A Book of Commandments & Revelations

The Lord gave to Joseph the Seer & others by the inspiration of God & the power of the Holy Ghost which is in God infinite & eternal World without end.

The first publication reflecting most redactions in this revelation is the Book of Commandments (chapter 2).

July one thousand eight hundred & twenty eight given to Joseph. The book as he had lost certain writings which he had translated by the gift & power of God. The saying the words of the Father & Son & Holy Ghost which is one God infinite & eternal World without end.
**Joseph Smith’s American Bible: Radicalizing the Familiar**

**TERRYL L. GIVENS**

The Book of Mormon emerged from the nineteenth century as the foremost claimant for a new American Bible. One important theme of the book is its recurring claims of its provenance. The book also gives insights on other themes such as revelation, Christology, Zion, and scripture.

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**Proclaiming the Way in Japanese: The 1909 Translation of the Book of Mormon**

**SHINJI TAKAGI**

The Book of Mormon was first published in Japanese in 1909, one hundred years ago. The style, quality, and accuracy of the translation, begun by a Mormon missionary, are examined.

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**Early Publications on the Book of Mormon**

**MATTHEW ROPER**

Early literature relating to the Book of Mormon during Joseph Smith’s lifetime has been collected and preserved and is now available online with images and transcriptions.
Journal Retrospective: Perspective from the Editors

JACOB D. RAWLINS

The Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, now approaching its 19th year, has had five editors and has evolved in style, title, and content through its history. Each editor gives background to his tenure.

Revealing the Joseph Smith Papers

MATTHEW J. GROW

The second volume of the Joseph Smith Papers Project features in photographic and textual format two early manuscript revelation books that contributed to our modern Doctrine and Covenants.
Terry L. Givens did his graduate studies at Cornell and Chapel Hill (PhD, 1988) in intellectual history and comparative literature. He currently holds the James A. Bostwick Chair at the University of Richmond, where he is professor of literature and religion. His several books include *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford, 2003), *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford, 2007), and *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction* and *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (both Oxford, 2009).

Matthew J. Grow is assistant professor of history and director of the Center for Communal Studies at the University of Southern Indiana. His book “Liberty to the Downtrodden”: *Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer* (Yale University Press, 2009) examines the most important non-Mormon in Latter-day Saint history. Along with Terry L. Givens, he is currently writing a biography of Parley P. Pratt for Oxford University Press.

Robert L. Millet is Abraham O. Smoot University Professor and professor of Religious Education at Brigham Young University. Before joining the BYU faculty in 1983, he worked with LDS Social Services as a marriage and family counselor and with the LDS Church Educational System as a religious instructor. Dr. Millet received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from BYU in psychology and his PhD from Florida State University in religious studies.

Jacob D. Rawlins is a PhD candidate at Iowa State University. He served on the staff of the Journal for several years while he worked as an editor and managed the Web site for the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University. He holds a bachelor’s degree in history and a master’s degree in public administration, both from Brigham Young University.

Matthew Roper holds an MA in sociology from Brigham Young University and is a research scholar for the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University. For many years he has been collecting and preserving copies of items reflecting early published responses to the Book of Mormon. This research is found in the digital collection, *19th-Century Publications about the Book of Mormon* (1829–1844), available on the Harold B. Lee Library Web site at BYU.

Shinji Takagi (PhD, economics, University of Rochester) is currently professor of economics at Osaka University and the author of over 80 international publications in economics. A technical translator, he has translated a number of professional papers between Japanese and English; he has also translated several LDS publications into Japanese. Professor Takagi was appointed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to serve as a member of the Scripture Updating Committee for the 1995 Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.
With this issue a new editor has taken over the helm of the Journal. Because of a recent church calling, it was necessary for Andrew H. Hedges, the immediate past editor of the Journal, to step down after only a short time. The new editor, Paul Y. Hoskisson, an erstwhile contributor to and long-time reader of the Journal, agreed to begin immediately. He brings a wide range of interests and professional experience.

This current issue forms a transition from the editorship of Andrew Hedges to myself. We will miss Andrew; he took the editorship seriously and served faithfully.

Terryl Givens has provided the first article in this issue, which makes available in print his presentation of the first Laura F. Willes Center Book of Mormon Lecture. Givens has already amassed a considerable and acclaimed body of scholarship on the Book of Mormon. In this article he discusses provenance as an important theme in the Book of Mormon, pointing out its influence on the structure and purpose of the book. He also discusses the themes of revelation, Christology, Zion, and scripture in the Book of Mormon.

The year 2009 is the hundredth anniversary of the translation of the Book of Mormon into Japanese. To help celebrate this milestone in the spread of the Restoration in these latter days, Shinji Takagi has written an exploration and commemoration of this seminal work.

Most well-known religions were founded in the misty past, with little if any contemporaneous documentation. Not so the restoration of the gospel in these latter days. Extant newspaper and other published accounts open windows onto interesting vistas of many of the early events of the Restoration. Matthew Roper offers Journal readers a few glimpses of the rich material about the Book of Mormon published in newspapers contemporaneous with Joseph Smith.

With the current change of editors of the Journal, it is only appropriate to include here for our readers a retrospective, written from the perspective of all the Journal editors, beginning with the very first editor.

Perhaps in the future historians might declare that, with the exception of our Restoration scriptures, the publication of the Joseph Smith Papers ranks as the most important publication in these latter days. Therefore, Matthew Grow’s review of the second book of the papers project, also the first book of the Revelations and Translations series, will be of interest to our readers.

With this issue we begin a new feature, “Worthy of Another Look: Classics from the Past.” In 1993 Robert Millet published “The Book of Mormon, Historicity, and Faith.” This paper is as relevant today as when it was first published. One of the directions biblical studies had taken, and continues to take, denies that scriptural events need be historical. On the contrary, it is important that Latter-day Saints know why many of the events recorded in the scriptures must be historical.

I hope you enjoy the variety and scholarly acumen that our authors have provided for your enjoyment and edification. As editor, I welcome your comments and suggestions. Please send them to jbmrs@byu.edu.

Notes


The nineteenth century saw repeated calls for an authentic American Bible. Restorationist Walter Scott described the second Great Awakening as rife with rumors of a “new Bible.” He probably didn’t have Walt Whitman in mind, but Whitman considered his mission to be “The Great Construction of the New Bible” and thought he pulled it off with *Leaves of Grass.* Scott did not have Joseph Smith in mind either, but when the century’s dust had settled, the Book of Mormon had emerged as the foremost claimant for the title. There are two principal points to be made about the Book of Mormon’s status as an “American Bible,” or more generally, as modern scripture. The first is this: the Book of Mormon emphasizes its own provenance in a way that deserves closer attention. Indeed, provenance is the book’s first, and perhaps most important, theme. This theme goes a long way to explain the structure of the Book of Mormon and its particular purpose as intended by its narrators. Second, the Book of Mormon fully engages familiar nineteenth-century scriptural forms, terms, and categories, only to subvert them and constitute them into an utterly new American Bible; for instance, a few of these themes are revelation, Christology, Zion, and scripture.

Provenance

Read against the paradigm of Judeo-Christian scripture, the opening of the Book of Mormon is conspicuously unusual. The Book of Mormon opens with a series of sentences that claim and reaffirm familiar scriptural forms, terms, and categories, only to subvert them and constitute them into an utterly new American Bible; for instance, a few of these themes are revelation, Christology, Zion, and scripture.

Terryl L. Givens

Terryl L. Givens, professor of literature and religion and occupant of the James Bostwick Chair of English, University of Richmond, presented the first biennial Laura F. Willes Center Book of Mormon Lecture on 8 October 2009 at the Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center, Brigham Young University.
The most striking claim within the Book of Mormon is undoubtedly its insistence that Jesus Christ was worshipped in the Western hemisphere, by way of anticipation, as long ago as six centuries BC.
epic events, and God’s primal acts of creation, the Book of Mormon’s first named author urgently presses upon his audience the very human, very local, and very historical nature of his narrative. It is as far removed from mythic beginnings and anonymous narratives as he can possibly make it. This is firsthand, eyewitness history of local events (set in 600 BC Jerusalem, we learn shortly). It is a beginning also strikingly unlike the gospels of the New Testament. None of the authors of the four Gospels, as certain critics delight to point out, identify themselves in their account of Jesus. There is no, “I, Matthew, proceed to give an account of one Jesus of Nazareth,” or “I, Mark, write this narrative of the Christ.” Some of these critics, in fact, find the unstipulated authorship of the Gospels to be a blow against their authenticity or reliability. Of course, we could read the silence differently. The anonymity of those four books seems almost calculated to emphasize the infinitely greater significance of the Christ who is the focus of their narratives. The authors themselves disappear in deference to the Messiah they proclaim. The Book of Mormon, by contrast, begins with the personal introduction of the book’s first author: “I, Nephi.” We need to ask why.

In art history, provenance means derivation. More fully, it refers to authenticity that is secured in a particular way, establishing the true origins of an object by verifying its unbroken history of transmission from original owner to the present. In the Book of Mormon, we never lose sight of the links in the chain of transmission. This fact is no coincidence. And it makes sense of the otherwise peculiar series of perfunctory and yet dutiful handoffs that Nephi’s descendants make to each successor. For after Nephi, each inheritor of the plates of ore attests to the unbroken chain of transmission, calling the responsibility to continue the tradition a “commandment” passed on through the generations. The weight of solemn obligation felt by these chroniclers is evident in their clear attestations of a responsibility both executed and then transferred, and explains the curious feature of the Book of Mormon’s structure in which a series of mini-books follows upon the heels of Enos’s record.

For it is precisely this very brevity, it is the dutiful but soulless nature of some of these entries, that points all the more powerfully to the intimidating magnitude of the obligation the authors have inherited to maintain intact the line of transmission, the authentication of the provenance, of the sacred records.

The accounts of Nephi, Jacob, and Enos are progressively shorter, and that of Enos’s son Jarom is only two pages, making it the shortest of all books named for their authors. (The only exception is the Words of Mormon, but that is more of an explanatory editorial insertion than a chapter proper.) Following Jarom’s brief account, the succeeding chronicles are too short to even constitute books. In one case, that of Chemish, his stewardship takes the form of a single paragraph.
This perfunctory brevity and the self-confessed wickedness of authors like Omni make the whole section seem, somehow, too mechanical—almost pointless. Why do they so dutifully fill their roles when their hearts seem so little invested in record keeping, and why do editors Nephi and Mormon alike leave their portions intact? A terribly important point hinges on those questions. For it is precisely this very brevity, it is the dutiful but soulless nature of some of these entries, that points all the more powerfully to the intimidating magnitude of the obligation the authors have inherited to maintain intact the line of transmission, the authentication of the provenance, of the sacred records. This is the message conveyed loudly and clearly by the economical Chemish: “Now I, Chemish, write what few things I write in the same book with my brother; for behold, I saw the last which he wrote, that he wrote it with his own hand; and he wrote it in the day that he delivered them unto me. And after this manner we keep the records, for it is according to the commandments of our fathers. And I make an end” (Omni 9).

So, that is the first detail of the Book of Mormon that draws attention: the authorial preoccupation—almost obsessive concern—with authenticating the record’s provenance. We are never permitted to lose sight of a documented genealogy that extends back in time—not to an anonymous author, or an implied Moses or even pseudepigraphal writer—but through a meticulously documented lineage to a historical personage of flesh and blood, who fashioned with his own hands the very materials on which the record was engraved. And from those hands, going forward, through a thousand years to Moroni. And one can now see the bridge from Moroni to Joseph Smith, attested to by the sworn affidavits of eleven men, as following in this same path, of confirming with legalistic documentation the still unbroken history of the record’s provenance. That is why, even though the final form those plates take is a printed volume and is now mass produced, each copy nonetheless inherits the same pedigree, and each volume can therefore function as a sacred artifact, a holy icon, from the moment the first copy came off the Palmyra press. This is the final meaning of the book’s ironclad guarantee of provenance. Aaron’s budding rod was not a horticultural treasure, the pot of manna was not a culinary relic, and the Book of Mormon’s primary function has never been textual. It is oracular.

A very accomplished scholar of Mormonism has continued to insist, at least in private conversations, that no one will take Mormonism’s theology seriously until Mormons learn to mythologize their scriptures. That remark fails to appreciate the very dimension to the Book of Mormon I have just indicated. For this aspect of the Book of Mormon, so self-consciously and pointedly constructed by its narrators, is stubbornly resistant to such acts of dislocation from history—and from authorial rootedness. Why is this unbroken chain of transmission so important? Because that is how the narrator of this record enacts, rather than describes, an uninterrupted connection to the divine that transcends centuries and continents. The Book of Mormon, precisely because of the testimony of its own provenance, functions in a way best captured by the imagery of George Herbert’s magnificent poem, “The Pearl.” “Through the labyrinths of this world,” the poet writes, addressing his God,

not my grovelling wit,
But thy silk twist let down from heav’n to me, [Does] both conduct and teach me, how by it To climb to thee. 3

In its own self-portrayal, the Book of Mormon functions as that silk twist let down from heaven.

Theme

Moving on to the content rather than the structure of this work, something is thematically at work that reinterprets, and does not just reenact, this meaning of scripture as sacred contact with the divine. This new scriptural identity is based upon, even as it creatively restructures, biblical elements. This is what I mean by the radicalizing of the familiar. As illustration, I will draw attention to four examples—four motifs in particular in the Book of Mormon: revelation, Christology, Zion, and scripture. It is no coincidence that each of these topics is introduced by successive visionary experiences of Lehi.

We know virtually nothing for certain of Lehi or his background except that he is a person of wealth and, as his wife laments and Lehi agrees, is a “visionary man” (1 Nephi 5:2, 4). His first recorded vision occurs as Lehi is praying “with all his heart”
(1 Nephi 1:5) on behalf of his people. Strangely, this is the only one of Lehi’s visions about whose content we are told nothing at all. Nephi simply reveals that as Lehi prays, “there came a pillar of fire . . . and he saw and heard much” (1 Nephi 1:6). No details of the message, no particulars of any message, are available to distract from the fact of the visitation itself, given to a man who shares neither the public prestige nor, so far as we can tell, the national stewardship of his contemporary Jeremiah. What we do have is the sheer fact of a personal revelation, apparently containing images and words (“he saw and heard much”), that comes as a result of petitionary prayer and profoundly affects the recipient. This definition of revelation as propositional, or content-bearing, will become one of the dominant themes of the Book of Mormon, even as it is manifested in the lives of a broadening range of recipients.

Immediately following Lehi’s first vision, he returns to his home and experiences a second vision. This one takes the form initially of a theophany, or vision of God, and calls to mind the divine assembly described in Old Testament passages like Psalm 82 or 2 Chronicles 18. Lehi sees “God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.” Then follows a sight that is decidedly without Old Testament precedent: “And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. And he saw also twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament” (1 Nephi 1: 8–10). Christians have not shrunk from reading messianic prophecies into the psalms or passages from Isaiah and Zechariah. But nothing biblical approaches the degree of specificity with which Book of Mormon prophets and writers detail their anticipation of a Christ, six centuries before his birth. Christocentrism pervades the text from its first pages to its last.

Following this vision, which includes foreshadowings of the destruction of Jerusalem, Lehi preaches repentance to an unreceptive populace. Like Jeremiah’s exhortations, which led to his persecution and imprisonment, Lehi’s public warnings prompt threats against his life (1 Nephi 1:19–20). Consequently, Lehi receives a third vision, wherein God commands him to take his family and flee into the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:1–2). Lehi promptly complies, setting in motion the principal action of the early Book of Mormon, the family’s journey to and settlement of a new world. This exodus also establishes a structural motif, as the first of many hegiras the Book of Mormon records. Flight from the old Jerusalem and building new ones, scattering and gathering, covenantal integrity in the midst of apostasy and dispersion and a “land of promise”—all these constitute variants of the Book of Mormon’s recurring theme of building Zion in the wilderness.

After traveling three days in the wilderness by the Red Sea, Lehi and his family make camp. There south of Jerusalem, Lehi has a fourth dream-vision,
in which he is commanded to send his four sons back to Jerusalem to secure a record of the Jews, together with a family genealogy, inscribed on plates of brass (1 Nephi 3). This is a formidable challenge because the plates are in the possession of one Laban, apparently a Jewish official of some standing. Twice the brothers fail, almost losing their lives in the process. Nephi himself returns a third time and succeeds unaided, but only through the extreme measure of killing a drunken and helpless Laban at the persistent urging of “the Spirit” (1 Nephi 4). The cost in expense, effort, and human life demonstrates and justifies a profound valuation of scripture—a concept that comes to be developed in the Book of Mormon in ways very unlike Catholic and Protestant notions.4

Revelation

Emil Brunner has written, “God’s revelation of Himself always occurs in such a way as to manifest more deeply his inaccessibility to our thought and imagination. All that we can know is the world. God is not the world. . . . He is Mystery.”5 Another contemporary religious scholar agrees and finds this a dominant motif in Christian thought:

The history of theology is replete with this truth: recall Augustine’s insight that if we have understood, then what we have understood is not God; Anselm’s argument that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived; Hildegard’s vision of God’s glory as Living Light that blinded her sight; Aquinas’s working rule that we can know that God is and what God is not but not what God is; Luther’s stress on the hiddenness of God’s glory in the shame of the cross; Simone Weil’s conviction that there is nothing that resembles what she can conceive of when she says the word God; Sallie McFague’s insistence on imaginative leaps into metaphor since no language about God is adequate and all of it is improper.6

This is not the God of the Book of Mormon.

In the Book of Mormon, God is not mystery. He is fully knowable, accessible, and susceptible to petitionary prayer. The Book of Mormon opens upon a scene of prophets and prophecy set in a time of extreme national peril. This is the world of Jeremiah, vintage Old Testament drama, epic in scope and sense of looming threat. Then, quite suddenly, everything abruptly changes. Within pages, the focus shifts from the city of Jerusalem and her inhabitants to the destiny of one man named Lehi and his family. From national destinies hanging in the balance, we go to a family in crisis. But ironically, in the process of this narrowing of focus, the manifestations of divine communication with which the record opened are not diminished, but multiplied. This shift of direction, from a public prophet advocating national repentance for the sake of collective survival in the face of geopolitical crisis, to a father contending for the preservation
of his sons and daughters in the wilderness, perfectly exemplifies the Book of Mormon’s tendency to invoke familiar categories and settings, only to abruptly shift the ground under our feet. Yes, the Old Testament also has its family sagas with warring siblings—but with a crucial difference. Because in the Old Testament, the Cains and Abels, the Isaacs and Esaus, are largely etiologies, explanatory types who represent or explain larger human destinies. And the revelation that guides them guides the enormous currents of human history and cosmic understanding. Writes one scholar of the subject: “[Prophecy] was preeminently the privilege of the prophets.” Prophecy is “exegesis of existence from a divine perspective,” writes Abraham Heschel. In the Book of Mormon, this is most emphatically not the case. Prophecy and revelation contract into the sphere of the quotidian, the personal, and the immediate, where they proliferate and flourish.

There are indications that the writers of the Book of Mormon intended the prevailing moral of the book to be, in fact, an openness to radically individualistic and literalistic conceptions of divine communication to mortals—that is, dialogic revelation. The kind of revelation we are referring to is seen in the Old Testament most memorably in Moses’s encounter with God on Mount Sinai, when it is recorded that “the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exodus 33:11), or in Abraham’s prolonged exchange with God over the fate of Sodom, when they haggle over numbers like a housewife and a bazaar merchant (Genesis 18:20–32). These exchanges, figurative or mythical as they may be to today’s readers, are certainly portrayed in anthropomorphic terms understood literally by the writer. At the conclusion of the latter episode, he writes, “And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place” (Genesis 18:33), as if human language and human paradigms of interaction were perfectly adequate to describe prophetic negotiations with the divine.

The major thrust of the Book of Mormon is an elaboration of this model of revelation, expanding and extending it to lesser mortals, and more intimate concerns. It is most dramatically revealed as a radical departure from Old Testament norms in the story of Lehi’s dream. Nephi’s father Lehi has a magnificent vision of a tree of life, resplendent with allegorical details, extensive symbolism, and several elements of eschatology. In the aftermath of this father’s vision, Nephi goes to the Lord in prayer, desiring that he may also “behold the things which [his] father saw” (1 Nephi 11:3).

The Spirit of the Lord appears to him and, at first, leaves him in possible doubt as to the propriety of his request. Does he not believe his father’s account? Why then ask for his own version? Assured by Nephi that he does indeed trust the words of his father, the prophet and patriarch Lehi, the Spirit breaks into a song of rejoicing and blesses Nephi for seeking his personal revelatory experience. Nephi then records his version of the vision, which exceeds his father’s in points of detail, at least in the written version (1 Nephi 11:24–14:30). Anyone reading this text, in the nineteenth century or our own, would have encountered a paradigm shift of dramatic proportions. This is why Alexander Campbell’s first protest against the Book of Mormon and an evangelical’s recent book on Mormonism both point to Moroni 10, with its promise of personal, dialogic revelation, as a nonnegotiable point of theological difference.

Christology

Second, I will say a few things about Christology in the Book of Mormon. According to Joseph Smith, when the angel Moroni first appeared to him with the commission to retrieve and translate the Book of Mormon, the angel reported that the “fulness of the everlasting Gospel” was contained in the plates, but added the enigmatic clause “as delivered by the Savior to the ancient [American] inhabitants” (Joseph Smith—History 1:34). Such a formulation seems almost calculated to combine shocking novelty with a kind of wry nonchalance. He might as well have said, the record affirmed the Ten Commandments—you know, the ones that God delivered to Atlantis. The angel’s perplexing description foreshadows the pattern I am trying to unpack: that the Book of Mormon flirts with both the clichéd and heretical, the pedestrian and preposterous.

Many claims surrounding the Book of Mormon—its inscription on plates of gold, its delivery to Joseph Smith by an angel, its miraculous translation involving seer stones and Urim and Thummim—are remarkable to say the least. The most striking claim within the Book of Mormon is undoubtedly its insistence that Jesus Christ was
worshipped in the Western hemisphere, by way of anticipation, as long ago as six centuries BC. The subtitle printed on the Book of Mormon cover since 1982 is a recent development that reflects both the centrality of Jesus Christ in Latter-day Saint belief and the Church’s concern to emphasize that belief in the face of public skepticism and uncertainty about its designation as Christian. But the gesture is no mere act of modern revisionism. On the title page itself, the final record keeper Moroni, upon concluding his ancient record, explains the second major purpose of the Book of Mormon to be “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God.”

The two questions such an assertion immediately invites are, first, how detailed was the Nephite knowledge of the Christ and, more to the point, how did a group of ancient Israelites exhibit such an emphatic and detailed knowledge of Jesus when their Jewish contemporaries had, at best, vaguely defined beliefs in some kind of Messiah to come? The Book of Mormon seems in this regard a pseudepigraphal response to the tantalizing possibilities

Christology in the Book of Mormon is not an occasional intrusion, but the narrative backbone of the story and the dramatic point of orientation. All of Book of Mormon history, in other words, pivots on the moment of Christ’s coming. Its narrative centrality is emphasized by describing the steadfastness and travails of those who anticipate the messianic moment, the subsequent Utopian era of those who keep the coming and its significance in memory, and the rapid decline and degradation of those who don’t. Book of Mormon prophets even establish their chronology around his coming: Logic would dictate that dating “Before Christ” can only occur from the perspective of a people living in the “Anni Domini.” But Nephi states and twice reaffirms that their departure from the Old World to the New occurs “six hundred years” before his birth (1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19). To Enos it is reaffirmed that he is living “many years . . . before he shall manifest himself in the flesh” (Enos 1:8). And to the prophetic Alma, even the demise of their civilization is dated in reference to that coming event: “Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief” (Alma 45:10).

One principal critique the Enlightenment made of Christianity was the historical particularity of the incarnation and ministry of Christ. Why would a God of the entire human race confine his earthly manifestation to only a fortunate few living in proximity to a Jewish village. Such criticism had been anticipated centuries earlier, when Christians
developed a doctrine of *prisca theologia*, holding that versions of the gospel were transmitted imperfectly to other peoples and cultures, affording even pagans a partial glimpse of gospel truth. The Book of Mormon suggests a more radical corrective, when Christ presents his own ministry to the Nephites as but one in a series of proliferating manifestations of his gospel and even his presence.

ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. . . . And verily, verily, I say unto you that I have other sheep, which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister. . . . But I have received a commandment of the Father that I shall go unto them, and that they shall hear my voice. (3 Nephi 15:21; 16:1, 3)

Instead of a single unparalleled eruption of the divine into the human, we have in the Book of Mormon a proliferation of historical iterations, which collectively become the ongoing substance rather than the shadow of God’s past dealings in the universe. For the third time, we see a familiar topic, central to Christian culture, introduced only to be fashioned into a version that moves in directions opposite to readerly expectations.

Zion

The central fact in the history of Israel is the exodus from Egypt and the settling of the promised land. Millennia later, the Puritans who settled America would see themselves as exiles from the Old World, figurative Israelites who were guided to this promised land to establish a spiritual Zion. The early Christian saga involves movement from the covenant of blood extended to a chosen tribe, to the covenant of adoption that creates a community of believers; it changes from a gathering in real space, centered in a literal Zion, to a spiritual gathering that constitutes a figurative body in Christ. The Book of Mormon reenacts the former, Jewish model, even as it anticipates the latter, Christian version. For the Book of Mormon is the record of a people’s repeated quests for a land of promise and their anxiety about their covenantal status before God, even as it insistently repeats the theme that “as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord” (2 Nephi 30:2).

Gods who hold dominion and sway by the power of love evoke a particular kind of anxiety in their people. We are never so vulnerable as when we love, writes Freud, and that holds true in relations with the divine as much as in relations with humans.11 The fear of alienation, anxiety about rejection, and the terror of being forgotten—these sentiments seem to be fully acknowledged and mercifully addressed in God’s institution of the covenant as a compensating mechanism. There is no more pervasive and unifying theme to the Jewish scriptures than the covenant made with Abra-
ham. It is the basis of both collective and individual identity. It is the foundation not just of a particular status vis-à-vis other peoples, but it is principally and primarily the guarantee of God’s constant love. A woman may forget her nursing child, the Lord assures them through Isaiah, “yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands” (49:15–16).

Only in this context does the dominant emotional tone of the Book of Mormon have a recognizable resonance. The Book of Mormon begins with an event that must have been traumatic to the principal actors in the drama: exodus. Not an exodus from bondage and wilderness exile to the land of promise, but exodus away from the land of promise, away from Jerusalem, the people of the covenant, from the temple, and into the wilderness. This is why the form of so much of Nephi’s preaching in the early days of exile is reassurance and consolation. He invokes Isaiah repeatedly, precisely in order to convince his people that they are “a remnant of the house of Israel,” and that, though broken off, they “may have hope as well as [their] brethren” (1 Nephi 19:24). A thousand years later, at the conclusion of the record, Moroni reaffirms this message by giving it pride of place on his title page. The sacred record, he writes, is “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.”

This lesson—the portability of Zion—is reenacted so many times in the Book of Mormon story that it becomes a leitmotif. Lehi erects an altar in the wilderness and makes of his exile a sacred refuge. After a terrifying sea voyage, the clan becomes established in the promised land. But there, dissension immediately breaks out, and Nephi is directed to again flee into the wilderness and reestablish a remnant of the original remnant (2 Nephi 5).

A few hundred years later, the Lord directs a subsequent king, Mosiah, to depart from there “into the wilderness” with “as many as would hearken” (Omni 1:13). Having arrived in Zarahemla, Mosiah and his people encounter another remnant from Jerusalem who “journeyed in the wilderness” to this New World Zion. Other iterations of this theme will include the newly converted Alma the Elder’s flight from the court of King Noah and his founding of a church in the wilderness (Mosiah 23), and yet another people descended from Old World exiles, who cross the sea in barges after being commanded to “go forth into the wilderness” at the time of the Tower of Babel (Ether 2:5). Most poignantly of all, the record will close with the spectacle of a lonely Moroni, sole survivor of his race, finding in his wilderness exile that he has neither family, friends, “nor whither to go” (Mormon 8:5). The successive chain of Zion-building finds its definitive end, and the record closes thereafter.

The Book of Mormon may be seen in this light as the story of the unending transmission of the gospel into new contexts, a chronicle of the...
volatility and fragility of lands of refuge, a testament of the portability and ceaseless transmutations of Zion, with the only constant being the eternally present promise of a special relationship to God and direct access to his power and truth. The original dislocation signified by Lehi’s exodus becomes a prelude not to a new geographical gathering, but to a shadow of the permanent reconstitution of Zion into spiritual refuge. The resonance of this theme for early American descendants of those who had embarked on their own errand into the wilderness would have been unmistakable. And the theme would undoubtedly have held special poignancy for the first readers of the Book of Mormon, nineteenth-century religious refugees who persisted doggedly and tragically in attempts to realize their own earthly Zions on a trail from Ohio through Missouri to Illinois and the Great Basin of Utah.

Scripture

A fourth major leitmotif in the Book of Mormon is scripture itself. After explaining the origins of this record that will eventually comprise the Book of Mormon and establishing his intent to write nothing “save it be . . . sacred” (1 Nephi 19:6), Nephi goes about constituting his record in a way that is markedly different from simple prophetic utterance or inspired dictate. He constitutes his record as a kind of bricolage, or assemblage of already existing pieces into a new mosaic. In doing so, he reinforces a conception of scripture as something fluid, diffuse, and infinitely generable—the very opposite of scripture as something that is unilinear, concretized, fixed in a canon.

Nephi characterizes the first eight chapters of his record as a summation of a record his father kept. His own record commences with the details leading up to his vision of the tree of life. He then assimilates into his account a number of other prophetic voices unknown to us; he writes, “[Christ shall yield himself to] be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Zenos” (1 Nephi 19:10). Nephi then progresses to the prophecies of Isaiah, which he has obtained from another set of plates taken from Jerusalem. Not content to merely cite him, Nephi incorporates into his narrative entire swaths of Isaiah, largely unchanged from the form known to Jewish and Christian readers of the Bible.

The dynamic, vibrant life of scripture, as something that is generated, assimilated, transformed, and transmitted in endless ways and in ever new contexts, is clearly indicated in these scenes where Nephi centers in on his commission to produce a sacred record. But the theme achieves its most pronounced instance well into the subsequent narrative at a time when a repentant sinner, Alma, living among a heathen people far removed from the God-fearing Nephites, begins, surprisingly enough, to preach Christ to his peers: “And now it came to pass that Alma, who had fled from the servants of king Noah, repented of his sins and iniquities, and . . . began to teach . . . concerning that which was to come, and also concerning the resurrection of the dead, and the redemption of the people, which was to be brought to pass through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ” (Mosiah 18:1–2).
How did Alma obtain a knowledge of Christ? He heard the preaching of Abinadi, an itinerant prophet martyred by a wicked king called Noah. And Alma “did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken” (Mosiah 17:4). Where did Abinadi, who appears suddenly in the narrative with no background or introduction, get that knowledge? In chapters 13–14 of Mosiah, we find him reading, from some unnamed text, the words of Moses and of Isaiah to Noah’s court, and finding in them clear foreshadowing of a “God [who should] himself . . . come down among the children of men, and . . . redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1). From where did Abinadi obtain those scriptures? He was a member of a colony founded by one Zeniff, an offshoot of the major Nephite settlement, whose founders took copies of the Nephite records with them when they departed Zarahemla and resettled a land called Lehi-Nephi. And those Nephite records? Before even leaving Jerusalem at the record’s beginning, Nephi and his brothers abscond with the brass plates of a Jewish ruler named Laban, which plates contain the writings of Moses, Isaiah, and several other Hebrew prophets. So we have a clear line of transmission from prophetic utterance, to brass plates, to Nephi’s small plates, to Zeniff’s copy, to Abinadi’s gloss, to Alma’s transcription. And that is only half the story. From Alma we learn that those teachings become a part of his written record. When he and his band of exiles arrive back in the major colony of Zarahemla, the Nephite king there, Mosiah, reads to the assembled people “the account of Alma and his brethren” (Mosiah 25:6). King Mosiah, as guardian of the large plates, presumably incorporates the record into his own record. Those plates are subsequently abridged by Mormon, acquiring finally the form they have today. One might object that the Book of Mormon itself cannot embody such an organic, constantly evolving and morphing canon without self-contradiction (it was, after all, given its final and definitive form in 1830). But the Book of Mormon undermines its own pretensions to simply reenact or supplement the Bible by situating itself, along with that Bible, as one in an endless series of scriptural productions. As the Book of Mormon’s God says, “I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it” (2 Nephi 29:12). As with revelation, we find parallels to these conceptions in the Hebrew scriptures. The point is that a Christian audience of Joseph’s day would have considered scriptural history to move inevitably toward completion and closure. In the Book of Mormon, scripture always moves toward proliferation and dissemination in both directions.

Historicity and the Book of Mormon

The themes and strategies I have surveyed convey something of the ways in which the Book of Mormon exploited the materials of the biblical text and biblical culture to fashion a work that was, as the designation Golden Bible implied, alien and recognizable, sacred and profane, at the same time. In this regard, the Book of Mormon mirrors Mormonism’s own peculiar synthesis of opposites. For Mormonism provides a very interesting case study of how a modern church tries to successfully negotiate a synthesis of modern science and biblical literalism, intellectual credibility and folk magic.
beginnings; how it has been managing, the critics notwithstanding, to persist in basing its theology on its history—an intractably and conspicuously vulnerable history at that.

I hope to have shown in this regard that the Book of Mormon’s place as canonical scripture cannot be separated from the particular ways it has portrayed itself as a literal historical creation, and from the unexpected ways it has both engaged and rewritten important strands of Christian historical understanding. All this strikes me as a remarkably novel way to think about scripture. Unlike the Bible or the Qur’an, both of which constitute the basis of their respective faiths’ doctrine, the Book of Mormon grounds virtually none of those principles or practices unique to the LDS faith. The premortal existence of human souls, the eternity of the family, a multi-tiered heaven, vicarious ordinances performed for the dead, the Mormon code of health (the Word of Wisdom), the law of tithing, a modern church organized under a prophet and 12 apostles—none of these distinctives appear in the Book of Mormon. No, it is the way the Book of Mormon challenges its audience to rethink their relationship to the divine, their place in Christian history, and God’s relationship to history—that is the point. In this capacity as a sign or pointer to meaning outside itself, the Book of Mormon was one of a panoply of heavenly portents that signaled the commencement of a new dispensation. During that first generation in which the Book of Mormon appeared, theophanies, angels, gold plates, Nephite interpreters, magic compasses—the whole entourage of otherworldly visitants and priestly articles—were like the vibrant, extravagant uncials in an illuminated manuscript, drawing attention to the inauguration of a new chapter in God’s conversation with man, conspicuous heralds of another revelation, of a fresh deluge of heavenly light.

Had Joseph Smith—or God—intended the Book of Mormon to be read and evaluated on its own merits, then Joseph could have presented it as an ancient text he had simply discovered and translated, as James McPherson had done with Ossian so successfully just a few years removed. Or he could have produced a volume of inspired writings and left his audience to gauge the extent of that inspiration, as would Mary Baker Eddy. He could even have claimed the second sight, and described civilizations ancient, exotic, or, like Emanuel Swedenborg, spiritual. In any of these cases, the text itself would have been dissociable from its author and his claims to himself be the portal to a new gospel dispensation.

But a wealth of data—Smith’s sermons and editorials, contemporary accounts, early missionary journals—confirm that Joseph was relentless and adamant in presenting the story of the Book of Mormon’s reception and translation as the paramount sign of his prophethood, even as he distanced himself—and potential readers—from what lay between its covers. He never sermonized from it. He virtually never quoted from it. After its publication, he never demonstrated intimate knowledge of its content or story line or themes. It is as if, like a court stenographer, he felt the text flow through him without ever taking cognizance of it. There is no evidence that he studied the Book of Mormon, or even read it after its publication (except to make the most minor of grammatical changes for subsequent editions). Similarly, early missionaries like William McLellin and John F. Boynton would read to potential converts the testimonies of the three witnesses, affirming the reality of the gold plates and Joseph’s prophetic powers of translation, but they do not indicate they ever employed the text of the Book of Mormon itself as a basis for discussion, catechism, or conversion. During the seven years of the Church’s Nauvoo period, when Joseph was preaching in public on a regular basis, the hundreds of recorded pages of his sermons contain only a handful of brief allusions to the Book of Mormon—and none of them involve sustained discussion of doctrine or any other content.

This, then, is the role the Book of Mormon played, and continues to play, predominantly in the life of the Church it launched. It had other lives and functions I have not had time to explore. It compelled interest on the part of nineteenth-century audiences initially because it claimed to solve the mystery of the ancestry of the American Indians. To restorationists, it translated the primitive Christianity of the New Testament into language that was plain and simple and resonated with the newness of American contexts. For other future converts, it served to distinguish the claims of Mormonism from a host of kindred newcomers, all crowding the religious landscape. Ultimately, however, the Book of Mormon was invoked, in logic and language that persist to the present day, as a sign that pointed out-
side itself with manifest authority and convincing materiality to larger events and processes underway. In summary, the Book of Mormon affirmed the Bible’s status as scripture, even as it undermined it. For while it testifies to “the gospel of Jesus Christ” and even prophecies and facilitates its restoration in purity, the Book of Mormon demolishes the Bible’s monopoly on its articulation.

It opens with a scene steeped in the trappings of biblical prophets and prophecy, then moves decisively in the direction of a divine discourse, a dialogic revelation, that is literal, egalitarian, and suggestive, if not indicative, of a God more possible, accessible, and anthropomorphic than most contemporary constructs. The Book of Mormon documents Christ’s Palestinian incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, but it then explodes their sublime historical uniqueness by reenacting Christ’s ministry and ascension in a New World setting, suggesting there were others besides (3 Nephi 16:1).

It makes other gestures of radical revisionism I have not had time to explore, such as affirming Jehovah’s covenants with Israel, even as it specifies the American continent as a separate “land of promise” and then chronicles a whole series of portable Zions founded and abandoned in successive waves.

But in its own position as a third testament, its real burden was to provide a new and compelling genealogy, not of Christ back to Abraham, or of the human family back to Adam. It attested to its own provenance, in a chain of authenticity traceable from God’s first command to Nephi, through a thousand years of providential history, to a hillside in upstate New York, when a young Joseph Smith resurrected the record from its stone tomb. Like Herbert’s silken twist let down from heaven, or like Jacob’s ladder along which angels ascended and descended, the Book of Mormon serves believers as a concrete conduit that connects them to a divine source, along which sacred energies flow in both directions. As such, it functions not just as witness, but as tangible embodiment, of God’s living word, manifest in the continuing production of scripture through prophets who still walk the earth.

Notes
1. A. S. Hayden, Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve, Ohio (Cincinnati: Chase and Hall, 1876), 121.
4. With these four themes—revelation, Christology, Zion, and scripture—briefly introduced, each will be examined in more detail to show how they take the familiar and turn it into a new creation.
9. Campbell writes, “I would ask [Book of Mormon witnesses Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris] how they knew that it was God’s voice which they heard—but they would tell me to ask God in faith. That is, I must believe it first, and then ask God if it be true! . . . If there was any thing plausible about Smith, I would say to those who believe him to be a prophet, hear the question which Moses put into the mouth of the Jews, and his answer to it—and if thou say in thy heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?—Does he answer, ‘Ask the Lord and he will tell you’? . . . Nay, indeed.” Alexander Campbell, “Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon,” Millennial Harbinger 2 (7 February 1831): 95–96; emphasis in original. And Craig Blomberg worries that “without some external checks and balances, it is simply too easy to misinterpret God’s answer when we try to apply a test like that of Moroni 10:4–5 and ask him to reveal through his Spirit the truth or falsity of the Book of Mormon.” Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 40.
The first Japanese version of the Book of Mormon was published in 1909. In celebration of the 100th anniversary of this event, we honor those who were involved in that significant effort.
INTRODUCTION

The year 2009 marks the centennial of the publication of the first Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon, which took place in October 1909. Several authors have discussed how Alma O. Taylor, with the assistance of Fred A. Caine, initiated, continued, and finished the work of translation between July 1904 and March 1908. As interesting as these details may be, a historical evaluation of the 1909 translation can only be based on the merits of the translation itself. Thus, I begin where the previous authors have left off by discussing, among other aspects, the style, quality, and accuracy of the translation.

In making this evaluation, I approach the Book of Mormon strictly as a book of scripture and primarily focus on how important ideas (with potential doctrinal implications or impact on religious behavior) are expressed and preserved in Japanese. This is not a linguistic exercise. I do not, for example, discuss the semantic or syntactic issues of correspondence in meaning between words, whether sentence structure (e.g., passive or active voice construction, word order, and the like) is preserved or changed, or how sentence length compares between the source and target languages.

Nor do I attempt to frame my discussion in terms of modern translation theory. In a fundamental sense, translation encompasses all forms of communication between two individuals. In written communication, for example, one first translates thought into coded graphic marks; the other person then translates those marks back into a mental text. But the written text may not convey the same message to the reader because words could carry different shades of meaning even in the same language, depending on the historical and cultural experience of the individual. Modern translation theory has thus become a discourse on language, mind, culture, and semiotics. At least for now, meandering into these territories does not seem helpful to my task.

Admittedly, the assessment of the 1909 translation ultimately involves my own judgment. In order to introduce objectivity into this subjective exercise, I appeal to two widely accepted rules of good translation to frame my discussion: (1) the translated text must sound natural in the target language (called “transparency,” or idiomatic translation, in the literature); and (2) it must be faithful to the original (“fidelity,” or faithful translation). These sometimes conflicting requirements of transparency and
fidelity have been debated for over two millennia in the theory and practice of interlingual translation, at least since Cicero and Horace in the first century BC.⁷

The ultimate quality that interlingual translation strives to achieve is equivalence. Broadly, there are two approaches.⁸ First, literal translation attempts to transform the original text into the target language word for word. In practice, this is not fully possible because the rules of grammar and syntax differ between languages, so that literal translation may more appropriately be called literalist translation. For example, the Japanese idiomatic sentence describing a person whose physical predisposition does not easily permit partaking of very hot substance (“boku wa nekojita da”) may be translated into English word for word as “I am a cat tongue.” This of course is nonsensical. We must at least render it as “I have a cat tongue” or better still “I have a tongue overly sensitive to heat.” Second, free translation renders the original text sense by sense, for example, by rendering the above sentence as “I cannot eat or drink very hot things” or “I easily burn my mouth.” There is no single correct translation. The art of translation is to determine the optimal mix of transparency and fidelity to achieve reasonable equivalence.

Practical applications are subtle, however. For example, one author suggests translating the English sentence “His rudeness was more than her sensitivity could tolerate” into Japanese as “kare no burei na gendō wa sensai na kanojo ni wa totemo taarenai mono de atta,” a literal retranslation of which might be “His rude language and conduct was something the sensitive woman could not tolerate.” The author further notes the occasional need to change words or parts of speech, suggesting that the English sentence “The nature of history would alter” be translated as “rekishi ga henshitsu suru de arō” (history would change in character), where henshitsu is a verb that can mean “to change in quality.” These examples show that good literary writing in Japanese generally avoids use of abstract nouns, especially as subjects, to sound natural.⁹

Elaborating on the concept of fidelity, another author notes that the German sentence “Dein Zagen zögert den Tod heran” (from Faust by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) has alternatively been translated by three competent translators into English in the following ways: “Thy irresolution lingers death hitherwards”; “Thy shrinking slowly hastens the blows”; and “My shrinking only brings Death more near.”¹⁰ If fidelity allows such variations between German and English, two relatively close languages, one would expect scope for even greater variations between English and Japanese. Fidelity, however, does mean that the translator must refrain from “showing his own self” in the work (except perhaps in the translation of poetry), that he should say neither more nor less than the original, and that his role is not to provide commentary or explanation.¹¹

In the realm of religious translation, there may be another aspect to the concept of fidelity. When words of authority are involved, translation may need to be more literal or literalist even at the risk of making the translated text sound unnatural. In fact, it appears that Joseph Smith took such an approach to translating the original Book of Mormon plates. Sidney Sperry characterized the English of the Book of Mormon as “translation English,” “that type of English that would be produced by a translator who frequently follows the original too closely, the syntax of which is thus made plain in the English
dress.” He then cites as examples “hear the words of me” (Jacob 5:2) for “hear my words”; and “stealing away the hearts of the people” (Mosiah 27:9) for “deceiving the people.” Royal Skousen, noting that many of the changes made in succeeding editions of the Book of Mormon had been to “remove grammatical uses that are nonstandard in modern English,” concluded that Joseph Smith made a literal translation of a non-English text. It is possible that, in the trade-off involving religious translation, greater weight needs to be given to fidelity, even to the point of being as literal as reasonably possible.

In what follows, I will proceed with my assessment of the 1909 Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon in the following sequence. I first discuss the question Alma Taylor faced as to whether the translation should use a style based on the grammar of contemporary spoken Japanese or that based on the grammar of classical Japanese, which was more widely used at the time. I then examine the work of revision, emphasizing how native reviewers, including able literary critic and writer Choko Ikuta, perfected Taylor’s draft translation. In the next two sections I identify several recurring patterns of departure from literalism, which make the translation sound natural, graceful, forceful, or complete in Japanese. Subsequently I review examples of notable words and expressions that give a special flavor to the 1909 translation, and finally I address the ultimate question of accuracy before concluding.

**THE CHOICE OF STYLE**

It was important for Taylor’s translation to be reviewed by “some native scholar” because he knew “[his] Japanese was all too imperfect to produce a translation worthy of the approval and respectful consideration of the public.” The search for a reviewer began in earnest in June 1907 even before the work of translation was fully complete. Up to this time, Taylor had assumed that his translation would be corrected, revised, and perfected by a native reviewer in the style he had used—the style of the colloquial language he had learned to speak. As he soon learned, written Japanese was at the time in the process of significant change, and the choice of style in which to render the translation was no simple matter.

The style in which educated people wrote Japanese from around the eighth century through the early twentieth century is called *bungotai* (lit. “written language style”). Although *bungotai* in turn encompasses several distinct literary traditions, it shares a common set of grammatical rules established during the Heian period (794–1192), when Japanese literature flourished, and great works, including the *Tale of Genji*, were created. Because the language of the Heian period was a great literary language, it should come as no surprise that the grammar (and to some extent the vocabulary) of the period became the standard of written Japanese over subsequent generations.

In the thirteenth century, the spoken language began to undergo transformation as the central players in Japanese society changed from the court nobles to the samurai warriors. The character of warrior life dictated the nature of the changes that took place—toward simplification. Spoken Japanese lost two vowels and a number of auxiliary verbs (which in Japanese define the functions of both verbs and adjectives in a sentence); the rules of verb conjugations also changed. Coupled with significant vocabulary changes, the difference between spoken and written Japanese by the middle of the nineteenth century was so great that an illiterate person would have hardly understood a sentence if it was read to him.
The significant divergence between spoken and written language became a major public issue at the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912), when the government set out to transform Japan into a modern nation. Some felt that bungotai was not an appropriate literary style for a modern state as the conventions were far too removed from the experience of ordinary people and hence too difficult for them to master.\textsuperscript{16} Modernization requires a literate population because a new way of organizing society can only be facilitated through education. Universal education was instituted quickly, but the question remained as to the “language” of instruction, and out of this grew a national movement to “unify spoken and written language” (gembunitchi in Japanese).

The need some felt to unify spoken and written language as the prerequisite for a modern state was not unique to Japan but was shared by other countries, including China. Even European countries had confronted the same issue several centuries earlier. It was only in the fourteenth century that major literary works finally began to appear in the vernacular (as opposed to Latin), such as Dante's \textit{Divina Commedia} and Chaucer's \textit{Canterbury Tales}. Establishing the grammar of spoken language as the basis for writing requires the genius of a greater writer. Writing, even in the colloquial style, entails greater elements of formality; it requires a great writer to develop rules of good writing. When Taylor completed the translation of the Book of Mormon, such rules were finally being established in Japanese, thanks to the efforts of modern writers, who all sought a language closer to their usual mode of communication.\textsuperscript{17}

The question Taylor had to deal with was similar to what the Protestant missionaries had faced some 30 years earlier. In translating the Bible into Japanese, most foreign representatives of the Protestant missions felt that the translation should be rendered in contemporary style in order to make it accessible to a wide audience. On the other hand, their Japanese collaborators considered that the dignity of Chinese-heavy classical style would be more appropriate for an authoritative religious text. In the end, the latter position prevailed, in part because the rules of good writing in the colloquial style were not yet developed. The first joint Protestant translations of the New Testament (published in 1880) and the Old Testament (in 1888) were rendered in classical style, though as a concession to foreign missionaries the use of Chinese was light.\textsuperscript{18}

The situation in the 1900s, however, was different in two respects. First, following the publication of the Protestant translation of the Bible, the gembunitchi movement actually waned. This was due, in part, to the establishment of universal education, which raised the literacy level of the public. As a result, some newspapers, which had earlier used conversational style, reverted to classical style.\textsuperscript{19} Instead, classical style developed into a modern style of its own called \textit{futsūbun} (lit. “ordinary or common writing”). \textit{Futsūbun}, while still based on classical grammar, used the colloquial vocabulary and accommodated elements of Western languages in translation style.\textsuperscript{20} After about 1897 it was in wide use in newspapers, textbooks, and government business.

Second, the gembunitchi movement received a renewed momentum at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1904 the national government adopted the policy of introducing contemporary style material in language textbooks. Certain features of spoken Japanese, which make it sound repetitious and monotonous when committed to writing, needed to be overcome in the contemporary style. The modern novelists introduced new auxiliary verbs to accommodate variation, crispness, occasional change in tone, and room for the individuality of the writer to play out. Thus, Taylor in fact faced a viable choice—between the classical style of \textit{futsūbun} variety and the contemporary style just being established.\textsuperscript{21}

Taylor records that many of the Japanese he sought advice from insisted that the “pure literary style” should be used. But he continued to believe that contemporary style was the most appropriate for the Book of Mormon:

My writings have all been in what is called “gembunitchi.” . . . This being nearer the form of every day speech, I had decided that, for general interpretation by all classes, “gembunitchi” was the proper style for the Book of Mormon translation. Nor was this decision made without investigation, consultation and earnest reflection. I sought to adopt the style best calculated to serve the purposes of the Lord. And again, “gembunitchi” was in the line of my studies in Japanese, and I felt I would do better in it than in any other style.
Determined that the style should remain contemporary, Taylor started to “secure the services of a good critic” in that style.\(^\text{22}\)

**THE WORK OF REVISION**

Taylor first approached Kinzo Hirai since their “experiences with this gentleman in the past had proved his integrity and ability.”\(^\text{23}\) Hirai was a language scholar who had attended the World’s Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893, as a representative of Japanese Buddhism.\(^\text{24}\) His speech at the convention was reprinted in the 29 June 1901 issue of the *Deseret Evening News*; Taylor must have been impressed with Hirai’s criticism of the hypocrisy of Christianity as seen in the actions of the Western powers toward Japan. He took a copy of the newspaper with him to Japan and contacted Hirai after his arrival. In April 1903, the missionaries were able to secure the use of a meeting place to hold their first public meeting in Japan through the help offered by Hirai.

*The Deseret Evening News, 29 June 1901.*
Hirai himself could not help with the translation, but he introduced Taylor to his associate Zenshiro Noguchi, who lived in Kobe some 400 miles southwest of Tokyo. Not much biographical information is available on Noguchi. Taylor’s correspondence only suggests that he was the son of a Buddhist monk, traveled to the United States and India when he was young, and did some writing. It appears that Noguchi was then a salaried worker in Kobe. His association with Kinzo Hirai went back at least to 1893 when Noguchi accompanied the Japanese Buddhist delegation to Chicago as an interpreter. Taylor visited Noguchi in Kobe in July 1907 and left him with a copy of the translated first chapter of 1 Nephi, requesting that the translation be corrected in contemporary style.

Taylor then visited Sendai, some 200 miles north of Tokyo, to see Genta Suzuki, a Methodist and a friend to Mormon missionaries. Suzuki (1865–1945) had studied at Central College (now Central Methodist University) in Fayette, Missouri, where he received a bachelor of arts degree in 1894. After returning to Japan, he became an English teacher at Kwanseki Gakuin, a Methodist academy in Kobe, and in April 1899 accepted the invitation of his brother-in-law to become the chief editor of the regionally influential Kahoku Shinpō in his hometown. Suzuki was responsible for English-language columns and wrote occasional articles on international affairs. He had also published translations of English-language novels. Again, Taylor left him with a sample copy of his translation, with the same request he had made of Noguchi.

It was with great surprise that Taylor received the corrected translations from both of these individuals, only to discover that part of the style was changed from contemporary to classical, despite the fact that they had agreed with Taylor that the contemporary style would be the best. They said “all efforts at putting force and dignity into the translation as it stood in ‘gembunitchi’ had proved unsuccessful.” Taylor recognized how difficult it was to write in contemporary style in a manner that deserved “public praise” because the rules of writing were less definite than for classical style. “Consultation, prayer, inquiry and thought anew” on the choice of style helped determine the change.

With a decision to adopt classical style, Taylor had no need to look for a critic outside of Tokyo. He thus signed a contract with Hirogoro Hirai, Kinzo Hirai’s brother and a teacher at Waseda University. The contract, signed on 2 September 1907, stated that Hirai would devote all his time to the “criticism” of Taylor’s Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon for 125 yen ($62.50 at the gold parity) per month. In March 1908, however, when Hirai had completed the work through the third chapter of 3 Nephi, a presumed scandal involving Hirai was reported in the press. Though Taylor became persuaded that the accusation was groundless and Hirai not guilty, his investigation of the matter revealed that Hirai had not severed his relationship with Waseda University, as prescribed in the contract, but he had “played sick to them,” which “made him a liar to me.” The contract was revoked on 31 March 1908.

Anxious to get “one of the best writers in Japan,” Taylor approached two gifted authors of national fame: Yujiro (or Shoyo) Tsubouchi and Kinnosuke (or Soseki) Natsume. Both declined the request, but Natsume recommended Hiroharu Ikuta, “a recent graduate of the Imperial University and author of several books which had been well received in literary circles.” Hiroharu (Koji) Ikuta (1882–1936), better known in Japan by his pen name Choko Ikuta, was a prolific literary critic, novelist, playwright, and translator of pre–World War II Japan. He became active in literary circles while attending school and, according to the Nihon Kindai Bungaku Daijiten (Dictionary of Modern Japanese Literature), he became acquainted with Natsume in the winter of 1905. In November 1907 he published a book entitled Bungaku Nyūmon (An Introduction to Literature) with a foreword by Natsume; in March 1908 he published an article on Natsume in the monthly Chōō Kōron (the Central...
Review). In terms of literary skill, he was more than qualified to act as a reviewer for Taylor's translation.

Ikuta was qualified in two other important respects. First, he was thoroughly familiar with the language of the Bible. Ikuta had been an avid reader of the Bible while attending secondary school in Osaka. In the fall of 1898, he became affiliated with the Universalists, though his interest in Christianity began to wane as he developed interest in European philosophies and social ideas (he died a Buddhist). Second, Ikuta was an accomplished translator of Western literary and philosophical works. Early in his career, he produced the first Japanese translation of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, which he published in January 1911 (his translation work, from May 1909 through 1910, partly overlapped with the work of revising Taylor’s translation).

**Of course, the work of translation was a collective effort, making it difficult to ascribe too much of the final product to any single individual.**

Ikuta held a special feeling for the language of the Bible in classical style. In the preface to his second translation of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, first published in 1921, Ikuta noted that classical style was the only way to express the simplicity and clarity, and the grace and dignity, of the original work in the German language. In the preface to the 1935 reprint Ikuta added that, in translating *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, he had used the style of the Meiji translation of the Bible, just as Nietzsche was reported to have used the style of the German translation of the Bible by Martin Luther.34

Finding Ikuta willing to undertake the assignment, Taylor left him with “two volumes of the manuscript as already corrected by Mr. Hirai” and requested him to make any necessary corrections. Ikuta’s ability and reputation are well indicated by the following reaction of three literary experts, including Shoyo Tsubouchi, whom Taylor asked to comment on the corrections Ikuta had made without revealing their connection:

The opinions of all three were that the changes, in most cases, were improvements. Then in a manner not calculated to betray myself, I asked about Mr. Ikuta, his ability and reputation. The answers were all complimentary to him. . . . I then asked if they thought that Mr. Ikuta was capable of producing a better work than the translation they had just been reading. The reply was that the translation as it was didn’t need to be changed, but that a man of Mr. Ikuta’s ability might be able to improve it just a little.35

On 29 July 1908, Ikuta signed the contract to devote at least five hours a day to the work except Sundays. He then worked on rendering Taylor’s translation into classical Japanese, from August through early April of the following year, at the rate of 100 yen ($50 at the gold parity) per month. Ikuta both reworked the revision made by Hirai and worked on the rest of the book on his own. Thinking it wise that two reviewers look at each portion of his translation, Taylor then requested Kosaburo (or Matahei) Kawai, a noted writer and poet better known in Japan by his pen name Suimei, to read over the portion Ikuta had revised alone, from the fourth chapter of 3 Nephi to the end of the book. Kawai completed his work in a little over a month, from early May to early June 1909, likely producing only a few substantive changes.36

**The Literary Value**

The 1909 Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon is a great literary achievement. The beauty and grace of the language used, for example, in translating Mosiah 3:19 (that begins with “For the natural man is an enemy to God . . .”) must be evident to many who are able to read it, perhaps much more so than the two subsequent translations published by the Church in 1957 and 1995. The final language of the 1909 translation must heavily reflect the hand of Choko Ikuta, who was the only person to render Taylor’s entire original translation into classical Japanese.37 Of course, the work of translation was a collective effort, making it difficult to ascribe too much of the final product to any single individual. Taylor records that no change was made that he did.
not approve. Certainly, Taylor and Caine did not stand idly by while Ikuta perfected the language. A handwritten note prepared by one of them reads:

Beginning with chapter 28 of II Nephi, ... I note that the use of difficult words increases very materially. I shall be entirely disappointed if after the hard labor of both of us, the translation is marked with so many hard words that it will be hard for the ordinary people to understand it. I do therefore hope that the necessity to use difficult words in some places in order to express the true meaning will not be a justification for the use of difficult words and phrases where there is no absolute necessity for them.\(^{38}\)

The missionaries must have prevailed over Ikuta’s propensity for using difficult and lofty words. The final language was much friendlier to the average reader than Ikuta perhaps would have produced on his own.

There are a number of isolated instances of beauty and grace, such as Mosiah 3:19 noted above. But identifying such individual instances would be a highly subjective and random exercise. After all, how a particular phrase, sentence, or sequence of sentences sounds may well be a matter of personal taste or preference. In order to be as objective as possible in my assessment, therefore, I will identify below recurring uses of certain literary expressions, devices, or principles in characterizing the overall literary value of the 1909 translation.

**Smoothing out awkward expressions.** The use of refined language contributes to the literary quality of the 1909 translation, which gives little indication that it is translation Japanese. The following example illustrates how a seemingly awkward expression in the English original was made smooth in Japanese:

The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak. (3 Nephi 17:16–17)

1909 Japanesees translation: warera no mi mata kikishi iesu ga tenpu ni inori tamaeru tokoro no kotoba wa, me ni imada kore wo mizu, mimi ni imada kore wo kikazu, kuchi ni ii uru mono mo

The smoothness of the translation, however, comes with the loss of Hebraic syntax evident in the English translation (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:16; 1 Nephi 22:26; Mosiah 3:1–3; Mosiah 3:18–19; Mosiah 5:10–12; Mosiah 15:2–4; Alma 13:19).\(^{40}\) Of course, it is simply not possible to preserve the exact Semitic order of words and phrases in Japanese, but another factor influencing the outcome is the tendency to use varied translations for parallel expressions in the 1909 translation (e.g., use of two separate words to translate “remember” in Mosiah 5:11–12).

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**Deletions and additions.** To make the translation sound less awkward, the following phrases were not translated at all: “either on the one hand or on the other” (1 Nephi 14:7); “And so it is on the other hand” (Alma 41:6)—translated simply as “but”; “yea, the word came unto them that it must be fulfilled” (3 Nephi 1:25); and “being on a parallel” (3 Nephi 26:5). On the other hand, some words and phrases were added, presumably to make the translation sound complete. For example, after rendering 1 Nephi 18:2 (which describes how Nephi constructed a ship), the 1909 translation adds an
entire sentence: “Ware wa tenshu no oshie tamaishi hōhō nite fune wo tsukurishi yue, sono fune wa hito no tsukuru mono ni kotonarishi nari” (Because I built the ship according to the method that the Lord had taught me, the ship was different from what men would build). The translation of 4 Nephi 1:14 (which notes that “many of that generation” had passed away) is followed by the addition of a clause that does not exist in the original: “sono kōnin mo taterare tariki” ([but] their successors were also put in place). An even greater departure from literalism is found in Mormon 5:14–15, where the translation of three ideas placed in a complex manner is facilitated by using numbers “daiichi wa” (first), “daini wa” (second), and “daisan wa” (third).

Specific and concrete language. The language of the translation reflects the consistent application of a certain set of rules. An obvious pattern is to use specific or concrete language. Anybody who is familiar with the English original is immediately struck with the tendency to replace an expression involving the English preposition of with a verb or verbal expression in Japanese. Thus, the “covenant people of the Lord” (1 Nephi 15:14) is translated as “tenshu no seiyaku wo ukeshi tami” (the people who received the covenant of the Lord). The conversion is not mechanical but involves serious thinking. Thus, the “true fold of God” (1 Nephi 15:15) is “makoto no kami ni shitagau mure” (the flock that follows the true God), and not the “true flock that follows God.” Likewise, the “revelations of God” when “looked unto” (Mormon 8:33) are “kami no atae tamaishi keishi” (the revelations that God gave) in the past tense, while those revelations when denied (Mormon 9:7) become “kami yori sazukaru keishi” (the revelations you receive from God) in the present.

Active or direct style. Use of active or direct style is a rule of good writing in any language and also a feature of the 1909 translation even when it does not correspond to the English original. For example, for the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks” (Jarom 1:3), the translation is “kokorokuraku, iji tsuyoki” (their hearts are dark, and their pride is strong). For the “blood of Christ atoneth for their sins” (Mosiah 3:16), we have “kirisuto wa onchi nite sono tsumi wo aganai tamau nari” (Christ atones for their sins by his blood). A related feature is the choice of simpler construction. Thus, “out of obscurity and out of darkness” (1 Nephi 22:12) is simplified as “kakuretaru kuraki kyōgai yori” (out of a hidden and dark state). The following is a more compelling example:

Ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again (Alma 41:14)  Sono mukui wo uku beshi. Sunawachi airen to seigi to tadashiki saiban to zen to wa nanji ni kaifuku seraru beshi  (Ye shall be rewarded, that is, ye shall have mercy, justice, a righteous judgment, and good restored unto you)

In this and other similar examples (e.g., 3 Nephi 19:34; Ether 6:10), the construction is made so smooth in Japanese that any trace of the original Semitic language is lost.

Literary expressions. A number of literary or expressive phrases are found throughout the translation. For example, “had become . . . grossly wicked” (Helaman 6:2) and “began to grow exceedingly wicked” (6:16) are translated respectively as “hanahadashiki jaaku ni nagaretari” (lapsed into gross wickedness) and “hanahada jaaku ni katamukeri” (degenerated greatly into wickedness). To introduce symmetry in expression between speaking and writing, “no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man” (3 Nephi 17:17) becomes “kuchini uru mono mo naku, fude nite shirushi uru mono mo naku” (there is none who can utter with a mouth, neither is there anyone who can record with a pen). It is not simply “a dew before the sun” (Mormon 4:18) that is swept off but “asahi ni terasururu tsuyu” (a dew lighted up by the morning sun). A “God of truth” (Ether 3:12) is really “makoto no michitaru kami” (a God full of truth).

Contrasting words and negative expressions. Occasional use of contrasting words is another literary device. Thus, asahimo (a flaxen string) is used to translate the “flaxen cord” the devil uses to lead the people, but nawa (ropes) is the cords he uses to bind them (2 Nephi 26:22). If it is an “infant” that dies but does not perish, the counterpart who drinks damnation must be otona (an adult), though “men” is the original word (Mosiah 3:18). Use of negative expressions (including double negatives) to affirm positive ideas is a characteristic of classical Japanese. For example, “one eternal round” (1 Nephi 10:19) is translated as “eien ni kotonaru koto nashi”
(not variable for ever); and “all things are given
them which are expedient unto man” (2 Nephi 2:27)
becomes “ōyoso sono tame to naru mono wa hitotsu
toshite atarerazaru koto nashi” (there is not a thing
that is beneficial unto them that is not given). To
“be remembered” (Moroni 6:4) is “wasurete nazo-
zari ni suru koto naku” (not to be forgotten nor
neglected).

THE MANNER OF TRANSLATION

Supplementing words, paraphrasing, and
attempting to interpret or explain (even when not
absolutely necessary to produce a good idiomatic
translation) are among the departures from literal-
ism that characterize the 1909 translation. These
features may well have reflected Taylor’s desire to
make the translation as understandable as possible
to all classes of people. In one instance, Taylor asked
the First Presidency if he could translate the expres-
sion “the Spirit of Christ” as seirei (the Holy Ghost),
saying that the original term might suggest Christ’s
own spirit to the Japanese. The First Presidency
counseled Taylor against it, arguing that the “same
difficulty in grasping the meaning of these terms”
would be met with by readers of the scriptures in
any language:

Religion, art and science each coin new words
or give a peculiar shade of meaning to familiar
words, and gradually these get established in
the language. The same is the case with words
used in the Japanese Bible. It may be hard for
those who have not studied that sacred volume
to comprehend the writer’s meaning, but re-
peated readings of such terms will gradually
make the meaning as clear to the Japanese mind
as they are to one who understands English but
has not made the scriptures his study.41

The First Presidency, however, approved certain
explanatory words to be inserted in brackets in
order to make the meaning “clearer to the reader”
(for example, “Jesus” following “the Son of Man” or
the “Lamb”; “three” before the words “beloved dis-
ciples” in Mormon 8:10; and “the emblem of” before
“the flesh and blood” in Moroni 4:1).42

Supplementing words and phrases. In some
cases, adding words or phrases may be absolutely
necessary to express the meaning of a foreign
sentence correctly in Japanese. In other cases, it
may be helpful to the reader but not necessary for
communicating the meaning. For example, the
translation renders “to stir them up in the ways of
remembrance” (1 Nephi 2:24) as “tenshu wo omi-
okasashimen tame” (to make them remember the
Lord). Likewise, “the life of my servant shall be in
my hand” (3 Nephi 21:10) is rendered as “sono hitori
naru waga shimobe no inochi wa waga te no uchi
ni mamaru beki” (the life of my servant shall be
protected in my hand).

Most cases of adding words and phrases appear
to be meant only for literary purposes. For example,
“May God raise you from death by the power of
the resurrection, and also from everlasting death
by the power of the atonement” (2 Nephi 10:25) is
translated as “kami ga fukkatsu no chikara wo mote
nanjira wo haka no ichiji no shi yori yomigaerase,
zaikadaishoku no chikara wo mote nanjira wo eien
no shi yori yomigaerase tamau” (May God raise you
from the temporary death of the grave by the power
of the resurrection, and raise you from everlasting
death by the power of the atonement). Here, “haka
no ichiji no” (temporary . . . of the grave) is added to
the first occurrence of the word “death” in contrast
to “everlasting death.”

In some cases, the translators exercised outright
poetic license, perhaps to be complete. For example,
“[they] scourged his skin with faggots” (Mosiah
17:13) is translated as “takigi wo moyashite shi ni
itarashimuru made sono hada wo yaki keri” ([they]
put fire on faggots and burnt his skin unto death).
Likewise, “[Alma] could not rest, and he also went
forth” (Alma 43:1) is rendered as “yasumu koto wo
ezareba, mata michi wo noben tame ide yukinu”
([Alma] could not rest, and he also went out to
preach the word). Finally, “they who were bap-
tized in the name of Jesus were called the church
of Christ” (3 Nephi 26:21) becomes “iesu no mina
ni yorite shinrei wo ukeshi monodomo no dantai
wa kirisuto no kyōkai to yobarenu” (the group of
people who were baptized in the name of Jesus was
called the church of Christ).

Paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is another device
that could be necessary in some cases to convey the
meaning correctly; in other cases, it is used only for
literary purposes. For example, “come to the knowl-
edge of the true Messiah” (1 Ne 10:14) is translated
as “shin no messha wo mitomureru” (come
to acknowledge the true Messiah), and “this cor-
rupption” (2 Nephi 9:7) as “kono kutsuru mi” (this
Supplementing words, paraphrasing, and attempting to interpret or explain (even when not absolutely necessary to produce a good idiomatic translation) are among the departures from literalism that characterize the 1909 translation.

Interpretation. Translation by necessity involves interpretation. But the need for interpretation is even greater for the Book of Mormon because the meanings of some passages are not straightforward, especially when they involve deep religious messages or novel ideas. For example, if one is to translate “through the fulness of the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 15:13) word for word into Japanese, one would have “ihōjin no kanzen naru koto ni yori” (by the completeness of the Gentiles), which makes absolutely no sense. The 1909 translation tries to interpret the passage by rendering it as “ihōjin ga kanzen naru fukuin wo ukuru ni yori” (as the Gentiles accept the perfect gospel). Likewise, “the severity of the Lord” (Omni 1:22) is translated interpretively as “sono kibishiki onbatsu” (his severe punishment); “repenting nigh unto death” (Mosiah 27:28) as “shisen bakari no itami mote kuiaratame” (repenting with the pain that nearly caused him to die); “a more excellent way” (Ether 12:11) as “mōse no rippō ni masareru michi” (a way that is superior to the law of Moses); and “in plain humility” (Ether 12:39) as “yono tsune no furi to ware to onaji kotoba to wo mote” (in ordinary manner and with the same language as mine). The following involves a more delicate act of interpretation:

I [come . . . to] do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh (3 Nephi 1:14)

Ware wa waga reikon no kankei ni yori chichi no mune wo okonai, waga nikutai no kankei ni yori ko no mune wo okonau
(I do the will of the Father on account of the spirit, and do the will of the Son on account of the flesh)

In this example, interpretation seems to define the meaning more precisely.

Explanatory. There are instances where the interpretation becomes explanatory. For example, the 1909 translation renders “nor repent of the thing which thou hast done” (Mosiah 4:22) as “sono zaisan wo oshimite hodokosazaru tsumi wo kuiaratamezu” (not repent of the sin of being unwilling to part with your possessions and not imparting them); and “look to God and live” (Alma 37:47) as “kami ni tayorite eien no seimei wo ukeyo” (rely upon God and receive eternal life). Likewise, “the law is fulfilled” (3 Nephi 12:19) is translated as “furuki rippō wa mohaya sono mokuteki wo tasshite kōyō naki mono to naru” (the old law has now fulfilled its purpose and become of no effect); “ye shall not resist evil” (3 Nephi 12:39) as “aku wo motte aku wo fusegu koto nakare” (ye shall not resist evil with evil); and “this is the law and the prophets” (3 Nephi 15:10) as “waga meirei wo mamoru wa, sunawachi rippō to yogenshara no kotoba ni kanau koto nari” (to keep my commandments complies with the law and the words of the prophets). These cases could give the impression that the translation is like commentary on a passage of scripture (though only to someone familiar with the English original).

NOTABLE WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS

The choice of certain words and phrases gives a distinctive flavor to the 1909 translation. There are of course countless such examples. I will here
focus on just three—namely, the frequent use of the Japanese word for “the way,” how the English word “soul” is translated, and the translation for “the Lord.”

The way. The Japanese word michi (dào in Chinese) is one of the favorite, multipurpose words of the 1909 translation. Though it literally means “way,” “road,” or “path,” the word is rich in a variety of meanings, such as “means,” “process,” “vocation,” “logic,” “reason,” “sense,” and “religious teaching.”  Michi is most frequently used to translate the term “word” as in “the word of God” or “the word of the Lord,” whereas kotoba would have been a more literal translation. Thus, “the word of God” that missionaries were preaching in Alma 23:1 is translated as “kami no michi” (the way of God), as was “the word” the people were ready to hear in Alma 32:6.

The use of michi for “word” in part follows the Chinese translation of John 1:1 where dào was used for the Greek word logos (the 1880 Japanese translation of the Bible also used the Chinese character dào for logos, but made it read kotoba thereby giving a dual meaning). Curiously, however, the 1909 translation of the Book of Mormon more frequently uses mikotoba (the holy word) when “the word of God” in the original is used in the sense of logos. Thus, “the rod of iron” (1 Nephi 11:25) is “kami no mikotoba” (the holy word of God), and “the word of God,” which is quick and powerful (Helaman 3:29), is also translated as “kami no mikotoba” (see also 4 Nephi 1:30).

Michi is also the principal word used to translate expressions such as “the plan of salvation” and “the plan of redemption.” Thus “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8) is translated as “hito ni kōfuku wo esasen to suru ōinaru michi” (the great way of having men obtain happiness). Likewise, for “the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death” (2 Nephi 11:5), we have “hitobito wo shi yori aganai sukuu tokoshie no ōinaru michi” (the eternal and great way of redeeming and saving people from death). Michi is used even when a counterpart does not appear in the original. Thus, the sentence “[Nephi and Lehi] began to grow up unto the Lord” (Helaman 3:21) is translated as “seichō shi yuku mama ni tenshu wo osore kashikomu michi wo manaberi” ([they] learned the way of fearing and respecting the Lord as they grew up). And “that thing which they do believe” with steadfastness (Helaman 15:10) is translated simply as “sono shinzuru michi” (the way of their belief).

Soul. A revelation to Joseph Smith gave a special meaning to the word “soul” as a compound made up of the body and the spirit (Doctrine and Covenants 88:15), but this is not always the sense in which the word is used in the Book of Mormon. The Hebrew counterpart nephesh appears over 780 times in the Old Testament and has been variously translated as “soul,” “self,” “life,” “creature,” “person,” “appetite,” “mind,” “living being,” “desire,” “emotion,” or “passion.” Some biblical commentaries suggest that nephesh can be translated as “self” or even more simply as “I” or “me.” Newer English translations tend to translate nephesh much less frequently as “soul.” For example, the New Revised Standard Version (1989) has “I loath my life” for the verse translated in the King James Version as “My soul is weary of my life” (Job 10:1).

It should be noted that the choice of tenshu in the 1909 Book of Mormon translation applies not to “God” but to “the Lord.” Gessel discusses how Taylor came to believe that tenshu would more closely carry the meaning of the scriptural word “Lord” than the simple shu, which is used in referring to earthly lords.

As might be expected, in the 1909 translation, the English word “soul” is translated variously as kokoro (heart) (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:15), reikon (spirit) (e.g., 1 Nephi 15:31; Alma 40:18), and hito (man or person) (e.g., 2 Nephi 9:13; Alma 39:17). Sometimes, it is not translated at all. For instance, the sentence “the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God” (1 Nephi 15:35) is translated as “hito wa tsui ni kami no mikuni ni sumu” (men will eventually live in the kingdom of God). Likewise,
"the enemy of my soul" (2 Nephi 4:28) is simply “waga teki” (my enemy), and “the welfare of your souls” (Jacob 2:3) is “nanjira no tokoshie no kōfuku” (your eternal happiness). Only rarely is “soul” translated according to the definition given in the Doctrine and Covenants (Mosiah 2:21; Helaman 8:28), as seems appropriate under the circumstances.

“The Lord” is typically rendered in the 1909 translation as tenshu, a new word that the Western missionaries working in China had created by combining two Chinese characters meaning “heaven” and “lord.” This Chinese word (tiānzhŭ in pinyin) was one of several words used to translate God (or its Latin equivalent Deus), and was sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church in the early eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, however, some Protestant missionaries began to use two existing words, shēn (kami in Japanese) and shàngdì (jōtei in Japanese). Though they never reached agreement, the American Bible Society published a Chinese translation of the Bible in the mid-nineteenth century, with shèn (kami) for God. These developments explain why in Japan the Catholics and the Protestants adopted two different words for God (but shàngdì was never adopted in Japanese).47

It should be noted that the choice of tenshu in the 1909 Book of Mormon translation applies not to “God” but to “the Lord.” Gessel discusses how Taylor came to believe that tenshu would more closely carry the meaning of the scriptural word “Lord” “than the simple shu, which is used in referring to earthly lords.” In the 1909 translation of the Book of Mormon, however, there is a fine distinction between tenshu and shu: the former is used more generally with reference to the Lord, while the latter is sometimes used when the Lord speaks or appears to an individual (e.g., 3 Nephi 1:12).

In preserving Taylor’s choice of the word tenshu for “the Lord,” Ikuta must have been familiar with the controversy among the Protestants in Japan over the biblical choice of the word kami for God. From the latter part of the nineteenth century, some Protestant missionaries even began to insist that tenshu, used in the Roman Catholic Church, was a better
term for “God” because the connotations of kami (a polytheistic spiritual entity residing in a particular location) were so ingrained in the language of Shinto that the use of the term was preventing the Japanese from coming to a proper understanding of God. Some influential Protestant publications called for a new translation of the Bible, in part to do away with the word kami for “God.”

The Question of Accuracy

Accuracy has been a buzzword for linguistic and theological purity in most analyses of biblical translation. In the realm of religion, inaccurate translation not only fails to achieve a satisfactory degree of equivalence but also could give a wrong idea and potentially jeopardize the reader. By the ultimate standard of accuracy, the 1909 translation earns high marks in my assessment. Even in a number of passages where the current 1995 translation is in my view incorrect, imperfect, or questionable (e.g., 2 Nephi 2:10; Mosiah 1:2; Alma 36:9; Alma 43:46; Alma 60:10; Helaman 4:26; Helaman 16:12; 3 Nephi 29:9; Moroni 1:3), the 1909 translation renders them correctly and skillfully (though the reverse could also be true in other passages—see below). But accuracy can be a relative concept, especially in translation, where there is a whole spectrum of correctness or incorrectness.

Though problems of accuracy are few, I attempt below to identify three types of imperfections in the 1909 translation, which I call (1) debatable translations; (2) questionable translations; and (3) outright mistranslations.

Debatable translation involves imperfect equivalence when near perfect equivalence is technically feasible. These cases generally entail the use of a particular word for the original when a better word is available. For example, in Mosiah 7:31, the 1909 translation adopts the word maneku (to bring about) for “reap” (used in contrast to “sow”) when a closely corresponding word is available in Japanese (karu).

In some cases, the original words are not translated at all even though they have good Japanese counterparts, for example, the “end” in the “end of its creation” (2 Nephi 2:12) or the “nature” in the “nature of that righteousness” (Helaman 13:38).

Questionable translation entails a greater deviation from the original than debatable translation, but it retains more ambiguity than outright mistranslation to allow disagreement. I have been able to identify 22 such cases in the 1909 translation (though the list may not be exhaustive). Many of them are passages that are very difficult to interpret, but the problem would not have existed if the translation had been more literal, leaving the interpretation of a difficult or ambiguous passage to the reader. The following two examples should suffice to make my point:

[God] shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain (2 Nephi 2:2)
Kami wa nanji no nameshi kannan shinku yori nanji no rieki wo shōzeshime tamawan (God shall cause thy gain to come out of the afflictions you experience)

{And others will he pacify, and} lull them away into carnal security (2 Nephi 28:21)
kore wo azamukite nikuyoku ni fukerashimuru (deceive them and cause them to indulge in carnal desires)

On the other hand, the following passage is not so difficult, but it appears that interpretation was carried too far:

{If their works are evil} they shall be restored unto them for evil (Alma 41:4)
Their works will testify that they are evil people.

Other cases of questionable translation entail the choice of words that give a different shade of meaning than that suggested by the original. These are questionable only because they have doctrinal implications or potential impact on religious behavior; otherwise, they could be brushed off as an inevitable but inconsequential outcome of translation. For example, the 1909 translation renders “turn away {from your sins}” (2 Nephi 9:45) as kui-aratamete (repent of); “are reconciled {unto God}” (2 Nephi 10:24) as shitagai taru (follow); “feasting upon {the word of Christ}” (2 Nephi 31:20) as ajiwai (taste); “[faith is] dormant” (Alma 32:34) as muyō (useless); and “lay hold upon {the word of God}” (Helaman 3:29) as uke ireru (accept).

Some cases border on mistranslation. For example:

It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do (2 Nephi 25:23)
Hito wa ikabakari tsutome hagemu tomo, sono sukuwaruru wa hitoeni kami no megumi ni yoru
(No matter how hard man may work, it is solely dependent upon God’s grace that man is saved)

[I trust that] . . . ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith, which is to come (Alma 7:6)
Eien usezaru shinkō mote kitaru beki koto wo shinjii nagara tsumi no yurushi wo ubeki toki wo yoki suru
(Ye look forward to the time when ye receive the remission of your sins with a faith in things to come that does not perish forever)

There was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man (Alma 42:18)
Yo no hajime ni wa batsu sadamerare, tadashiki rippō taterareshi ga, kono rippō no tame hito wa hajimete ryōshin ni togamerarete kuyuru ni itareru
(A punishment was affixed and a just law given at the beginning of the world. Because of this law, man for the first time felt the pangs of conscience unto repentance)

The inadequacy of translation in a few passages has only been highlighted recently in light of new research on the Book of Mormon, concerning the “brightness” of possibly wooden swords (Alma 24:12 and other similar verses). The remaining cases involve inappropriate words (i.e., 2 Nephi 2:22; Alma 13:3; Alma 31:35; Helaman 10:7), failure to translate the English preposition “in” properly (i.e., Helaman 13:38; Moroni 9:25), or simple interpretational errors (i.e., 3 Nephi 26:9; Ether 1:35).

Outright mistranslations are rare; I have been able to identify only nine. Four involve interpretational errors and are not serious. Two of them (2 Nephi 26:11; Ether 2:15) translate “always” as eikyū or eien ni (forever) when rendering the idea that the Spirit “will not always strive with man.” The substitution of “forever” for “always” seems to give too much focus on the eternal consequence.
of our actions, as opposed to the need to keep our actions righteous here and now. The translation of Helaman 14:9 “[Prepare] the way of the Lord” as “tenshu no kudari tamau michi” (the way through which the Lord will descend [from heaven]) is insightful but seems too restrictive. Surely, preparing the way of the Lord also includes the spiritual and mental preparation of the individual. Finally, whereas the original in Mormon 9:32 asserts that the record is written in “reformed Egyptian” characters, “according to our knowledge,” the translation gives “warera wa warera no iwayuru ejiputo moji wo manabishi tokoro no chishiki nite kono kiroku wo tsukurinu” (we made this record according to our knowledge of [or our knowledge obtained from learning] so-called reformed Egyptian characters).

The other cases are more substantive because they misinterpret the intended words of the prophets. Three of the cases involve failing to translate the conjunction “if” in the sense of “whether” (2 Nephi 33:11; Ether 4:10; Ether 5:6). For example:

And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye (2 Nephi 33:11)
Nanjira kore wo kirisuto no mikotoba ni arazu to omou tomo
(Even if you may think that they are not the words of Christ)

In these cases, the reader who reads the Japanese translation would fail to respond to the challenge of a prophet to judge the validity of his words or authority. The remaining two cases (2 Nephi 25:12; Mosiah 15:3) are even more serious as they involve possible doctrinal misrepresentations, as indicated below:

The Only Begotten of the Father, yea, even the Father of heaven and of earth (2 Nephi 25:12)
Tenchi no chichi no umi tamau hitorigo
(The Only Child begotten of the Father of heaven and earth)

The translation leaves no room for understanding that the “Father of heaven and of earth” could refer to Christ, and not to his father.

The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh (Mosiah 15:3)
Kami no michikara nite sono reikon no umare tamaishi kankei ni yori chichi nari. Nikutai wo
mochi tamau kankei ni yori ko nari
(The Father, because his spirit was conceived by the power of God, and the Son, because he has a body)

As serious as these errors may be, these are the only cases I have found of outright mistranslation that I believe involve possible doctrinal misrepresentation. The 1909 translation is substantially accurate and should convey broadly the same information to religious seekers as would the English original.

CONCLUSION

The 1909 Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon is a great literary achievement. Commentary by some previous authors may have created the false sense that the translation was somehow rendered in an archaic language few understood. This is far from the case. It was a modern translation in every sense of the word by the standards of the early twentieth century. Though it was rendered in classical style, its classical style was of the futsūbun variety, which had been developed to accommodate the needs of an increasingly modernizing society and was at the time widely used.

In terms of the beauty and force of the language, the 1909 translation far surpasses the 1957 and 1995 translations (though perhaps not in terms of fidelity). The language in part reflects the skill with which Choko Ikuta perfected Taylor’s draft translation. The 1909 translation consistently uses specific and concrete language and an active and direct style, and employs a number of literary expressions and devices. To sound more natural, it supplements words and phrases as well as paraphrasing the original expressions even when not required to produce good idiomatic translation. These characteristics may also have reflected Taylor’s desire to make the language as accessible as possible to the average reader. For the most part the translation is accurate, but the characteristic departure from literalism is a possible weakness that needs to be recognized as a work of religious translation.

I have paid relatively little attention to the choice of theological words, a topic that Gessel discusses in depth. This reflects my view that the choice of words to express foreign concepts is not fundamental to the process of interlingual transla-
In terms of the beauty and force of the language, the 1909 translation far surpasses the 1957 and 1995 translations (though perhaps not in terms of fidelity).

words for most fundamental Christian words. The Church had also published a number of pamphlets in the 1900s in which the Japanese words for some uniquely Mormon terms were identified.

It is difficult to assess the choice of classical style. Should the Church have waited until the written colloquial style was firmly established before attempting to translate the Book of Mormon? If so, how long? Until the early 1920s when the print media fully embraced contemporary style, or until after the end of World War II when official government documents began to be expressed in contemporary style? One thing is clear. Writing in contemporary style with grace and dignity would have been a difficult task even in the 1950s. The public outcry over the colloquial style translations of the New Testament (published in 1954) and the Old Testament (in 1955) was so great that Tatsui Sato, in making the second Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon for the Church, gave up the idea of rendering it entirely in contemporary style. In fact, the Church waited until 1995 to make a full colloquial style translation available to contemporary Japanese readers who might have limited familiarity with classical grammar.

In view of all this, Taylor’s ultimate choice of classical style for the 1909 translation may well have been the right one. As a result, a writer of Choko Ikuta’s ability could apply his literary skills in perfecting the translation. Even after the Japan Mission closed in 1924, the translation was used among the Hawaiians of Japanese ancestry, thus paving the way for the resumption of missionary work at the conclusion of World War II. Though Ikuta may have had the final touch, Taylor, with the assistance of Caine, produced the initial translation and was fully involved in every step of the finalization process, thus earning the Church the ownership of the work that it deserves. Because of these individuals’ efforts, Japanese-speaking members of the Church can enjoy the privilege of reading the Book of Mormon from time to time in the language of the Tale of Genji, though with a modern vocabulary. Indeed, the way was proclaimed in the language of Japanese poetry—the beautiful language of their ancestors.

Notes


3. Technical notes: I use the 1979 LDS edition of the Book of Mormon as the source text to assess the 1909 Japanese translation (though the translators apparently used the "sixth electrotype edition published at Liverpool"). See Alma O. Taylor, letter addressed to Anthon Lund, 15 November 1904. Alma O. Taylor Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church History Library). I generally follow the Hepburn system to Romanize Japanese words but, consistent with official Japanese government practice,
do not apply the Hepburn convention of using diacritical marks to indicate long vowels in personal and geographical names.


7. Steiner, After Babel, 236.


9. These examples come from Yoshifumi Saito, Honyaku no Sahō (The Art of Translation: An Introduction to Literary Translation) (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2007), 17, 24, and 34.

10. This example comes from Toyohito Nomagi, Honyaku Ron (Theory of Translation) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1932), 7–8. The book was published as part of a multivolume compendium of scholarly works on Japanese and Western literature in the celebrated Iwanami Köza series.


14. This is the position the Church took in 1991 when it initiated the work of translating the Book of Mormon into contemporary Japanese.


17. There were three main schools whose writers contributed to the development of colloquial-style writing. Psychological realism attempted an “impartial description of man and his environment”; the shaseibun school attempted to “portray places, people, and events in the objective manner of an artist”; and the Natu-ralist school believed that the only subject novelists could write


21. While 78 percent of novels were written in contemporary style in 1905, the percentage rose to 91 percent in 1906 and 98 percent in 1907, and to 100 percent in 1908. Outside the field of literature, the proportion of jutsubun remained high, as much as 54 percent in a representative magazine in 1907; though it declined to less than 10 percent in 1917. Yamamoto, Kindai Buntai Hassei no Shi-teki Kenkyū, 51. See also Twine, Language and the Modern State, 188–93.


23. Taylor, “The History”: Taylor spelled Hirai’s given name Kinza, as did Hirai himself. This follows the historical convention of using phonetic Japanese letters on the basis of how words were presumably pronounced during the Heian period. Consistency in the use of phonetic Japanese letters requires that the name be spelled Kinza in this paper.


29. The 16 March 1908 issue of the Yorozu Chōhō reported under a prominent heading that a married teacher of English at Waseda University by the name of Higoro Hirai had fallen in love with and taken custody of a prostitute (thus liberating her from servitude in a brothel). A reporter from the Miyako Shinbun investigated this presumed incident, however, and demonstrated in a series of three articles beginning on 27 March 1908 that the accusation was groundless.


31. Shoyo Tsubouchi (1859–1935) and Soseki Natsume (1867–1916) were both major figures in the modernization of Japanese literature. Tsubouchi not only wrote plays and novels but also translated major Western literary works into Japanese, including the complete works of Shakespeare. Natsume, who began his career as a scholar of English literature, became one of the greatest nov-elists of modern Japan by writing several works of lasting influence, beginning with I Am a Cat (a satire on life in Meiji Japan seen through the eyes of a cat).

32. Taylor, “The History.”


35. Taylor, “The History.”

36. Taylor accommodated Kawai’s suggestions during a single meeting held on 8 June 1909. See Taylor, “The History.” Given Kawai’s background, his knowledge of English was probably very limited.

37. Although two individuals worked on each portion of the book, Ikuta’s contribution stands out. He made a number of corrections on the work previously done by Hirai, which were in most cases judged by three literary experts to be improvements; the other critic who reviewed Ikuta’s work (Kawai) made only a few corrections, judging from the fact that they were accommodated by Taylor in a single meeting.


39. In this and subsequent examples, retranslations into English (“back-translation”) are offered only as an aid to make my point to an English-speaking reader. In making these back-translations, I have tried to be literal in the sense of preserving word-for-word correspondence where feasible. These may not be the best translations. When equivalence is established, the source text is the best back-translation of the translated text.


42. First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, letter addressed to Alma O. Taylor, 3 March 1908. Alma O. Taylor Papers, Church History Library.

43. Curly brackets indicate phrases that appear in the original text and are significant in giving meaning to the phrase but are not relevant to the translation.
46. The first word refers to an invisible being or a spirit, while the second means the Ruler on High, the Supreme Ruler, or the Emperor. Suzuki, *Seisho no Nihongo*, 35–37.
51. The Church corrected at least three of the more obvious errors in 2009, but many others remain, in my view. The 2009 correction, however, introduced a grammatical error where none had existed previously (in Alma 42:25).
52. Other cases in this category are 2 Nephi 3:17 and Mosiah 2:34.
53. See Matthew Roper, “Eyewitness Descriptions of Mesoamerican Swords,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 150–58. The way “brightness” is translated in these verses (hikari wo hanatu—to emit light) leaves little alternative but to assume the swords to be metallic.
54. To transgress is translated as “tsum wo okasu” and “preparatory redemption” as “prepared redemption”; “souls are precious” is rendered as “reioku (spirits) are precious”; and to “have power among this people” is translated as “to have authority and power to work among this people.”
55. Seeking happiness in doing iniquity is translated as “seeking happiness while doing iniquity,” while being faithful in Christ is rendered as “being faithful to Christ.”
56. To “try their faith” is translated as to “test whether their faith is strong”; “confounding the language of people” and “confounding the people” are translated synonymously (i.e., they cease to understand each other), but confounding a group of people can also mean scattering or dispersing them. See Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 172–73.
58. I make these claims on the basis of over 20 years’ experience teaching economics, a technical discipline of Anglo-Saxon origin, to American and Japanese university students.
63. He used a mixture of contemporary and classical style by retaining the former style for informal parts (such as narratives and sermons), while using the latter for supplications to and utterances of God. See Tatsui Sato, “Shinyaku Morumon Kei ni tsuite” (About the New Translation of the Book of Mormon), *Seito no Michi*, July 1957, 4–5. Numano, “The Japanese Translation,” offers a linguistic assessment of the 1957 translation by Sato.
65. Classical Japanese is still the principal medium of poetry, especially in *waka* and *haiku*. Even in the contemporary Church, hymns are sung in classical Japanese. In the current edition of the Japanese LDS hymnbook, all but five of the 200 hymns are written in classical style; of the five hymns that are written in contemporary style, four are children’s songs.
One of the best historical windows for understanding how the Book of Mormon was interpreted and understood by early readers is the literature relating to that book published during the Prophet Joseph Smith’s lifetime. Publications of this period can often enrich our perspective on early Latter-day Saint history. Until fairly recently, however, the task of collecting many of the early publications relating to the Book of Mormon was difficult. During the 1930s Francis W. Kirkham started a collection with articles from New England and Ohio newspapers. As Keith Perkins notes, “At a time when others lacked either the opportunity or the inclination to do so, [Kirkham] set out to gather many early documents related to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon—source materials that were still available but in jeopardy of loss or deterioration. He analyzed these sources and compiled them into a work that has had a lasting impact on our understanding of this book of scripture.” This collection was initially published in 1937 under the title Source Material Concerning the Origin of the Book of Mormon.

Later Kirkham expanded his work to include and describe naturalistic explanations of the Book of Mormon of that period. With the encouragement of Latter-day Saint leaders, these efforts produced several expanded editions of his work that were eventually published in two volumes. “Since the early books and newspapers and pamphlets are few and widely scattered,” noted John A. Widtsoe in 1959, “President George Albert Smith invited Dr. Kirkham to extend his research in this field and to assemble for publication under one cover the many attempts to prove the Book of Mormon man-made.” Church leaders believed such efforts...
would have a salutary effect on Latter-day Saints by making them more familiar with the history and events surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as well as with the arguments of critics who believed that it was man-made. “Unbelievers in Joseph Smith’s story,” wrote John A. Widtsoe, “have not been able to agree on any one explanation. It has even been necessary by some writers to change the explanation they first proposed. This unsuccessful, changing search is of itself an evidence of the truth of the Prophet’s own story.” Since many of these publications were rare, even in Kirkham’s day, and not easily accessible, Kirkham’s two-volume collection has been a helpful resource to historians and students of Latter-day Saint history who are interested in the events surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Although still valuable, Kirkham’s volumes are not comprehensive or complete. Many important articles relating to the Book of Mormon published in American religious periodicals that were unknown to him at the time have since been identified by researchers. Additionally, Kirkham usually only published extracts from these documents in order to provide a sampling of varying theories about the Book of Mormon. Kirkham’s focus was limited primarily to issues relating to the origin of the Book of Mormon and the theories of critics who attempted to prove it man-made. His research did not focus on other factors, such as how Latter-day Saints understood and related to the Book of Mormon. These limitations underscore the need for a more comprehensive and searchable resource.

Thanks to the encouragement and support of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and the assistance of the staff at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University, an important collection of early publications relating to the Book of Mormon between 1829 and 1844 has been gathered and is being made accessible to researchers. This article provides an overview of this collection and a sampling of its contents.

Nineteenth-Century Publications about the Book of Mormon (1829–1844) includes more than 600 publications (close to one million words of text) and is intended to comprise, insofar as possible, everything published in that time span relating to the Book of Mormon. The collection includes works by defenders and detractors. By far the most common category of publications in the collection is articles...
published in early newspapers. “Newspapers,” notes Walter A. Norton, “were the first form of public communication, other than community gossip and hearsay, to convey to a surprised citizenry the curious story surrounding the birth of Mormonism in Western New York. In fact, for nearly a century newspapers and magazines were almost unanimous in conveying a disparaging image of Mormonism.” In spite of this challenge, Latter-day Saint writers were able to utilize the print media to spread the message of the restoration more widely. Beginning in 1832, the Church of Jesus Christ began publishing its own periodical, The Evening and the Morning Star. This and later Church-sponsored newspapers such as the Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate and the Times and Seasons enabled the first generation of Latter-day Saints to become better informed about their beliefs, present their history, and provide a forum in which to correct, clarify, and respond to misrepresentations. Other publications include books and pamphlets, published accounts of missionary activities relating to the Book of Mormon, hymns, broadsides, and early reference works.

Reports alluding to the recovery and coming forth of a “Gold Bible” may have been published before that time, perhaps as early as 1827, but if so, they may not have survived. As Norton observes, “Certain newspapers printed in these two regions [New York and Ohio] can be identified by name, but copies of them exist today in no known archival depository. Furthermore, many individual issues are missing from larger collections and apparently are lost forever.”

The earliest known article published on the Book of Mormon appeared in the Palmyra Wayne Sentinel on 26 June 1829. On 16 November 1830, E. D. Howe, the editor of the Painesville Telegraph, recalled, “Some two or three years since, an account was given in the papers, of a book purporting to contain new revelations from Heaven, having been dug out of the ground, in Manchester in Ontario Co. N.Y.” Howe did not indicate where the article was published. Two years before 16 November 1830 would have been November 1828. Three years before would have been November 1827, about two months after Joseph Smith recovered the plates.

In 1845 Brigham Young spoke of the years before his conversion in Mentor, New York. Young also described signs in the heavens that he and his wife observed, on what he would later realize was “the night the plates were found.” He recalled that about this time “there was printed in the newspaper a short paragraph; it was only a square inch, but it stated that a young man had seen an angel who had told him where to find an Indian Bible, and it went on to inquire what would happen if it should come forth; should we then know about the origin of the Indians?” While it is clear that Young refers to a time before the publication of the Book of Mormon, his statement is insufficiently clear as to whether this was the time when Moroni first revealed the plates in 1823 or the night when Joseph Smith recovered the plates from the hill in 1827. A date in late 1827 would fit with Howe’s recollection.

In 1858 Orson Hyde published an autobiographical account of the events leading to his introduction to the Book of Mormon: “About this time [1827], some vague reports came in the newspapers, that a ‘golden bible’ had been dug out of a rock in the State of New York. It was treated, however, as a hoax. But on reading the report, I remarked as follows—‘Who knows but that this “golden bible” may break up all our religion, and change its whole features and bearing?’ Nothing more was heard of it for a long time in that section.” In a letter to Thomas Gregg in 1882, former Utah Governor S. S. Harding recounted some of the early events of his life relating to Mormonism: “When I left my home in the West, I had never heard of Mormonism, by that name. When I was a student at Brookville, in the fall of 1827, the Brookville Enquirer was laid upon my table, when my eye fell upon a paragraph, credited to some Eastern paper, of the finding of a book of metallic plates, called the ‘Golden Bible.’ It was found by a young man by the name of Joe Smith.”
Unfortunately copies of the Brookville Enquirer for the period in question have apparently not survived. It is significant, however, that each of these reports, coming both from non-Mormons like Howe and Harding and Mormons like Young and Hyde, consistently place the appearance of such an article in New York or Ohio in late 1827 and shortly after the recovery of the plates in September of that year. Such articles, were they to be located, would be of great interest to historians.

While many publications are no longer extant, diligent and persistent researchers often turn up occasional treasures. One researcher recently located an early article published in the New York Telescope on 20 February 1830, written by C. C. Blatchley. By some means Blatchley had obtained a copy of one of the sixteen-page signatures of the Book of Mormon from Grandin’s Palmyra printing office more than a month before the Book of Mormon was published and took the opportunity to disparage its style and grammar. More significantly, he cited a previously unknown letter he had received from Oliver Cowdery which Blatchley reportedly printed in another publication called the Investigator on 11 December 1829. Blatchley said he had previously written to Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer, “the believers in said bible of gold plates—which they affirm they have miraculously, or supernaturally beheld.” Not willing to accept their testimony, he “sought for evidences, and such as could not be disputed, of the existence of this bible of golden plates.” He said that Oliver Cowdery had written back to inform him that “the
world must take their words for its existence; and that the book would appear [that] month.”13 Although it comes to us secondhand, this is the earliest published reference to the testimony of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Efforts to locate the Investigator and the previously unknown Oliver Cowdery letter have so far failed, but future researchers may be more successful.

Some accounts in these publications shed additional light on the activities of early missionaries. In the revelation given on 25 January 1832, now known as section 75 of the Doctrine and Covenants, Lyman Johnson and Orson Pratt are commanded to “take their journey into the eastern countries” (D&C 75:14). In his personal journal, Pratt gives a summary of their labors but provides few details about their journey or what they taught. Others, however, who encountered these early missionaries provide descriptions of what they said and did. In one account published in Mercer County, Pennsylvania, one observer describes these two missionaries in favorable terms as they stopped for a cottage meeting at his home on their journey to the East. “They appeared to have very little learning, to be sincere in all they said. They had good manners—had been well raised—were decent and unassuming in every thing I saw, or heard them say.” One of them stated that he was “specially commanded to go forth and warn the people to flee from the wrath to come . . . to declare the will of God, and the revelation of John who saw the angel flying through Heaven—An angel brought the Mormonite Bible and laid it before him (the speaker;) he therefore knows these things to be true.”14

While these early publications can be a valuable resource to historians, it is also worth noting the obvious fact that not everything published was necessarily true or accurate. Both Mormon and non-Mormon writers could be deeply partisan. Writers were often hasty in publishing descriptions and reports without verifying their accuracy. In 1841, for example, the Rochester Daily Democrat published a false report of the murder of Martin Harris (Harris would in fact live another thirty-four years and die of natural causes in 1875).15 Negative rumors, reports, and speculations about Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints tended to be taken at face value without serious investigation or critical assessment. “Considering the state of transportation and communication in antebellum America, newspapers were able to ‘get away with’ ambiguous writing, if not palpable falsehoods.”16 Even Howe, not above reporting negative rumors about the Mormons, observed, “To record the thousand tales which are in circulation respecting the book and its propagators, would be an endless task, and probably lead to the promulgation of a hundred times more than was founded in truth.”17 In 1838 Elder Parley P. Pratt surveyed the bewildering chaos of mostly unchallenged rumor and misrepresentation so common in the press:

Fortune telling, money digging, juggling, wicked, cheat, liar, profane, intemperate, quarrelsome, not good character, gold bible company, indolent, lying, notoriously bad, wife whipper, destitute of moral character, visionary, addicted to vicious habits; and add to this catalogue, the ridiculous stories that went the rounds of the religious papers concerning the “Angel Caught;” and the walking on the water story; and the murder story; together with “Adultery;” and the love tale of Mr. Smith’s stealing his wife; and then the all things common; together with doing away with matrimony; and then the Treason against Government; the stirring up of the Slaves against their Masters; the instigating of the Indians to war and bloodshed; together with driving the inhabitants of Jackson County, Missouri, from their houses and lands, and the taking possession of them by force . . . Perhaps they might have added the story of eating their own children; and of having hairy throats, and but one eye, and that in the middle of their foreheads . . . . We are willing to give our enemies, . . . together with his Satanic majesty; great credit, for inventive and fertile imaginations, as well as for great credulity.18

In a letter published in 1842, J. N. T. Tucker, a cousin of Palmyra printer Pomeroy Tucker, claimed to have worked on the typesetting of the Book of Mormon. While preparing the Book of Mormon for publication he and several coworkers in the printing office attempted to test Joseph Smith’s ability as a translator. “Accordingly, after putting one sheet
in type, we laid it aside, and told [Martin] Harris it was lost, and there would be a serious defe-
cion in the book in consequence, unless another sheet like the original could be produced.” This,
according to Tucker, forced Harris to return to Joseph Smith and ask him to reproduce the miss-
ing text. When he returned several weeks later with a replacement sheet, it differed from the original.
This little joke, Tucker said, “caused no little mer-
riment among those who were acquainted with the circumstance.”

Tucker’s tale, however, appears to have been fab-
ricated. When asked about the incident, John Gil-
bert, who was responsible for setting the type of the Book of Mormon, noted that Tucker did not even work in the office at the time the alleged incident was to have occurred. “His statement in regard to a
page of the manuscript being spirited away by some of the typos in the office, is totally untrue.” Tucker,
Gilbert remembered, “went to Groton, Ct., got mar-
rried, became a preacher—Baptist I believe—com-
mitted some crime,—was tried and acquitted on
the plea of insanity—he was a ‘bad egg.’” Unfortunately, there were few safeguards against the circu-
lation of false stories and rumors about Mormonism once they were printed.

Early Reactions to the Book of Mormon

Early literature relating to the Book of Mormon appeared in a highly partisan atmosphere of reli-
gious polemic common to the time. Early publica-
tions treated the Book of Mormon with contempt
and ridicule even before it came off the press. “For
some time past,” noted the editor of the
Wayne
Sentinel on 26 June 1829, “much speculation has
existed, concerning a pretended discovery, through
superhuman means, of an ancient record, of a reli-
gious and a divine nature and origin, written in
ancient characters, impossible to be interpreted by
any to whom the special gift has not been imparted
by inspiration. It is generally known and spoken of
as the ‘Golden Bible.’ Most people entertain an idea
that the whole matter is the result of a gross impo-
sition and a grosser superstition.” The term Gold
Bible was not intended as one of respect. As Abner
Cole, the editor of the Palmyra tabloid the Reflector,
explained, “The appellation of ‘Gold Bible,’ is only
a cant cognomen,” a nickname given to the Book
of Mormon by “revilers and unbelievers—by way of
derision.”

During the summer of 1829, the editor of Paul
Pry’s Weekly Bulletin lampooned local community
figures in a series of parodies written in biblical
style. On 8 August, he concluded one such parody,
entitled “From the Gold Bible,” with a swipe at the
as-yet-unpublished Book of Mormon, “Behold all
these things, yea many more, are graven on the
massy leaves of the Golden Book, and are now in the custody of Joseph the prophet.” In another one written on 29 August, the editor lambasted local Methodists for alleged improprieties and then concluded, “And now oh ye worshipers of Bad, if ye turn not from the evil of your ways, and do that which is right, ye shall be delivered over to the folly of Smith, and with his exhortations be tormented day and night forever.”

On 26 March 1830, the Wayne Sentinel reported that the Book of Mormon had been published and was available for sale. Early reactions in the press to its publication varied from charges of blasphemy or contempt to amusement. On 2 April 1830, the Rochester Daily Advertiser wrote, “The ‘Book of Mormon’ has been placed in our hands. A viler imposition was never practised. It is an evidence of fraud, blasphemy and credulity, shocking to the Christian and moralist.”

“We have no doubt,” wrote the editor of the Cleveland Herald, “many will be shocked to learn there are those sacrilegious enough to contend that a new bible has been given to the children of men. But it is even so.” He considered it “one of the veriest impositions of the day.”

The belief in a restoration of spiritual gifts and miracles heralded by the Book of Mormon was also a common object of criticism and at least a partial motivation behind early persecutions of Latter-day Saints. In the summer of 1833 a mob destroyed the printing office of The Evening and the Morning Star in Independence, Missouri, and tarred and feathered several Church leaders, forcing them to sign an agreement promising to remove the Saints from the county. In an article published in the Missouri Republican, the actions of this “citizen’s meeting” are described as follows: “The committee express their fears that, should the population [of Mormons in Jackson County] continue to increase, they will soon have all the offices of the county in their hands; and that the lives and property of the other citizens would be insecure, under the administration of men who are so ignorant and superstitious as to believe that they have been the subjects of miraculous and supernatural cures; hold converse with God and his angels, and possess and exercise the gift of divination, and of unknown tongues.”

Such animosity was also evident after the Saints’ removal to Illinois several years later. One interesting report was published in the Illinois Register in March 1840:

A short time since it was ascertained that a Mr. Clark, a member of the Methodist Episcopal church in Logan county, had in his possession the Book of Mormon. For this glaring outrage he was severely reprimanded, deprived of his station as class leader, and the book demanded of him by his preachers, a Mr. Martin and a Mr. Watt. He (the said Clark) contended that the book was his own property, and unless they bought it, they could not have the same. Accordingly, the necessary sum was raised, and paid for the book. Shortly after the said book was taken into De Witt county, to a Quarterly Conference meeting, there to await its final trial; and it was condemned, and burnt to ashes—the judges themselves being the executioners. And what is still more appalling, Mr. Watt, a preacher, has been heard unblushingly to assert, that if burning the book would not do, they would next burn the Mormons themselves.”
Early publications also recount the reactions of travelers and visitors to the Prophet and the Saints. David Marks, a Methodist preacher, visited the Whitmer home in Fayette, New York, shortly after the publication of the Book of Mormon. “On reviewing this pretended revelation, I was forcibly struck with the contrast between the introduction of the gospel of Christ, and that of the ‘Book of Mormon.’ The former came down from heaven; the latter is said to have been dug out of the earth.” He dismissed the notion that only certain witnesses could be allowed to see the plates which were subsequently “hid up unto the Lord” and found the Book of Mormon “full of absurdity, and too dull to charm the soul.”

Nancy Towle, an itinerant evangelical preacher from England, visited Kirtland, Ohio, in October 1831. A year later, in 1832, she published a little-known account of her visit to the headquarters of the Saints and the Prophet Joseph Smith. Unimpressed, she described the Prophet as “a good-natured, low-bred, sort of a chap” and looked upon the meetings of the Saints “with the utmost indignation and disgust,” though admitting, “I saw nothing indecorous; nor had I, any apprehension, of any thing of the kind.” She was puzzled, however, to find among them former “ministers of different persuasions: and some, it appeared, who had once been eminent for piety,” and she “viewed it strange, that so many men of skill should be thus duped.” When W. W. Phelps told her that she would not be saved unless she believed the Book of Mormon, she heatedly responded, “If I had the Book, Sir, I would burn it!” She then asked the Prophet Joseph if he would take an oath that the angel really appeared to him and showed him the plates, to which he replied, “I will not swear at all!” (see Matthew 5:33–37). Frustrated, she lashed out, “Are you not ashamed, of such pretensions? You, who are no more, than any ignorant plough-boy of our land! Oh! blush, at such abominations! And let shame, cover your face!” The Prophet, she reports, simply replied, “The gift, has returned back again, as in former times, to illiterate fishermen.”

Others found the Book of Mormon no less difficult to believe than the Bible. “After a pretty careful perusal of the Book of Mormon, or the Golden Bible, as it is usually termed,” wrote William Owen, “I am of the opinion that, setting aside the historical proofs of authenticity, the Golden Bible will bear a very good comparison with the Holy Bible. I find nothing in the former inconsistent with the doctrines or opposed to a belief in the latter; on the contrary, the one seems to corroborate the other; and I can discover no good reason why the generality of Christians should scoff, as I have generally found them to do.” The writer, a skeptic of all religious claims, suggested that believers were inconsistent in rejecting the claims of the Book of Mormon if they truly believed in the Bible. “Christians can hardly read the book of Mormon without remarking a striking similarity to their own scriptures, and
the believers in the Old and New Testaments cannot consistently deny the possibility of a single circumstance related to the Mormonite scriptures. . . . For my own part, I should consider satisfactory proofs of the genuineness of the Golden Bible as strong evidence of the divine origin of the Holy Bible, so consistent they are with, and corroborative of, each other.”

Liberal thinkers and atheists faulted Christians for inconsistency in rejecting the Book of Mormon simply because it required faith in the story of its recovery and belief in the testimony of witnesses, while accepting the Bible at face value. “Every part of the Bible,” claimed one proud critic in 1844, “both of the Old and New Testament, has originated in the same way as the Book of Mormon—that is, ‘been found,’ and then commended to the world.” He cited the story of the discovery of the book of the law during the reign of King Josiah and noted “that the writings of no prophet were received as divinely inspired, until after his death and the fulfilment of his prophecy proved him to be a true prophet.”

Hence even biblical writings, like those of the Latter-day Saints, require faith in the testimony of those who produced them. “We are no Mormon, God knows, or, at any rate, we know. We believe their religion is the same as that of all others, founded in delusion, deceit, and falsehood—in books that are found.” He predicted, however, that “the Mormons will ultimately become the predominant sect, and the Book of Mormon be incorporated in the Bible. . . . For every Mormon slain, ten will rise up to collect [Joseph Smith’s] ashes, embalm his memory, and propagate his faith.”

**Defending the Book of Mormon**

While the earliest publications relating to the Book of Mormon tended to be very negative, Latter-day Saints were quite capable of defending themselves, responding to criticisms, and correcting misrepresentation when necessary. Many of the earliest Latter-day Saint publications were written in response to critics. In 1834, when E. D. Howe published *Mormonism Unvailed*, the first anti-Mormon book, Latter-day Saint leaders responded indirectly by publishing an account of Joseph Smith’s early history. In 1840, Apostle John Taylor wrote a rebuttal to several anti-Mormon tracts written by

*Boston Investigator*, 17 January 1844.
Reverend Robert Heys and Thomas Livesey who had relied heavily on *Mormonism Unvailed*. In his rebuttal, Elder Taylor noted with some amusement:

One says that Joseph Smith junr. is the author and publisher of the Book of Mormon the other says that Solomon Spaulding is the author of it! One says that it was written by Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdry, from the mouth of Joseph Smith, junr., as he looked at a stone, with his face in a hat; the other, that it was written, and altered by Sidney Rigdon, from the “Manuscript Found”!! One makes it out that it was written in Harmony township, Susquehanah county, by Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery; the other, that it was written in Conneaut, Ohio, first by Solomon Spaulding, and afterwards altered by Sidney Rigdon, in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania!!! So much, then, for the agreement of the testimony which is brought forth as FACTS concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and yet these gentlemen are both of them good men; both of them accredited ministers of the Methodist connexion; and both of them have got what they call FACTS, diametrically opposed to each other as light is from darkness. But Mr. Heys has got good testimony to his account, so has Mr. Livesey; and I suppose that because both of the testimonies are good, they must both of them be true—although the one contradicts the other—especially as they were supported and held forth by such pious, holy men. I shall leave Messrs. Heys and Livesey, then, to settle this difficulty between themselves.37

Some early criticisms of the Book of Mormon merely show that critics had never read the book or given it serious consideration. When one critic was asked in 1837 why he rejected it, he explained that he “had read the book of Mormon enough to find . . . the terms, ‘gunpowder, mariner’s compass,’ and several others of recent origin, introduced into a silly story of the exploits of one ‘Nephi.’ . . . There are also references to pistols and other fire arms.”38 In an inexplicable comment, Alexander Campbell faulted the Book of Mormon for mentioning “steam-boats.”39 Referencing the account in 3 Nephi of the destruction at the time of Christ, another critic wondered how the earth could be carried up upon the city of Moronihah (3 Nephi 8:10). “Tell us what this city stood on; the Moon, or which of the planets?”40 More sober critics wondered how Nephi could have a sword of most precious steel41 or be justified in killing a drunken Laban,42 why Lehi might write in Egyptian rather than Hebrew,43 or why the Book of Mormon would attribute Yankee nicknames like Sam or Josh to ancient Israelites.44 Recent research on the Book of Mormon puts these questions in an entirely different light. The subsequent confirmation of such details once thought to be problematic suggests that the Book of Mormon was much more than a product of its environment and lends support to its claim to be a translation of an ancient record.
Just two years following the murder of Joseph Smith in 1844, the fiery Welsh missionary Dan Jones, in surveying reactions to the Book of Mormon since its first appearance, noted:

Wherever it goes in every country, the ears of the populace are filled to the brim with stories and tales as numerous and varied as their authors, which consequently contradict each other; many of them published and preached by those who have never seen the book; others by those who have dipped into it here and there, purposely to pick faults, and not infrequently one sees quotations from it greatly distorted and twisted. Some describe it as an invented tale; others say it is a new Bible, to supersede the old. Some condemn it for being the most worthless tissue of foolishness they ever saw; others say that it is the most skillful fraud possible. Some find fault with it because it is too similar to the Bible, that its testimony coincides with it, and is therefore unnecessary; but others assert that it is a fraud because it is not similar enough to the Bible. Some condemn the principles it contains because they are immoral, totally evil, and blasphemous; but others of their brothers proclaim to their faces that the principles teach morality, chastity, and holiness, as though it had been purposely composed to trick in that way. . . . Some of the great men of the age have proclaimed that its idiom, its language, and its contents prove its antiquity; and others of the same class, that it bears every mark of a recent forgery. Some cannot make out what use it could be, or how to prove its truth, unless there were some prophecies in it to be fulfilled, from which they could prove its divinity; others quote extensively from the prophecies that are about to be fulfilled, and they condemn it for being too clear: the old prophets did not do thus, they say.

15. “Martin Harris, the Mormon,” Rochester Daily Democrat, 23 June 1841.
21. Wayne Sentinel, 26 June 1829, emphasis in original.
22. “Gold Bible,” The Reflector, 13 January 1830, emphasis in original.
27. Missouri Republican, 9 August 1833, reprinted in Niles’ Weekly Register, 14 September 1833.
In his autobiography Elder Parley P. Pratt wrote in spring 1844: “Visiting North Bridge, a short distance from Boston, and having a day’s leisure, I wrote a dialogue entitled ‘Joe Smith and the Devil,’ which was afterwards published in the New York Herald.”¹ In this comical parody of popular sectarian criticism of the Latter-day Saints, the Devil acknowledges the absurdity of the Spalding theory but insists that it is the Prophet’s fault for publishing the Book of Mormon, thereby exposing sin and corruption and threatening all his evil plans. At length, the Devil claims to serve at least one useful purpose: “The fact is, you go in for the wheat, and I for the tares. Both must be harvested; are not we fellow laborers? I can make no use of the wheat, nor you of the tares, even if we had them; we each claim our own, I for the burning, and you for the barn. Come, then, give the poor old Devil his due.”²

and have even caused tens of thousands to come out in open rebellion, not only against witnesses of truth, but also against the declarations, well as
proved and attested, but against some of the most
moral, learned, exemplary, and honorable clergy, whom I know myself and all the world, live, heart and
estates, and this is not all. But you are causing many persons to think who never thought before, and you would thus put the whole world
thinking, and then what will true religion and purity be? Also, they will have no place among
men, for it can never keep such a terrible thinking and reasoning as they begin to do, since you com-
mand your business, as you call it, they never
will continue to sustain the good old way in which
they have yoke away and in peace for so many ages
and thus. Mr. Smith, you will overthrow your
country, and leave the flow of ground we want,
and thus in the very thing you want it. But I do,
not have the boldness to oppose you by every lawful
lawful means, as your Majesty permits. Nevertheless,
Mr. Devil, your Majesty has at
least become very good. I think some of your
Christian brothers have been grossly misrepresented,
it is generally reputed by them that you are op-
posed to religion. But
Devil—It is false; there is not a more religious
and pious being in the world than myself, in the
church, and I have never been
in the least part of my being, and I am merely in
service of all the gods, whether the name of another
without that hour I have not. It is true that
church has been, and that honorable doctors, who
cause not so much trouble in former times, and which
are a true standard of the Church, and true to
them, I mean the doctrinal as well as by revelation. That is it, it is im-
portant, it is directly opposite to all the divisions of the
Church of Jesus Christ.

Smith—Then your most Christian Majesty is
in favor of the Church of Jesus Christ, Mr. Devil?
Devil—Certainly, I am fond of praising the Church,
church building, being there, going in meetings,
consecration, receiving the sacrament in a
heavenly way, I have never been
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Church of Jesus Christ.
In 1992, when Stephen D. Ricks proposed a new academic journal focusing on the Book of Mormon, his goal was to encourage serious research of the Book of Mormon and to publish that research to the widest possible audience. Ricks, along with John W. Welch, Daniel C. Peterson, and others, had participated in publishing a newsletter, research updates, and important books, including John Sorenson’s seminal *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* and the first volumes of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, through the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) since 1978. The new journal, however, would be something different—in Ricks’s words, “a forum devoted to the serious and faithful study of the Book of Mormon in its historical, linguistic, cultural, and theological context.”

The first volume of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* delivered on the vision Ricks had for the new publication. Eleven scholars contributed articles on a wide range of topics—including geography, economics, customs, cultures, laws and legal systems, language studies, and an examination of the possible origins of the name Nephi. Subsequent issues of the *Journal* followed the same pattern: Faithful scholars from diverse disciplines used their expertise to contribute to the academic study of the Book of Mormon. During Ricks’s five-year tenure as editor, more than 140 articles were published in the *Journal*—a staggering amount of scholarship that redefined the landscape of the research on the Book of Mormon.

In 1997, John L. Sorenson replaced Ricks as the editor of the *Journal*. While Sorenson wanted to continue the tradition of excellent scholarship, he felt that the *Journal* had potential to reach a far wider audience. He proposed a change in the *Journal’s* format, from the traditional 6” x 9”, unillustrated format to a larger, illustrated format that would appeal to an expanded readership. In Sorenson’s words, “the plan was to seek competent Book of Mormon scholars willing to present first-rate scholarship in accessible language and in a visually attractive format.”

In addition to attracting a larger audience, Sorenson also desired a larger, more diverse pool of contributors. He worked tirelessly to encourage scholars from many parts of the world to write articles for the *Journal*. In his time as editor, more than fifty different scholars contributed articles; many of these scholars were located at places other than at BYU.

In 2002, after five years as editor, Sorenson passed the *Journal* on to S. Kent Brown, who had
served as associate editor under Sorenson. Brown built on the vision for the Journal begun by Ricks and expanded by Sorenson. As part of his efforts to broaden the range of the articles in the Journal, Brown invited a number of diverse scholars to serve as associate editors or on the editorial advisory board. Brown wrote, “In time, the Journal enjoyed the supporting commitment of an international group of historians and linguists and anthropologists and literary savants who served on one or the other board.”

During Brown’s tenure, the focus of the Journal expanded to include articles on early LDS Church history (especially regarding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon), translations of the Book of Mormon into other languages, and early missionary work, as well as a recurring feature that spotlighted individual conversion stories.

After six years as the editor, Brown retired, leaving the Journal as the premier publication of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, which had been organized in 2006 to include FARMS and other departments. Brown’s retirement and Andrew Hedges’s appointment as the new editor allowed the Maxwell Institute to reevaluate the mission and scope of the Journal. The topics covered in its pages had been diverse since the first issue, but over the years the focus on the Book of Mormon had expanded to include other topics related to LDS scripture and history. Hedges proposed a formal expansion of the Journal, with a name change, to include all restoration scripture—Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, as well as other material from Church history, such as the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible and material from the ongoing Joseph Smith Papers Project. The new journal, now titled the Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture, will continue the vision of all of the previous editors: To be “a venue where scholars from a variety of backgrounds can explore, discuss, and even debate important topics relating to the texts, contexts, and meaning of latter-day scripture.”

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

While each issue of the Journal has had significant articles that have furthered scholarship on the Book of Mormon, certain issues stand out as milestones in the Journal’s history.

**Issue 1/1 (1992).** The first issue of the Journal represents a landmark in publications on the Book of Mormon. Not only was it the beginning of a new wave of LDS scholarship, but it also contains some of the most significant articles published on the Book of Mormon, which stand up to scrutiny even eighteen years later.

**Issue 4/1 (1995).** In 1995, the editors of the Journal paid tribute to the late Sidney B. Sperry, who, along with Hugh Nibley and John Sorenson, pioneered the systematic study of the Book of Mormon. This issue contains tributes, memorials, a bibliography, and twenty-five of Sperry’s articles on the Book of Mormon.

**Issue 7/1 (1998).** When John Sorenson took over the editorship of the Journal, he initiated a change to a larger format, complete with extensive illustrations, including both photographs and fine artwork. Sorenson did not, however, abandon the academic rigor applied to earlier issues of the Journal. This first issue in the new format introduces a discussion on Lehi’s trail and the location of Nephi’s Bountiful that has continued in the pages of the Journal for the past decade.

**Issue 9/2 (2000).** In a short article near the back of JBMS 9/2, John Sorenson addresses the difficulty of using DNA to establish any sort of link between modern native Americans and the peoples of the Book of Mormon—years before the use of DNA became a controversial issue to opponents of the Book of Mormon. Sorenson’s work was later expanded and supported by geneticists and DNA scientists in JBMS 12/1.

**Issue 13/1–2 (2004).** One of several themed issues produced during Kent Brown’s editorship, JBMS 13/1–2 focuses on the Hill Cumorah, including articles on its location, history, traditions, and the Hill Cumorah Pageant.

**Issue 15/2 (2006).** In another themed issue, Kent Brown presents the views of various scholars on Lehi’s trail from Jerusalem to the land Bountiful, where they launched the ship that would take them to the promised land.

**Issue 17/1–2 (2008).** Under its new editor, Andrew Hedges, the Journal once again undergoes a transformation—in title, scope, and design. This new beginning for the Journal represents an expansion of the original vision set forth by Stephen Ricks.
Editors’ Perspective

Stephen D. Ricks

The Journal of Book of Mormon Studies originated in discussions among John W. Welch, Daniel C. Peterson, and myself in 1992. We decided to found the Journal as a forum devoted to the serious and faithful study of the Book of Mormon in its historical, linguistic, cultural, and theological context. It took next to no time coming up with the title of the journal, Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, and it has, I am happy to say, stuck through many years.

We brought our proposal to the board of directors of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, who approved it, along with our board of editors, which included Kay P. Edwards, Robert L. Millet, Donald W. Parry, and David R. Seely (we later added Brian Hauglid and Gaye Strathearn).

Intending to be “no respecter of persons” in our selection of papers to be included in forthcoming issues, we did not insist that those publishing in the Journal have certain academic credentials. We did, however, ask that the work be rigorous, carefully thought out, and well presented. At first we advertised for submissions—even soliciting some papers—but since the significance of a journal devoted to this particular subject caught on, it has taken on a life of its own.

While I enjoyed all of the articles published during my tenure as editor, I am most pleased that the Journal became a forum for investigations of proper names and their origins in the Book of Mormon (a topic I hope to turn into a book-length study). Through the years, the Journal has continued the vision we first presented to the FARMS Board in 1992. I hope to see that work continue for many more years to come.

John L. Sorenson

When Stephen Ricks and others launched the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies in the fall of 1992, I enthusiastically supported the idea and the effort by contributing a significant piece (“When Lehi’s Party Arrived, Did They Find Others in the Land?”) that appeared as the first article in volume 1, number 1.

I was still an enthusiast upon learning in 1997 that a follow-on editor was being sought. Feeling that the publication had not yet reached its potential, I presented a proposal to the officers of FARMS to serve as the new editor, under certain conditions. First, I would require the aid of two mature associate editors, S. Kent Brown and M. Gerald Bradford.
The second condition was that the format of the *Journal* be substantially changed in order to attract an expanded readership. Taking *Scientific American* as a general model, the plan was to seek competent Book of Mormon scholars willing to present first-rate scholarship in accessible language and in a visually attractive format.

Acceptance of the proposal implied that substantially more FARMS resources would be directed toward preparing the *Journal*. In fact it became the flagship publication of the Foundation that would go to all member/subscribers twice per year.

Secondary concerns at that stage were to invite a widened range of writers to contribute and to assist them to prepare their articles at an appropriate level of clarity and rigor. The visual quality of the *Journal* depended on the talent of excellent designers, particularly Bjorn Pendleton. In some cases specific works of art began to be commissioned for use in the *Journal*.

An additional goal was to increase the variety of contributors. In three and one-half years the work of 35 different authors was published, half of them located at places other than BYU.

Those who have invested effort in the *Journal* can look forward to progress in future publishing of not only articles on the Book of Mormon, but also now on a wider range of scholarship on the other restoration scriptures.

**S. Kent Brown**

How do I characterize my editorial years with the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*? I was introduced to this world through John L. Sorenson, who succeeded the first editor, Stephen D. Ricks. Dr. Sorenson graciously invited me to be one of his associate editors in 1997. I was thrilled to be able to work with someone of Dr. Sorenson’s abilities and interests. When he stepped aside after five years, I accepted the invitation from FARMS to succeed him. I felt that I could do no better than to hold the *Journal* in the channel that he had carved.

My interests largely mirrored those of my two predecessors—to broaden the range of topics covered by the *Journal* (that is, to explore both the ancient dimensions of the text and the modern story of the Book of Mormon) and to stretch the pool of contributors. In this light, my first task was to invite not only a diverse group to serve on the board of associate editors, but also an equally diverse group to act as an editorial advisory board. In time, the *Journal* enjoyed the supporting commitment of an international group of historians and linguists and anthropologists and literary savants.
who served on one or the other board. For me, it was a very satisfying moment when the last person on my list said yes.

In retrospect, what would I judge to be the most significant issue of the Journal? Perhaps I could measure by the fact that we completely ran out of one issue, the one that dealt in large measure with the question of DNA and Native American origins (JBMS 12/1). I do not take credit for inaugurating the issue of the Journal that dealt with this question. The suggestion came from John Sorenson, who correctly anticipated that the question of DNA and its ability, or inability, to solve questions that tie to Book of Mormon origins would become important.

Naturally, the whole effort to put together issues of the Journal was filled with little disappointments and joyful triumphs. With this said, the biggest payoff for me was the deepened relationships with people who made efforts to submit studies or contributed their time to the editorial process by reviewing studies in the early stages. I am forever in their debt.

Andrew Hedges

The Journal of Book of Mormon Studies was first published in 1992, under the editorial direction of Stephen D. Ricks. Seven years later John L. Sorenson, as the Journal’s new editor, changed its format to make the contents more accessible to specialist and nonspecialist readers alike. Under the direction of Sorenson’s successor, S. Kent Brown, the Journal has continued to feature first-rate scholarship on the Book of Mormon, often accompanied by beautiful visual aids and images. Thanks to these scholars’ vision and editorial skills, thousands of people now enjoy the Journal either as subscribers or through the Internet, where they are able to stay abreast of the best that scholarship has to offer on the Book of Mormon.

Partly as a result of the Journal’s success, and partly in answer to the apparent need for a scholarly, faithful venue in which other latter-day scriptures can regularly be discussed, with volume 17, the Journal’s scope was expanded to include all of what might be termed “Restoration Scripture”—those books of Latter-day Saint scripture and related texts that were revealed through the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith. These include the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. With the expansion in scope came a name change, to the Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture—“the Book of Mormon” being retained in the title not only to help provide a sense of continuity with the former title but also
in recognition of that book’s continuing role as the keystone of the Mormon faith.

Our hope is that the expanded *Journal* will be a venue where scholars from a variety of backgrounds can explore, discuss, and even debate important topics relating to the texts, contexts, and meaning of latter-day scripture. We believe that part of this includes reexamining and unpacking familiar assumptions and arguments—even those that have found their best expression in past issues of the *Journal* and related publications. We believe, too, that there are many topics yet to be explored in both the Book of Mormon and other restoration scriptures and hope contributors and readers alike will consider the *Journal* a fitting venue for introducing new subjects and directions for study.

**Paul Y. Hoskisson**

On assuming my new duties as editor of the *Journal*, a few words of thanks on my part would be appropriate.

Thanks and honor go to Stephen Ricks for getting the *Journal* off the ground. He oversaw the fledgling years, helped it grow from one issue a year to two, and set the original bar high. Without Stephen’s early efforts, neither the quality nor the quantity that we have come to expect from the *Journal* would have been set in place for those that followed.

John Sorenson, after many years as professor of anthropology at BYU, became the next editor. John moved the *Journal* in a slightly different direction. He enlarged the format and added numerous illustrations in a successful attempt to attract an even wider audience.

To S. Kent Brown, friend, colleague, and gentleman, I owe much, and not just as past editor. He has been a mentor to me since I first came to BYU in 1981. Kent has always held the bar high for himself and others. During his tenure as editor the *Journal* printed a wider range of excellent articles than heretofore, thus setting the stage for the expansion that came with the next editor.

To my predecessor, friend, former student, and now colleague, Andrew H. Hedges, goes the credit for expanding the *Journal* to formally include more than just Book of Mormon studies. Having a PhD in American history and an MA in ancient Near Eastern Studies made him the ideal person to expand the scope and territory the *Journal* would cover. Short though his tenure has been, he has had a profound influence on the future direction of the *Journal*.

It is an honor to be associated with these capable and distinguished editors.
Revealing The Joseph Smith Papers


MATTHEW J. GROW
This significant volume of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, the second to be published, reproduces in photographic and textual format two manuscript revelation books that scribes used between 1831 and 1835 to record Smith’s revelations. Known as the “Book of Commandments and Revelations” and the “Book of Revelations” (often referred to as the Kirtland Revelation Book), these books served as the basis for the first publications of the revelations, the Book of Commandments (1833) and the Doctrine and Covenants (1835). The publication of the “Book of Commandments and Revelations,” which has been stored among the papers of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is particularly exciting, as it makes broadly accessible for the first time one of the crucial documents of early Mormonism. While most of the Joseph Smith Papers volumes will contain only transcriptions, the current volume, because of the centrality of Smith’s revelations to Mormonism’s development, contains photographs of each manuscript page facing its transcription. Revisions to the revelations are color-coded in the transcription to distinguish those made by Smith from those made by one of several associates. Scrupulous in its adherence to the scholarly standards of documentary editing, this admirable volume gives unique insight into the revelatory culture of early Mormonism.
The volume editors bring considerable skill and experience to their task. Robin Jensen is an expert in documentary editing and transcription analysis with the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Steven Harper is an associate professor of LDS Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University who specializes in early Mormon and American religious history. Robert Woodford’s massive dissertation, “Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants” (BYU, 1974), is still the most comprehensive work on this subject. They dedicate their volume to the recently deceased Larry H. Miller, who, along with his wife, Gail, has been the primary benefactor of the Joseph Smith Papers.

The careful scholarship of the first two volumes of the Joseph Smith Papers Project places it in the upper tier of major documentary editing projects, in company with the papers projects of the American Founding Fathers, for instance. The project, sponsored by the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has earned the endorsement of the National Archives and Records Administration’s National Historical Publications and Records Commission, indicating that it meets the rigorous conventions of the scholarly field of documentary editing. The Joseph Smith Papers will eventually consist of roughly thirty volumes arranged in six series: Administrative Records, Documents, History, Journals, Legal and Business Records, and Revelations and Translations. This book is the first in the Revelations and Translations series, which will also reproduce the 1830 Book of Mormon, the Book of Commandments, and the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants.

The various series of the Joseph Smith Papers overlap with each other. Thus, Smith’s revelations will appear in both the Revelations and Translations series and in the Documents series (with some also in the Journals and History series). In the Revelations and Translations series, they will be published as collections of revelations (either the manuscript books or the published scriptures). By contrast, the Documents series will interweave the “earliest and best extant version of each revelation” with other items such as Smith’s letters. Only the Documents series will contain contextual footnotes and historical introductions to the individual revelations. In this volume, the editors restrict their annotation to physical descriptions of the document (for instance, “There

is a series of pin-holes at this point in the manuscript,” p. 145), alternate readings of the original text (“Possibly ‘Labou{rs,rer),” p. 31), and notes about when textual changes first appeared in print. Readers should not expect historical context or interpretations. The Documents series will also feature “a detailed chronology, maps, a biographical directory, and an index.” For these reasons, the editors advise that “users of the present volume should consult the Documents series for information about the setting and significance of individual revelations” (p. xxvi). Unfortunately, readers will have to await the publication of these future volumes to be able to use Manuscript Revelation Books to its full extent.

This book contains both an introduction to the Revelations and Translations series and a volume introduction, both of which emphasize the centrality of Smith’s revelations to the early Saints. The volume introduction asserts that while other contemporary Americans recorded visions, Smith’s “revelations were a class apart.” Other visionaries “wrote in terms that were comparatively more modest, even ambiguous,” but Smith “produced distinctive revelatory documents that explore, in the words of one historian, ‘realms of doctrine unimagined
in traditional Christian theology” (p. xxx). The editors could have framed a more convincing comparison by placing Smith in context with earlier and later prophetic figures who spoke more boldly than Smith’s antebellum American contemporaries.

Manuscript Revelation Books

Revelation Book 1

The manuscript revelation books are particularly important since Smith’s revelations comprise much of the surviving documentary basis for Mormonism’s earliest years, especially from 1828 to 1831, and since they cover the period when Smith received most of his revelations. Smith’s efforts to preserve his revelations predated his other forms of record keeping. John Whitmer likely began copying revelations in the “Book of Commandments and Revelations” (designated by the editors as Revelation Book 1) about March 1831, after his appointment as Church historian. Revelation Book 1 contains revelations dating from 1828 to 1834, including “the earliest known copies of many revelations and, in some cases, the only surviving early manuscript copy” (p. 5).

In November 1831, desiring to make Smith’s revelations available to the expanding Church membership, a Church conference in Hiram, Ohio, authorized the publication of a book of revelations and excitedly voted to publish an impressive 10,000 copies. Oliver Cowdery and Whitmer then took Revelation Book 1 to Independence, Missouri, where William W. Phelps, earlier appointed as Church printer, had established a press. Though distant from Church headquarters in Kirtland, Whitmer continued to copy revelations as he received them “delivered by mail or in person” (p. 5). In 1832, Phelps founded the first Church newspaper, The Evening and the Morning Star, in which he published twenty-four revelations, all but one drawn from this manuscript book.

Revelation Book 1 also served as the basis for the Book of Commandments, which Phelps prepared for publication in Missouri in 1833 (with a more modest, planned publication run of 3,000). However, a mob destroyed Phelps’s office and home in July 1833, leaving only “a few dozen incomplete copies of the Book of Commandments” (p. xxix). This transferred the center of Church publishing to Kirtland, where Whitmer returned in April 1835, likely bringing with him Revelation Book 1, which was then used as a “supplemental source for the publication” of the Doctrine and Covenants (p. 6).
A Book of Commandments & Revelations

1st. 1 [recto]/ 2A Book of Commandments & Revelations of the Lord given to Joseph the Seer & others by the Inspiration of God & gift & power of the Holy Ghost which beareth record of the Father & Son & Holy Ghost which is one God infinite & eternal world without end Amen

3July one thousand Eight hundred & twenty eight

Given to Joseph the Seer after he had lost certain writings which he had translated by the gift & power of God

The saying the words & designs & the purposes of God cannot be frustrated neither can they come to naught for God doth not walk in crooked paths neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left neither doth vary from that which he hath said therefore his paths are strait & his course is one eternal round Remember remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated but the works of men for although a man may have many revelations & have power to do many mighty works yet if he boasts in his own strength & setteth at naught the councils of God & follows after the dictates of his will & carnal desires he must fall to the earth & incur the vengeance of a just God upon him behold you have been intrusted with those things but strict was your commandments & Remember did not also the promises which were made to you if you transgressed them & behold how oft you have transgressed them & the laws of God & have gone on in the persuasions of men for behold you should not have feared man more then God although men set at naught the councils of God & despise his words yet you should have been faithful & he would have extended his arm & supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary & he would have been with you in every time of trouble behold thou art Joseph & thou wast chosen to do if thou art not the work of the Lord but because of transgression thou mayest be aware thou wilt fall but remember God is merciful therefore repent of that which thou hast done & be with more sincere & holy thoughts & thou shalt conquer all the many doubts of the adversary & he would have been with you in every time of trouble what does not seek a thing must change the word of the law but because of transgression thou art incensed thou wilt fall but by repentance & sincere thoughts & prayer & fasting & by the operation of the holy ghost thou mayest be restored & shall & thou wilt be called to the work & except.
1st. 1 [recto]

/ A Book of Commandments & Revelations

of the Lord given to Joseph the Seer & others by the
Inspiration of God & gift & power of the Holy Ghost which
Beareth Re[c]ord of the Father & Son & Holy Ghost which is
one God Infinite & eternal World without end Amen

♦ 

July one Thousand Eight hundred & Twenty Eight
Given to Joseph the Seer after he had lost cer[tan writ

sayings which he had Translated by the gift & Power of God

Saying the works & designs & the Purposes of God cannot
be frustrated neither can they come to nothing for God
doeth not walk in crooked Paths neither doeth he turn to
the right hand nor to the left neither doth vary from
that which he hath said therefore his paths are strait & his
course is one eternal round Remember Remember that it
is not the work of God that is frustrated but the works of
men for although a man may have many Revelations &
have power to do many Mighty works yet if he boast in
his own strength & Sets at naught the councils of God &
follows after the dictates of his will & carnal desires he
must fall to the Earth & incur the vengence of a Just God
upon him behold you have been intrusted with those


things but strict were your commandments & Remember
also the Promises which were made to you if you transgres-
sed them & behold how oft you have transgressed the


Laws of God & have gone on in the Persuasions of men for
behold you should not have feared man more then God alth-
ough men set at naught the councils of God & dispise his
words yet you should have been faithful & he would have
extended his arm & supported you against all the firey darts
of the advisary & he would have been with you in every time
of trouble behold thou art Joseph & thou wast chosen to do
the work of the Lord but because of transgression thou


fall but remember God is merciful therefore repent of
that which thou hast done & he will only cause thee
to be afflicted for a season & thou art still chosen &
will & will again be called to the work & e[s]cept
The Vision

A vision of Joseph & Sidney February 16th, 1832
given in Portage County Ohio in the township
of Union

A vision of the first times and concerning the enemy
and concerning the creation throughout all eternity
Here are heavens, in earth and world and in
the inhabitants thereof, through the land he is God
and besides him there is no other for great is
his wisdom, marvelous are his ways and the
extent of his doings none can find out his
purposes fail not neither are there any who can
stay his hands from eternity to eternity.

For thus saith the Lord, the same and his years never fail.
I the Lord those am merciful and gracious unto them who fear
those am and delight to honor them who serve me
unto the end in righteousness and in truth great shall be
their reward and Eternal shall be their glory and unto
them will I reveal all mysteries yea all the hidden
mysteries of my Kingdom from days of old and for
go to come will I make known unto them. The good
pleasure of my will concerning all things shall be
even the wonders of eternity shall they know and things
to come will I shew them even the things of many
generations there wisdom shall be great and there
understanding shall reach to heaven and before them
the wisdom of the wise shall perish and their
understanding of the understanding shall come to nothing
for by my Spirit will I enlighten them and make
them wise. And the understanding of those who
were blind and who saw not shall be open
unto the heart of man.
Sec. 76

16 February 1832 [D&C 76:1]

REVELATION BOOK 2

1. This identification matches others in Revelation Book 2 and is a mid-twentieth-century redaction; it also matches notations found on other manuscripts in the Revelations Collection, CHL.

2. The style and ink flow of the page numbers change frequently throughout the manuscript book, suggesting that Frederick G. Williams numbered most pages as he copied items into the book. The transcript identifies (by color) the handwriting of all page numbers, whether they were written at the time of original inscription or inserted later.

3. The first publication reflecting most redactions in this item is the February 1835 issue of Evening and Morning Star, which was an edited reprint of the July 1832 issue of The Evening and the Morning Star.

4. Possibly “hands” (without a comma).

A vision of Joseph & Sidney [Rigdon] February 16th, 1832 given in Portage County Hiram Township state of Ohio in North America which they saw concerning the church of the first born and concerning the economy of God and his vast creation throughout all eternity. Here O ye heavens & give ear [ear] O earth and rejoice ye inhabitants thereof for the Lord he is God and beside him there is none else for great is his wisdom, marvellous are his ways and the extent of his doings none can find out his purposes fail not neither are there any who can stay his hand, from eternity to eternity, he is the same and his years never fail[.] I the Lord am merciful and gracious unto them who fear me and delight to honor them in righteousness and in truth great shall be their reward and Eternal Shall be their glory and unto them will I reveal all misteries yea all the hidden misteries of my Kingdom from days of old and for ages to come will I make Known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my Kingdom even the wonders of eternity shall they know and things to come yea even the things of many generations there wisdom shall be great and there understanding reach to heaven and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught for by my spirit will I enlighten them and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will yea even those things which eye has not seen nor ear heard nor yet entered into the heart of man.

Joseph Smith Jr. Rigdon
We Joseph & Sidney being in the spirit on the
In all, Revelation Book 1 contains 64 of the 65 items in the Book of Commandments and 95 of the 103 sections of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. (It also includes eleven items that do not appear in either book.) Whitmer’s brief historical introductions provide dates and other details for many of the early revelations. He recorded, for instance, that the revelation given the day of the Church’s organization on 6 April 1830 (D&C 21) was received in Fayette, New York. The Book of Commandments, however, identified Manchester, New York, as the site of the revelation, helping fuel later confusion and controversy over the location of the Church’s organization. The manuscript version clearly supports the traditional notion that Smith and his associates convened in Fayette to organize the Church of Christ.1

Carried by the Saints to Utah during the trek west, Revelation Book 1 was housed in the Church Historian’s Office. At some point, it became part of the papers of Joseph Fielding Smith, Church historian from 1921 to 1970. When he became Church president in 1970, Revelation Book 1 became “part of the First Presidency’s papers” (p. 4). As such, it has been inaccessible to scholars and, therefore, its publication marks a milestone in the textual study of Joseph Smith’s revelations.

Revelation Book 2

Because Whitmer and Cowdery took the first revelation book to Missouri, a second book was purchased in Ohio to continue recording revelations. This was known as the Kirtland Revelation Book and was designated by the editors as Revelation Book 2. Significantly shorter than Revelation Book 1, it contains about fifty revelations, many of which also appear in the first book, copied between early 1832 and late 1834. Frederick G. Williams served as the primary scribe, though Orson Hyde, Cowdery, and Smith also recorded some of the revelations.

In September 1834, a high council appointed Smith, Cowdery, Rigdon, and Williams to prepare the revelations for publication. Before the return of Revelation Book 1 to Kirtland, the committee used Revelation Book 2, along with the Book of Commandments and The Evening and the Morning Star, to prepare the Doctrine and Covenants. The 1835 Doctrine and Covenants published all but eight revelations copied in Revelation Book 2, and an additional two were included in the 1844 edition. Following the publication of the Doctrine and Covenants, Revelation Books 1 and 2 were no longer used to record revelations; additional revelations were written in various locations, such as Smith’s journals. Images of Revelation Book 2 were first made widely available as part of Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (a DVD set produced in 2002).2

Editing the Revelations

The manuscript revelation books clearly indicate that Smith and other Latter-day Saints viewed revision of the revelations’ text as a natural and necessary part of the publication process. During the November 1831 conference that authorized the publication of the revelations, Smith received a revelation designed to serve as preface to the proposed volume (D&C 1), which acknowledged that the revelations “were given unto my Servents in their weakness after the manner of their Language” (p. xxvii). The conference charged Smith to “correct those errors or mistakes which he may discover
by the holy Spirit” (p. xxix). The participants also discussed “Smith’s imperfect language” (p. xxvii), resulting in another revelation (D&C 67), which challenged the “wisest man present to produce a text on par with the ‘least’ of the manuscript revelations” (p. xxviii). William McLellin’s failed attempt to replicate a revelation inspired further confidence in Smith’s revelations.

The editors explain, “Joseph Smith and his followers considered his revelations to be true in the sense that they communicated the mind and will of God, not infallible in an idealized sense of literary flawlessness.” Thus Smith and a handful of associates—including Cowdery, Rigdon, Whitmer, and Phelps—edited the revelations, believing “that although Smith represented the voice of God descending to speak to him, he was limited by a ‘crooked broken scattered and imperfect language’” (p. xxix). Rigdon, for instance, replaced biblical language with more modern words (substituting you, your, and yours for thee, thy, and thine). Whitmer reversed many of Rigdon’s changes, as well as making some modifications of his own. Cowdery altered the revelations less frequently, but his changes “were often more substantive in nature, clarifying and expanding the meaning of several items” (pp. 6–7). For instance, a revelation received on 2 January 1831 stated, “Ye are blessed not because of your iniquity, neither your hearts of unbelief, for verily some of you are guilty before me” (D&C 38:14). At this point, Cowdery inserted a clause, “but I will be merciful unto your weakness” (p. 71). In other revelations, Cowdery indicated that divine promises were conditional on the recipient’s faithfulness (p. 133). Phelps generally provided copyediting, such as adding punctuation and versification. Smith also clarified passages and “likely reviewed some of his associates’ editorial changes,” although the extent of his supervision is unknown (p. 7).

Uncanonized Revelations

The manuscript revelation books also contain revelations that were never canonized. While some are fairly mundane, others give fascinating glimpses into the world of early Mormonism. For instance, this volume publishes for the first time a revelation that Smith received in early 1830 directing Cowdery, Hiram Page, Josiah Stowell, and Joseph Knight to travel to Kingston, Ontario, and sell the Canadian copyright to the Book of Mormon. In 1848, Hiram Page wrote to William E. McLellin that Smith had “herd [heard] that there was a chance to sell a copyright in Canada for any useful book that was used in the states.” Hoping to “get a handsome[er] sum of money” for his family, Smith sent the four men to Canada, but they failed to find a purchaser. Decades later, David Whitmer claimed that when the disappointed group returned, Smith “enquired of the Lord” and received a revelation through his seer stone that explained, “Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and

“The editing and updating of revelation texts in the early years of the Church demonstrate the process of continuing revelation to Joseph Smith. The revelation manuscripts reveal how men grappled in trying to make certain that the ideas and doctrines Joseph received were transcribed and printed accurately—a process that for the publication of any work risks the introduction of error. In some instances, when a new revelation changed or updated what had previously been received, the Prophet edited the earlier written revelation to reflect the new understanding. Thus, as his doctrinal knowledge clarified and expanded, so did the recorded revelations. They were characterized by the changing nature of his understanding of the sacred subject matter. The Prophet did not believe that revelations, once recorded, could not be changed by further revelation.” (Marlin K. Jensen, “The Joseph Smith Papers: The Manuscript Revelation Books,” Ensign, July 2009, 51).

Therefore, as part of the expanded coverage the Journal has taken on, we present this review of the first volume of the Revelations and Translations series of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, a project which Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Seventy, Church Historian and Recorder, has called “the single most significant historical project of our generation.”
some revelations are of the devil.” Critics of Joseph Smith have described the Canada venture as evidence of Smith’s greed and manipulation.

In keeping with their approach, the editors do not provide historical commentary on this revelation. In a recent Ensign article, LDS Church Historian Marlin K. Jensen argues that “calling the divine communication a ‘failed revelation’ is not warranted,” as it “clearly conditions the successful sale of the copyright on the worthiness of those seeking to make the sale as well as on the spiritual receptivity of the potential purchasers.” The revelation states that the sellers “shall do my work . . . with an eye single to my Glory that it may be the means of bringing souls unto Salvation” and that they will have success “if the People harden not their hearts against the enticing of my spirit” (p. 33).

Another heretofore unpublished item in Revelation Book 1 is “A Sample of pure Language given by Joseph the Seer.” This revelation, which consists of a series of prophetic questions and divine answers and which was referred to by Orson Pratt in an 1855 sermon, identifies the “name of God in pure Language” as “Awman,” the “being which made all things in all its parts.” Christ is called the “Son Awman” and “the greatest of all the parts of Awman,” while members of “the human family” are “the greatest parts of Awman Sons” (p. 265). While ambiguous in its meaning, the revelation hints at the radical break that Mormonism would make, as more fully articulated in Smith’s King Follett sermon, with traditional Protestant conceptions of God and man (“the greatest parts of Awman Sons”). It potentially represents in embryo the collapse of the ontological distinction between God and man that would result in Parley P. Pratt’s succinct declaration that “God, angels and men, are all of one species.”

Finally, the volume includes a document that was sung “by the gift of Tongues & Translated,” likely by Frederick G. Williams. The song’s text envisions “Enoch of Old at a time when he stood upon the mount which was called the mountain of God” and records his song as “he gazed on eternity and sang an Angelic song and mingled his voice with the heavenly throng” (p. 509). Describing Enoch’s vision of man’s history from the time of Adam to the last days, the song declares that the Saints will ultimately “gaze upon Jesus . . . stand at his feet behold they are weeping they strike hands with Enoch of Old they inherit a city as it is written the City of God, Loud sound the trump, they receive a celestial crown hozana hozana the heaven of heavens” (p. 511). The song not only indicates the acceptance of glossalalia (speaking tongues) among the early Saints, but also gives insight into their views of Enoch and their millennial hopes.

Conclusion

Besides the reproductions of the manuscript books, the editors insert many useful items, including a chronology; biographical sketches of the seven scribes who contributed to the revelation books;
Pages & Josiah Stowel shall do my work in this thing yea Copy
even in securing the right & they shall do it with an eye single
to my Glory that it may be the means of bringing souls
unto me Salvation through mine only Be[gotten] Behold I am
God I have spoken it & it is expedient in me Wherefor I say
unto you that ye shall go to Kingston seeking me continually
through mine only Be[gotten] & if ye do this ye shall have my
spirit to go with you & ye shall have an addition of all things
which is expedient in me. & I grant unto my servent a privelige
that he may sell through you speaking after the manner of
men for the four Provinces if the People harden not their hearts
against the enticing of my spirit & my word for Behold it

and a correspondence of items in Revelations Books
1 and 2 with The Evening and the Morning Star,
1833 Book of Commandments, and the Doctrine
and Covenants of 1835, 1844, 1891 (Church of Jesus
Christ of Latter-day Saints), and 2004 (Community
of Christ). Unfortunately, the volume has no gen-
eral index, with the explanation that an index of
the revelations’ contents will be in the Documents
series. For the moment—and for those who will use
this volume independently of that series—this deci-
dion decreases the volume’s usefulness; in the words
of the Joseph Smith Papers Project’s Web site, “a
detailed index . . . is an essential tool for using these
reference volumes.”

The photographic reproductions make this vol-
ume both massive and expensive at $100. In some
ways—the photographs, the color-coded revisions,
the assiduous attention to every pin-prick—this is
documentary editing on steroids. In contrast to the
first volume of the Joseph Smith Papers (Smith’s
1832–39 journals), which was priced at $50 and
has sold extremely well, this volume will test the
commercial popularity of the project. For schol-
ars and serious students of Joseph Smith and the
revelatory culture of early Mormonism, this will
be an indispensable resource. For Latter-day Saints
interested in reading the revelations as they were
originally recorded, this is an excellent volume.
Those who want the revelations placed in historical
context with explanatory footnotes, however, should
wait for the Documents series. If I had to choose
between purchasing this volume and two volumes
of the Documents series (presumably priced, like
Journals 1, around $50), I would opt for the latter.
Nevertheless, Jensen, Woodford, Harper, and the
team of the Joseph Smith Papers Project have pro-
duced the necessary starting point for any future
scholarship on the textual history of Joseph Smith’s
revelations, which have long needed the methodi-
cal attention that this volume both exemplifies and
makes possible for future researchers. ■

Notes
1. Paul H. Peterson, in his review of Inventing Mormonism: Tradi-
tion and the Historical Record, by H. Michael Marquardt
the evidence for both locations. See also Steven Harper’s comments
in R. Scott Lloyd, “‘Major Discovery’ Discussed at Mormon His-
2. Richard E. Turley Jr., ed., Selected Collections from the Archives
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Provo, UT:
BYU Studies, 2002). H. Michael Marquardt published many of
the revelations from the Kirtland Revelation Book in The Joseph
Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary (Salt Lake City: Signa-
ture Books, 1999).
3. When quoting from the text of the revelations, for clarity pur-
poses I will silently delete the “barbed wire” of documentary
editing notations.
4. Hiram Page to William McLellin, 2 February 1848, Community
of Christ Archives, in H. Michael Marquardt, The Rise of Mor-
5. David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ, 31, empha-
sis in original, in Marquardt, Rise of Mormonism, 155–56.
of Discourses, 2:342 (18 February 1855).
8. Parley P. Pratt, Key to the Science of Theology (Liverpool: Rich-
ards, 1855), 33.
9. Frederick G. Williams (a namesake descendant) makes the case
for Williams’s authorship in “Singing the Word of God: Five
Hymns by President Frederick G. Williams,” BYU Studies 48/1
A B S T R A C T: The historicity of the Book of Mormon record is crucial. We cannot exercise faith in that which is untrue. Too often the undergirding assumption of those who cast doubt on the historicity of the Book of Mormon, in whole or in part, is a denial of the supernatural and a refusal to admit of revelation and predictive prophecy. Great literature, even religious literature, cannot engage the human soul and transform the human personality like scripture. Only scripture—writings and events and descriptions from real people at a real point in time, people who were moved upon and directed by divine powers—can serve as a revelatory channel, enabling us to hear and feel the word of God.

My memories of the first class I took in a doctoral program in religious studies at an eastern university are still very much intact. It was a course entitled “Seminar in Biblical Studies” and dealt with scripture, canon, interpretation, authorship, eschatology, prophecy, and like subjects. We were but weeks into the seminar when the professor was confronted by a question from a conservative Baptist student on the reality of miracles among Moses and the children of Israel. The response was polite but brief: “Well,” the professor said, “I’m not going to state my own position on the matter in this class. Let me just say that I feel it doesn’t really matter whether the Israelites crossed the Red Sea as a result of Moses parting that body of water in a miraculous way, or whether they actually tiptoed across the waters of the Red Sea. What matters is that the Israelites then and thereafter saw it as an act of divine intervention, and the event became a foundation for a people’s faith for centuries.”

About a year later I found myself in a similar setting, this time in a seminar entitled “Critical Studies of the New Testament,” the first half of a two-semester encounter with biblical criticism. The composition of the class made for fascinating conversation: a Reformed Jew, two Methodists, two Southern Baptists, a Roman Catholic, a Nazarene, and a Latter-day Saint. By the time we had begun studying
the passion narratives in the Gospels, the question of “historical events” vs. “faith events” had been raised. The professor stressed the importance of “myth” and emphasized that such events as the miracles and bodily resurrection of Jesus—because in them the narrative detaches itself from the ordinary limitations of time and space such that the supernatural “irrupts” into human history—should be relegated to the category of faith events or sacred story. And then came the interesting phrase: “Now whether Jesus of Nazareth came back to life—literally rose from the dead—is immaterial. What matters is that Christians thought he did. And the whole Christian movement is founded upon this faith event.”

Perhaps one can appreciate how I felt when I read an article written by a prominent member of the Church a few years later in which he suggested that we Latter-day Saints tend to concern ourselves with all the wrong things. “Whether or not Joseph Smith actually saw God and Christ in a grove of trees is not really crucial,” he said in essence. “What matters is that young Joseph thought he did.” There was a haunting familiarity about the words and the sentiments. Certain others have described the First Vision as mythical, a vital and significant movement in Mormonism’s past upon which so many things turn, and yet a “faith event,” which may or may not represent an actual historical occurrence. More recently, it seems fashionable by some to doubt and debate the historicity of the Book of Mormon; to question the reality of Book of Mormon personalities or places; or to identify “anachronisms” in the book, specifically doctrines or principles that they feel reflect more of Joseph Smith and the nineteenth century than antiquity. Others go so far as to deny outright the reality of plates, angels, or authentic witnesses. These are interesting times indeed.

Though not a secular history of the Nephites per se, the Book of Mormon is a sacred chronicle or, to use Elder Boyd K. Packer’s language, “the saga of a message.” The book claims to be historical. Joseph Smith said it was a history. He even went so far as to suggest that one of the major characters of the story, Moroni, appeared to him and delivered golden plates upon which the Nephite narrative was etched. Now in regard to the historicity of the book, it seems to me that only three possibilities exist: Joseph Smith told the truth, did not know the truth, or told a lie. The latter two alternatives are obviously not very appealing to believers. If Joseph Smith merely thought there were Nephites and supposed that such persons as Nephi and Jacob and Mormon and Moroni wrote things which they did not, then he was deluded or remarkably imaginative. He is to be pitied, not revered. If, on the other hand, the Prophet was solely responsible for the perpetuation of the Book of Mormon story—if he created the notion of a Moroni, of the golden plates and Urim and Thummim, and of a thousand-year-old story of a people who inhabited ancient America, knowing full well that such things never existed—then he was a deceiver pure and simple. He and the work he set in motion is to be feared, not followed. No matter the intensity of his labor, his own personal magnetism, or the literary value of his embellished epic, the work is a hoax and the word of the New York farm boy is not to be trusted in matters of spiritual certainty any more than Hawthorne or Dostoevsky.

The “expansionist” position of the Book of Mormon history is what some have assumed to be a middle-of-the-road posture. It propounds the view that the Book of Mormon represents an ancient core source mediated through a modern prophet. I feel this is basically an effort to have it both ways, to contend that certain sections of the Nephite record are ancient, while certain identifiable portions are unmistakably nineteenth-century, reflecting the culture, language, and theological worldview of

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Joseph Smith. Any reference to such matters as the fall, atonement, resurrection, new birth, or Godhead before the time of Christ are seen to be anachronistic—evidencing theological perspectives obviously out of place—perspectives which were written into the narrative by the translator but which would not originally have been on the plates themselves. For example, any discussion of resurrection or
atonement through Jesus Christ in the writings of Lehi or Jacob would be classified as expansion text, inasmuch as such notions are not to be found among the preexilic Jews, at least according to the extant materials we have, such as our present Old Testament or other Near Eastern documents. But, as Stephen D. Ricks has observed:

If we use the Bible or other documents from the ancient Near East as the standard, this seems an implied admission that the Book of Mormon has no independent evidentiary value as an ancient document. It also seems to imply that what can be known about preexilic Israelite religion is already to be found in the extant sources, principally the Bible. If this is the case, and nothing not previously known will be accepted, what unique contribution can a new document make? This reminds me of the reply falsely attributed to Umar when asked why he wished to burn the library at Alexandria: “If it is already in the Qur’an, we have no need of the books; if it is not in the Qur’an, then it is suspect of heresy and ought for that reason to be destroyed.” But can we be so certain that what can be known about preexilic Israelite religion is available in the extant sources? . . . Are we authorized to believe that Israelite religion before the exile is given its complete account in the Bible and other available documents? I, for one, am not so certain. ²

Nor am I. Nor can I grasp how one can deal with a major inconsistency in the reasoning of such a position. Why is it, for example, that God can reveal to the Lehites how to construct a ship and cross the ocean, but that same God cannot reveal to them the plan of salvation, together with Christian concepts of creation, fall, atonement, and redemption through bodily resurrection? Why is it that God can speak to Abinadi, call him to ministerial service, send him to Noah and his priests, and yet not make known to that same prophet the doctrines of the condescension of Jehovah and the ministry of Christ as the Father and the Son? Why is it that God can raise up a mighty prophet-king like Benjamin, can inspire that holy man to gather his people for a large covenant renewal ceremony (an occasion, by the way, which, according to expansionists, bears the mark of Israelite antiquity), and yet not reveal doctrine to him—doctrine pertaining to the natural man, the coming of the Lord Omnipotent, and the necessity for the new birth? The selectivity is not even subtle.

We need not jump to interpretive extremes because the language found in the Book of Mormon (including that from the Isaiah sections or the Savior’s sermon in 3 Nephi) reflects Joseph Smith’s language. Well, of course it does! The Book of Mormon is translation literature: practically every word in the book is from the English language. For Joseph Smith to use the English language with which he

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and the people of his day were familiar in recording the translation is historically consistent. On the other hand, to create the doctrine (or to place it in the mouths of Lehi or Benjamin or Abinadi) is unacceptable. The latter is tantamount to deceit and misrepresentation; it is, as we have said, to claim that the doctrines and principles are of ancient date (which the record itself declares) when, in fact, they are a fabrication (albeit an “inspired” fabrication) of a nineteenth-century man. I feel we have every reason to believe that the Book of Mormon came through Joseph Smith, not from him. Because certain theological matters were discussed in the nineteenth century does not preclude their revelation or discussion in antiquity.

Unless. Unless we deny one of the most fundamental principles of the Restoration—Christ’s eternal gospel: the knowledge that Christian prophets have taught Christian doctrine and administered Christian ordinances since the days of Adam.

“Taking it for granted that the scriptures say what
they mean, and mean what they say,” Joseph Smith explained in 1842, “we have sufficient grounds to go on and prove from the Bible [that is, by utilizing the supplementary scriptural resources available through the Restoration] that the gospel has always been the same; the ordinances to fulfill its requirements, the same, and the officers to officiate, the same.”3 This is evident in the Book of Mormon, is found throughout the Doctrine and Covenants, and is central to the Pearl of Great Price, especially the Book of Moses. I contend that there is little reference to Christian doctrine in our present Old Testament or other Near Eastern texts, simply because that was a time in ancient Israel of spiritual darkness and apostasy. The Book of Mormon is a report and an account of a restoration, a renewal, a reevaluation of the nature of God and the plan of salvation. Kent P. Jackson has written that in the Book of Mormon “we follow the history of one family of Israelites which proved itself worthy to be blessed with great light and knowledge concerning Christ. . . . Even a superficial comparison of the content of the Book of Mormon with that of the Bible enables one to see that the level of understanding concerning sacred things was greater among Lehi’s descendants than among the people from which they came. With the separation of Lehi and his family from their native society came a revelation—perhaps more accurately a restoration—of gospel principles that were unknown to the mainstream of their countrymen.”4

Too often the real issue—the subtle but certain undergirding assumption of those who question the historicity of the Book of Mormon, in whole or in part—is a denial of the supernatural, a refusal to admit of divine intervention, of revelation and miracles and predictive prophecy. It is the tendency, unfortunately, to adopt uncritically the secular presuppositions and methodologies of those who have neither faith nor direction. “It should be noted,” Stephen E. Robinson observed, “that the rejection of predictive prophecy is characteristic of the secular approach to the scriptures, for the exclusion of any supernatural agency (including God) from human affairs is fundamental to the methodology of most biblical scholarship.”

The naturalistic approach gives scholars from different religious backgrounds common controls and perspectives relative to the data and eliminates arguments over subjective beliefs not verifiable by the historical-critical method. However, there is a cost to using the naturalistic approach, for one can never mention God, revelation, priesthood, prophecy, etc., as having objective existence or as being part of the evidence or as being possible causes of the observable effects.

. . . If one starts with the a priori that the claims of Joseph and the Book of Mormon to predictive prophecy are not to be accepted, then that a priori is bound to force a conclusion that where the Book of Mormon contains predictive prophecy it is not authentic and must therefore be an “expansion.” But clearly, this conclusion flows not from the evidence but from the a priori assumption. If one allows the possibility that God might have revealed future events and doctrines to Nephi, Abinadi, or Samuel the Lamanite, then the so-called anachronisms disappear and this part of the argument for “expansion” collapses.

Naturalistic explanations are often useful in evaluating empirical data, but when the question asked involves empirical categories, such as “Is the Book of Mormon what it purports to be?” it begs the question to adopt a method whose first assumption is that the Book cannot be what it claims to be. This points out a crucial logical difficulty in using this method in either attacking or defending the Church.5

I candidly admit to caution rather than eagerness when it comes to applying many of the principles of biblical criticism to the Book of Mormon. The quest for the historical Jesus of Nazareth has led thousands to the demythologization and thus the de-deification of Jesus the Christ. “It would be incredibly naive,” Robinson noted, “to believe that biblical criticism brings us closer to the Christ of faith. After 200 years of refining its methods, biblical scholarship has despaired of knowing the real Jesus, except for a few crumbs, and has declared the Christ pictured in scripture to be a creation of the early church.”6 I for one am reluctant to assume that certain scholarly movements represent progress. Change, yes. Progress, not necessarily. Our faith as well as our approaches to the study of the Bible or the Book of Mormon must not be held hostage by the latest trends and fads in biblical scholarship; our testimony of historical events must not be at the mercy of what we know and can read in sources
external to the Book of Mormon. In the words of Elder Orson F. Whitney,

We have no right to take the theories of men, however scholarly, however learned, and set them up as a standard, and try to make the Gospel bow down to them; making of them an iron bedstead upon which God’s truth, if not long enough, must be stretched out, or if too long, must be chopped off—anything to make it fit into the system of men’s thoughts and theories! On the contrary, we should hold up the Gospel as the standard of truth, and measure thereby the theories and opinions of men. 7

Professor Paul Hedengren of the Philosophy Department at Brigham Young University made a specific request of those studying the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

If someone wishes to consider the Book of Mormon as other than historical, do not make subtle this deviation from its obvious historical structure as some have done to the Bible. Make the deviation bold so that it is clear and unmistakable. Do not take the book Joseph Smith had printed in 1830 and say that its truths are not historical but are of some other type, for the simple logical structure of the sentences in it falsifies this claim. Instead create from the Book of Mormon another book which asserts what the Book of Mormon simply reports to have asserted. If someone claims that actually no one said what the Book of Mormon claims someone to have said, but these actually unspoken utterances are true, let them compose a book of these sentences without the historical reports of these sentences being said. Do not say in this new book, “Jesus said to some Nephites, ‘Blessed are the meek.” Simply say in this new book, “Blessed are the meek.” In doing this the person will not have to overlook or ignore the historical claims taken to be either false or inessential. . . .

If we deny the historicity of the Book of Mormon or consider it inessential, let us compose a book in which claims are not inherently historical and attend to whatever truths we may find there. But in no case, let us say of the new book we compose that it is either the book Joseph Smith had printed in 1830 or that it is the Book of Mormon, for it is neither.8

When it comes to faith (and thus faithfulness and adherence to a cause), it matters very much whether there is an actual event, an objective occurrence toward which we look and upon which we build our faith. One cannot exercise saving faith in something untrue (Alma 32:21) or that did not happen, no matter how sweet the story, how sincere the originator or author, or how committed the followers. Though it is true that great literature, whether historically true or untrue, may lift and strengthen in its own way and even contain great moral lessons, such works cannot result in the spiritual transformation of the soul as only scripture can do. Scripture becomes a divine channel by which personal revelation comes, a significant means by which we may hear the voice of the Lord (see D&C 18:34–36). The power of the word, whether spoken or written, is in its source—God our Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. We are able to exercise faith in a principle or doctrine taught by real people who were moved upon by the power of the Holy Ghost, actual persons in time and space whose interactions with the Lord and his Spirit were genuine and true and whose spiritual growth we may imitate. Huck Finn may have given the world some sage advice, but his words cannot sanctify. Even the sweet testimonies of Demetrius the slave and Marcellus the Roman centurion from The Robe cannot enliven the soul in the same way that the teachings of Alma to Corianton or the letters of Mormon to Moroni do. There is a difference, a big difference.

In regard to the resurrection of Jesus—and the principle surely applies to the First Vision or the Book of Mormon—one non–Latter-day Saint theologian has observed:

There is an excellent objective ground to which to tie the religion that Jesus sets forth. Final validation of this can only come experientially [as Latter-day Saints would say, by personal revelation]. But it is desperately important not to put ourselves in such a position that the event-nature of the resurrection depends wholly upon “the faith.” It’s the other way around. The faith has its starting point in the event, the objective event, and only by the appropriation of this objective event do we discover the final validity of it.

The Christian faith is built upon the Gospel that is “good news,” and there is no news, good or bad, of something that didn’t happen. I personally am much disturbed by certain contemporary
movements in theology which seem to imply that we can have the faith regardless of whether anything happened or not. I believe absolutely that the whole Christian faith is premised upon the fact that at a certain point of time under Pontius Pilate a certain man died and was buried and three days later rose from the dead. If in some way you could demonstrate to me that Jesus never lived, died, or rose again, then I would have to say I have no right to my faith.9

Faith in Jesus as a type of timeless Galilean guru is at best deficient and at worst perverse. Faith in his moral teachings or in a Christian ethical code alone produces lovely terrestrial labors but superficial and fleeting commitment. As C. S. Lewis observed:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.10

Our faith in Christ is grounded in the work of redemption that was accomplished in a specific garden and on a designated cross in a particular moment in our earth’s history. It is not the exact site that matters so much as it is that there was such a site. If Jesus did not in reality suffer and bleed and die and rise from the tomb, then we are spiritually doomed, no matter how committed we may be to the “faith event” celebrated by the first-century Christians. And so it is in regard to the occasion in Palmyra. It matters very much that the Eternal Father and His Only Begotten did appear to a young boy in a grove of trees in New York State. Exactly where the Sacred Grove is, as well as what specific trees or ground were hallowed by the theophany, is much less significant. If Joseph Smith did not see in vision the Father and the Son, if the First Vision was only the “sweet dreams” of a naive boy, then no amount of goodness and civility on the part of people of God in all ages than they do about the way things were in the nineteenth century. Joseph Smith the Seer, in harmony with the principle taught by Ammon to Limhi (Mosiah 8:17), may well have restored as much knowledge of things past as of things future.

There is room in the Church for all types and shapes and sizes of people, and certainly all of us are at differing stages of intellectual development and spiritual maturity. Further, there are a myriad of doctrinal issues over which discussion and

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of Mormon—which, in the uncompromising language of President J. Reuben Clark, “must stand, unchanged, unmodified, without dilution, excuse, apology, or avoidance; they may not be explained away or submerged. Without these two great beliefs [the reality of the resurrection and atonement and the divine call of Joseph Smith] the Church would cease to be the Church.” Further, “any individual who does not accept the fulness of these doctrines as to Jesus of Nazareth or as to the restoration of the Gospel and Holy Priesthood, is not a Latter-day Saint.”

I have often sensed that ours is not the task to shift the Church about with its history, practices, and beliefs—as though the divine institution was on casters—in order to get it into the path of moving persons who desire a religion that conforms with their own private beliefs or attends to their own misgivings or doubts. At a time of intellectual explosion but of spiritual and moral corrosion, I am persuaded that no Latter-day Saint needs to surrender cherished values to live in a modern world; that a member of the Church need not fall prey to the growing “alternate voices” offering alternative explanations for our foundational events and institutions; and that one can have implicit trust in the Church and its leaders without sacrificing or compromising anything. In the end, as we have been counseled repeatedly, the reality of golden plates and Cumorah and angels may be known only by an independent and individual revelation. Such an experience, as well as the reinforcing and renewing ones thereafter, comes to those who demonstrate patience and faith. “The finished mosaic of the history of the Restoration,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “will be larger and more varied as more pieces of tile emerge, adjusting a sequence here or enlarging there a sector of our understanding. . . . There may even be,” he added, “a few pieces of the tile which, for the moment, do not seem to fit. We can wait, as we must.” One day, he promised, “the final mosaic of the Restoration will be resplendent, reflecting divine design. . . . At the perfect day, we will see that we have been a part of things too wonderful for us. Part of the marvel and the wonder of God’s ‘marvelous work and a wonder’ will be how perfect Divinity mercifully used us—imperfect humanity. Meanwhile, amid the human dissonance, those with ears to hear will follow the beckoning sounds of a certain trumpet.”

Notes
3. Joseph Smith, Times and Seasons 3 (1 September 1843): 904; see also History of the Church, 2:15–18; 4:208.
The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship encourages and supports research on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Bible, other ancient scripture, and related subjects. The Maxwell Institute publishes and distributes titles in these areas for the benefit of scholars and interested Latter-day Saint readers.

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“Christology in the Book of Mormon is not an occasional intrusion, but the narrative backbone of the story and the dramatic point of orientation. All of Book of Mormon history, in other words, pivots on the moment of Christ’s coming” (Terryl Givens).