

The Book of Mormon: Man-Made or God-Given?

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The Book of Mormon Is the Keystone of Our Religion

It is good to be with you today. I love BYU. It is where I attended school, where I met my wonderful wife, and where all six of our children have attended.

The title of my talk today is “The Book of Mormon: Man-Made or God-Given?”¹ Because the Book of Mormon is “the keystone of our religion,” as described by Joseph Smith,² the Church rises or falls on the truth of it.

As a result, if the Book of Mormon can be proved to be man-made, then the Church is man-made. On the other hand, if its origin is God-given, then Joseph Smith was a prophet, and if he was a prophet, then The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true. It is that simple.

Once we have a foundational testimony of the Book of Mormon, then any question or challenge we confront in life, however difficult it may seem, can be approached with faith, not doubt. Why? Because the keystone of our religion—the Book of Mormon and its witness of Jesus Christ—has also become the keystone of our testimony, which keystone holds our testimony securely in place.

Thus the Book of Mormon has become the focal point of attack by many of our critics: disprove the Book of Mormon and you disprove the Church and undermine testimonies.

But this is no easy task—in fact, it is impossible, because the Book of Mormon is true. Eleven witnesses, in addition to Joseph Smith, saw the gold plates, millions of believers have testified of its truthfulness, and the book is readily available for examination. Critics must either dismiss the Book of Mormon with a sheepish shrug or produce a viable alternative to Joseph Smith’s account; namely, that he translated it by the gift and power of God.

What then are those alternative arguments presented by our critics for the origin of the Book of Mormon, and what is the truth?

Argument 1: Joseph Smith, Alleged to Be an Ignorant Man, Wrote the Book of Mormon

In 1831 a clergyman named Alexander Campbell proposed that Joseph Smith wrote rather than translated the Book of Mormon:

There never was a book more evidently written by one set of fingers, nor more certainly conceived in one cranium . . . , than this . . . book. . . . I cannot doubt for a single moment that [Joseph Smith] is the sole author and proprietor of it.³

Tad R. Callister, general president of the Sunday School of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on 1 November 2016.

Campbell also declared that “[Joseph was] as ignorant and as impudent a knave as ever wrote a book.”⁴ But this assertion that Joseph Smith, who was “ignorant” and lacked education, could write such a work as the Book of Mormon seemed so preposterous to other contemporary critics that they readily dismissed it. Even Campbell himself, who proposed this theory, later abandoned it in favor of another alternative.⁵

So the early theories about the origin of the Book of Mormon started to focus on the premise that Joseph Smith, an unlearned man, was simply incapable of writing such a complex book. After all, he was but twenty-three years of age, a simple plowboy from western New York, and he had little formal education. Consequently the early critics concluded there must be some other explanation for the origin of the Book of Mormon than the unlikely possibility that Joseph wrote it.

Argument 2: Someone Else Wrote It

Accordingly, some critics proposed the theory that Joseph Smith conspired with someone who had the education, intelligence, and skills to write the Book of Mormon.⁶ One candidate for its authorship was Oliver Cowdery. After all, he was a schoolteacher, a scribe, and later a lawyer. But a major problem arose for the critics: Oliver never claimed to have written any portion of the book; in fact, he testified to the contrary:

*I wrote, with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated it by the gift and power of God. . . . That book is **true**.*⁷

Even though Oliver was excommunicated from the Church and it was some years before he returned, he remained true at all times to his testimony, even on his deathbed. As a result, this argument receives little acceptance today.⁸

Another candidate for authorship of the Book of Mormon was Sidney Rigdon. He was a Protestant minister and theologian. The supreme irony of this argument, however, is that he was converted

by the very book he was supposed to have written. Parley P. Pratt, a former member of Rigdon’s congregation, introduced him to the Book of Mormon in October 1830—about six months after the Book of Mormon had already been published. Do we have any witnesses that this is how Sidney Rigdon was converted? We do. In fact, the historical evidence is compelling.⁹

First, Sidney Rigdon’s daughter, Nancy Rigdon Ellis, was eight years old when Parley P. Pratt and Oliver Cowdery presented her father with a copy of the Book of Mormon in their home. She said that she recalled the event because of the conflict that arose:

*I saw them hand [my father] the book, and I am as positive as can be that he never saw it before. He read it and examined it for about an hour and then threw it down and said he did not believe a word in it.*¹⁰

Later, however, he did accept the Book of Mormon, joined the Church, and became one of its leaders.

Second, Sidney Rigdon’s son John spoke to his father as he lay on his deathbed: “[Father], you owe it to me and to your family to tell [the truth about the Book of Mormon].”

In other words, this is the day of reckoning; be totally honest before you go to the judgment bar.

The son then recounted his father’s response: “My father looked at me a moment, raised his hand above his head and slowly said, with tears glistening in his eyes: ‘My son, I can swear before high heaven that what I have told you about the origin of that book is true.’”

After this tender moment, the son said, “I believed him.”¹¹

Later, John joined the Church, and thus another argument fell by the wayside.

Argument 3: The Book of Mormon Was Plagiarized from Other Books

Other critics offered a different line of attack; namely, that Joseph Smith plagiarized the Book of Mormon (at least its historical content) from other existing books. One such theory alleged that Joseph Smith copied from the Solomon Spaulding

manuscript—an unpublished manuscript written about 1812 by a man named Solomon Spaulding, who had once been a Protestant minister. It is a fictional account of ancient Romans who were sailing for England but were blown off course and landed in North America. When the critics were asked to produce the manuscript for comparison with the Book of Mormon, they conveniently claimed it was lost.¹²

However, with the passage of time, the manuscript was found in 1884 by a Mr. L. L. Rice. He found the alleged smoking gun in the personal historical papers of one of the very critics who had claimed the manuscript was lost. Knowing of its alleged connection to the Book of Mormon, Mr. Rice, Mr. James Fairchild, and others (none of whom were members of the LDS Church), reviewed it and concluded, “[We] compared it with the Book of Mormon and could detect *no resemblance between the two, in general or in detail.*”¹³

When I was in my twenties, I saw a notice from the Church History Department that stated that a copy of the Solomon Spaulding manuscript could be purchased for a dollar. I ordered a copy and likewise found no meaningful relationship whatsoever between the two books.¹⁴

With the demise of this argument, critics alleged that the supposed source for the Book of Mormon was another book titled *View of the Hebrews*, written by Ethan Smith in 1823. This book was an attempt to prove that the Native Americans were descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel.¹⁵ In essence, the critics claimed that this was the historical basis for the Book of Mormon.

There is a simple test to determine if the Book of Mormon was copied from *View of the Hebrews*: simply compare the two books and decide for yourself. With complete academic honesty, B. H. Roberts, one of the leading scholars of the Church, listed some possible parallels¹⁶ between the two books, but he then reached this conclusion: “I am taking the position that our faith is not only unshaken but unshakable in the Book of Mormon, and therefore we can look without fear upon all that can be

said against it.”¹⁷ Shortly before his death, Roberts further declared, “Ethan Smith played no part in the formation of the Book of Mormon.”¹⁸

I too have read *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon. Suffice it to say, these two books have totally different objectives and writing styles. For example, the Book of Mormon’s principal focus is to testify of Jesus Christ and His doctrine. Accordingly, the historical setting is not the focus, but it is rather the background music that gives context and emphasis to the doctrine. The principal focus, however, for *View of the Hebrews* is to historically connect the Native Americans to the ancient Hebrews. In addition, *View of the Hebrews* is a series of independent quotes and purported evidences to prove its theory. On the other hand, the Book of Mormon is a cohesive narrative—a story of families and prophets who struggled to live God’s word. The purpose and style of these two books is most disparate.¹⁹ Any honest reader can determine that for himself.

Argument 4: Joseph Suffered from a Mental Illness

Those who advanced this argument alleged that such mental disorders bestowed upon Joseph Smith additional powers and skills that enabled him to write what he could not otherwise have written on his own.²⁰

In 1931 Harry M. Beardsley wrote, “*The Book of Mormon* is a product of . . . a mind characterized by the symptoms of the most prevalent of mental diseases of adolescence—dementia praecox,”²¹ sometimes referred to as schizophrenia.

There are fatal defects, however, with such an argument. First, there is no credible evidence that Joseph had any form of mental illness. Second, there is no substantiating evidence that such physical or mental conditions magically bestow upon an untrained writer, such as Joseph Smith, the ability to instantly become a skilled writer. And third, the book is not characteristic of the mentally ill. Even Fawn M. Brodie, an avid critic of Joseph Smith, acknowledged this latter fact:

Recent critics who insist that Joseph Smith suffered from delusions have ignored in the Book of Mormon contrary evidence difficult to override. Its very coherence belies their claims. . . .

. . . Its structure shows elaborate design, its narrative is spun coherently, and it demonstrates throughout a unity of purpose.²²

As you would expect, these arguments that Joseph Smith suffered from a mental illness never got much traction.²³

Argument 5: Joseph Smith Was a Creative Genius Who, Shaped by His Environment, Wrote the Book of Mormon

This argument has become a principal one used by many if not most critics today. It is a 180-degree turnabout from the premise of earlier critics; namely, that Joseph was illiterate, ignorant, and incapable of writing such a work on his own. In fact, we have come full circle, back to the same argument originally made by Alexander Campbell in 1831, except that now Joseph Smith is considered brilliant rather than ignorant.

Fawn Brodie, perhaps the chief proponent of this argument, opined that Joseph Smith, the unschooled farm boy, was a creative genius who, fashioned by his environment and the influence of local history books and resources, personally wrote the Book of Mormon. Remarkably, Fawn Brodie wrote:

*Never having written a line of fiction, [Joseph Smith] laid out for himself a task that would have given the most experienced novelist pause. **But possibly because of this very inexperience he plunged into the story.**²⁴*

When one contemplates that assertion, it is nothing short of mind-boggling. Was it this same inexperience that helped him create hundreds of names, weave them into the most complex set of events, and then thread them together in a harmonious story resplendent with profound doctrinal insights? By her very acknowledgment of Joseph's

inexperience, she has magnified the improbability of Joseph writing this monumental work on his own.

Nonetheless, others have bought into this argument—lock, stock, and barrel. Why? Because they have nowhere else to go except to admit that Joseph translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God—a place they desperately do not want to go. These latter critics have added one more ingredient to the mix. Joseph Smith, they said, besides being a genius, was suffering from narcissistic personality disorder or dissociative disorder or depression.²⁵ Here we are back again to the mental disorder theories that proved so ineffective in the past.²⁶

In order to account for the history of the Book of Mormon, these critics claim that Joseph must have read or been conversant with a staggering number of books or ideas related to them. In fact, one author has suggested that Joseph may have read or gleaned information from more than thirty books in nearby libraries in order to gather necessary information about the early Americans.²⁷ The claim is then made that these books—or discussions of the same in newspapers or conversations—became the basis for the historical narrative in the Book of Mormon.²⁸

How might one counter this argument? Here is a list of questions that an honest seeker of truth might raise:

- Is there a single reference—just one—in Joseph's journals or written correspondence suggesting he might have read or had conversations concerning any of these historical sources before translating the Book of Mormon? No.²⁹
- Is there any evidence he visited the libraries where these books were supposedly located? No.
- Did Emma Smith, who was married to him, ever comment that he referred to any of these books before the Book of Mormon was translated? No.

- Is there any record that he had any of these books present when he translated the Book of Mormon? No.

How many nos does it take to expose the critics' arguments as pure speculation—nothing more than sand castles that come crashing down when the first waves of honest questions appear on the scene.

Do the critics expect us to believe that Joseph searched out and studied all these resources on Native American life; inhaled the related conversations on the topic; winnowed out the irrelevant; organized the remainder into an intricate story involving hundreds of characters, numerous locations, and detailed war strategies; and then dictated it with perfect recollection, without any notes whatsoever—no outline, no three-by-five cards, nothing—a fact acknowledged even among the critics?³⁰ And during it all, no one remembered him going to these libraries, bringing any such books home, having any conversations concerning this research, or making any diary entries to the same. Where, I ask you, is the hard evidence?

Where Did Joseph Get the Doctrine?

Even if Joseph had obtained historical facts from local libraries or community conversations—for which there is no substantiating evidence—the real issue still remains: Where did he get the deep and expansive doctrine taught in the Book of Mormon—much of which is contrary to the religious beliefs of his time? For example, contemporary Christianity taught that the Fall was a negative, not a positive, step forward, as taught in the Book of Mormon (see 2 Nephi 2).

Likewise, contrary to contemporary beliefs, the Book of Mormon refers to a premortal existence in Alma 13 (see Alma 13:1–11) and to a postmortal spirit world in Alma 40 (see Alma 40:11–14). Where did Joseph Smith get these profound doctrinal truths that were in fact contrary to the prevailing doctrinal teachings of his time? Where did he get the stunning sermon on faith in Alma 32? Or one of the greatest sermons ever recorded in all

scripture on the Savior's Atonement as delivered by King Benjamin (see Mosiah 2–5)? Or the allegory of the olive tree with all its complexity and doctrinal richness (see Jacob 5)? When I read that allegory, I have to map it out to follow its intricacies. Are we supposed to believe that Joseph Smith just dictated these sermons off the top of his head with no notes whatsoever?

The doctrinal truths taught in the Book of Mormon are overwhelming evidence of its divine authenticity. Nephi prophesied that in our day an exceeding great many would stumble in finding the truth. Why? "Because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the [Bible]" (1 Nephi 13:29). Here are but two examples of plain and precious doctrinal truths that were clarified or restored in the Book of Mormon:

1. Baptism. Much of the Christian world debates whether or not baptism is essential for salvation; they stumble over this issue. Let me read just one of many scriptures on this subject from the Book of Mormon: "[God] commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, . . . or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 9:23). Should there be any debate about the necessity of baptism after that scripture? The Book of Mormon makes clear that which is unclear to much of the Christian world.

The majority of the Christian world embraces sprinkling and pouring as legitimate modes of baptism. The Savior Himself addressed this issue in the Book of Mormon: "Then shall ye *immerse* them in the water, and come forth again out of the water" (3 Nephi 11:26; emphasis added). What is ambiguous for many is crystal clear in the Book of Mormon. Must one be baptized by authority, or is sincerity sufficient? Do we make covenants at the time of baptism, and, if so, what are those covenants? Should infants be baptized?

Again and again the Book of Mormon comes to the rescue, giving answers and restoring many plain and precious truths about baptism that were distorted or lost during the Apostasy. How did Joseph Smith know all these answers when

the rest of the Christian world was so confused? Because he received them by revelation from God as he translated the Book of Mormon.

2. What about Christ’s Atonement—the central doctrine of all Christianity? The clarity and expansiveness of this doctrine as taught in the Book of Mormon is beyond honest dispute. The Old and New Testaments have some scattered doctrinal gems on the Atonement (which we greatly appreciate and benefit from), but the Book of Mormon has numerous sermons—entire masterpieces—on the subject. For example:

a. 2 Nephi 2 is a mind-expanding sermon on the relationship between the Fall and Christ’s Atonement. While the rest of the Christian world believes that the Fall was a step backward in man’s progress, Lehi taught us the truth—that the Fall coupled with the Atonement is a giant step forward.

b. 2 Nephi 9:7 introduces for the first time the phrase “an infinite atonement,” revealing the expansiveness, scope, and depth of Christ’s saving power.

c. Mosiah 2–5 is King Benjamin’s sermon. It gives insights about the depth of Christ’s suffering, the retroactive as well as prospective nature of Christ’s Atonement, and the power of the Atonement to remove our guilt as well as our sins.

d. Alma 7 explains that the Savior suffered not only for our sins but also for our “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind” (Alma 7:11).

e. 3 Nephi 11 is the most powerful witness we have of the resurrected Lord, as 2,500 believers, consisting of men, women, and children (see 3 Nephi 17:25) came forth and “thrust their hands into his side,” felt “the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet,” and “did know of a surety and did bear record” (3 Nephi 11:15) that He was the Son of God. Who can read that account and not feel the witness of the Spirit testifying of its truthfulness?

f. The Bible teaches us that, through the Atonement, Christ can make us clean; the Book of

Mormon teaches us that, through the Atonement, Christ can also make us perfect (see Moroni 10:32–33).³¹

Does anyone honestly believe that Joseph Smith somehow invented these profound doctrines with their compelling powers of reason, their mind-expanding insights, and their language, which is divinely eloquent? If these doctrines were the product of Joseph’s creative mind, one might ask, “Were there no other creative geniuses in the 1,800 years following Christ’s ministry who could produce similar doctrines?”

The argument that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon is simply counter to the realities of life. It is one thing to have creative ideas; it is quite another to put them into a complex but coherent and harmonious whole, inundated with majestic doctrinal truths and all done in a single draft in less than ninety days. Joseph Smith’s wife, Emma, the person who knew him better than any other, confirmed this conclusion: “Joseph Smith [as a young man] could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictat[e] a book like the Book of Mormon.”³²

A Parable That Counters the Arguments Proposed by Critics

In response to critics’ arguments as to the origin of the Book of Mormon, Hugh Nibley published the following parable:

A young man once long ago claimed he had found a large diamond in his field as he was ploughing. He put the stone on display to the public free of charge, and everyone took sides. A psychologist showed, by citing some famous case studies, that the young man was suffering from a well-known form of delusion. An historian showed that other men have also claimed to have found diamonds in fields and been deceived. A geologist proved that there were no diamonds in the area but only quartz. . . . When asked to inspect the stone itself, the geologist declined with a weary, tolerant smile and a kindly shake of the head. . . . A sociologist showed that only three out of 177 florists’ assistants in four major

cities believed the stone was genuine. A clergyman wrote a book to show that it was not the young man but someone else who had found the stone.

Finally an indigent jeweler . . . pointed out that since the stone was still available for examination the answer to the question of whether it was a diamond or not had absolutely nothing to do with who found it, or whether the finder was honest or sane, or who believed him, or whether he would know a diamond from a brick . . . , but was to be answered simply and solely by putting the stone to certain well-known tests for diamonds. Experts on diamonds were called in. Some of them declared it genuine. The others made nervous jokes about it and declared that they could not very well jeopardize their dignity and reputations by appearing to take the thing too seriously. To hide the bad impression thus made, someone came out with the theory that the stone was really a synthetic diamond, very skilfully made, but a fake just the same. The objection to this is that the production of a good synthetic diamond [in that day and age] would have been an even more remarkable feat than the finding of a real one.³³

To suggest that Joseph Smith, a farm boy with little formal education, produced a synthetic work of God in 1829 that has baffled the brightest of critics for almost two centuries would be a more remarkable feat than the simple fact that he obtained the gold plates from an angel of God and translated them by the gift and power of God.

Other Evidences That the Book of Mormon Is Not Man-Made

What other evidence do we have that the Book of Mormon was a God-given translation and not a man-made creation? There are many evidences, but for the sake of time I refer to but one, because it is personal to me. Emma Smith gave the following testimony, as reported by her son Joseph Smith III:

My belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity—I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired; for,

when acting as his scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.³⁴

This may seem insignificant to some, but to me it is astounding. For thirty-four years, as a lawyer, I regularly dictated to my secretary. As I did so, I was often interrupted by a phone call or a question. After such interruptions I would invariably ask my secretary, “Where was I?”

But Joseph was not dictating or writing a new work; he was receiving revelation by the power of God and therefore did not need to ask, “Where was I?”

When all is said and done, Joseph Smith’s explanation of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is the only viable option on the table. Why? Because it is as true as true can be.³⁵

How We Can Discover the Truth of a Divine Work

If I were to ask my good Christian friends how they unquestionably know the Bible is the word of God, I do not believe they would cite archaeological discoveries or linguistic connections with ancient Hebrew or Greek as their prime evidence; rather, they would make reference to the Spirit. It always comes back to the Spirit. The Spirit that helps me know the Bible is true is the very same Spirit that helps me know the Book of Mormon is true.³⁶

The Spirit is the decisive, determining factor—not archaeology, not linguistics, not DNA, and certainly not the theories of man. The Spirit is the only witness that is sure and certain and infallible.

As a boy of about fifteen or sixteen, I was reading the story of the 2,000 sons of Helaman. I marveled at their bravery and the Lord’s protecting hand. Then a voice came to my mind: “That story is true.” Since then, other confirmations have come.³⁷

Why is it so important for you individually to gain a testimony of the Book of Mormon? Because if you do, it will become your personal iron rod. The mists of darkness may come and the unanswered questions may arise, but through it all you will have your iron rod to cling to—to keep you on the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life.

The Lord has promised that if we pray “with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto [us], by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4). If we want the truth that badly, if we are willing to pay that price and be unrelenting in that quest, the answer will eventually come.

By that promised power of the Holy Ghost I bear my personal witness that the Book of Mormon is God-given and that it is all it claims to be—a pure and powerful witness of Jesus Christ, His divinity, and His doctrine. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. I thank Matthew J. Grow and others from the Church History Department who have been so helpful in their comments and in verifying historical sources used herein.

2. Joseph Smith, 28 November 1841, *HC* 4:461; Joseph Smith, “History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1,” 1255, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/427.

3. Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon; with an Examination of Its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of Its Pretences to Divine Authority* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832), 13. Campbell also opined that Joseph “wrote on the plates of Nephi, in his book of Mormon, every error and almost every truth discussed in N[ew] York for the last ten years” (*Delusions*, 13).

4. Campbell, *Delusions*, 11.

5. Campbell later endorsed the argument that Sidney Rigdon wrote the Book of Mormon with the help of the Solomon Spaulding manuscript,

an argument discussed hereafter. See Louis C. Midgley, “Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?: The Critics and Their Theories,” in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1997), 132, note 18.

6. In this regard, Fawn M. Brodie wrote, “Unwilling to credit Joseph Smith with either learning or talent, detractors of the Mormons within a few years declared that the Book of Mormon must have been written by someone else” (*No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* [New York: Vintage Books, 1995], 68).

7. Reported in “Last Days of Oliver Cowdery,” *Deseret News*, 13 April 1859, 48; emphasis in original. On another occasion, Cowdery wrote:

These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated, with the Urim and Thummim, . . . the history, or record, called “The book of Mormon.” [Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate 1, no. 1 (October 1834): 14; emphasis in original]

8. If Oliver wrote the Book of Mormon, one must ask, What was his motive? There was no lasting fame, no money, and no lasting power to be gained by remaining silent as to its authorship; rather, Oliver Cowdery was excommunicated from the Church. If there was ever a time to expose Joseph Smith as a fraud, this was it—his chance to get even and to declare who the true author was. But none of that happened. In addition, the original transcript includes the handwriting of several scribes besides that of Oliver Cowdery, evidencing that he alone could not have been its sole author.

While Oliver was excommunicated from the Church, he tried a murder case as a county attorney. At the beginning of the trial, the defense counsel ridiculed Oliver and his connection with Joseph Smith and the gold plates. With great

interest, those in the courtroom waited for Oliver's reply. Oliver arose and declared:

Gentlemen of the jury, I have never denied my testimony, which is attached to the front page of the Book of Mormon, and I declare to you here that these eyes saw the angel, and these ears of mine heard the voice of the angel, and he told us his name was Moroni; that the book was true, and contained the fulness of the gospel. [In B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), 1:142; quoting an affidavit by Judge Charles M. Nielsen in front of Adam A. Duncan, notary public for the county of Salt Lake, State of Utah, 3 December 1909; LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City]

9. Joseph Smith III reported that his mother, Emma, had said that “no acquaintance was formed between Sidney Rigdon and the Smith family till after the Church was organized,” which of course was after the Book of Mormon had already been published (Joseph Smith III, “Letter to R. Patterson,” 20 January 1883, in *Saints' Herald* 30, no. 12 (24 March 1883): 179; letter continued from the previous week in *Saints' Herald* 30, no. 11 (17 March 1883): 162–64).

10. Nancy Rigdon Ellis, as reported by Edmund L. Kelley in “Correspondence,” *Saints' Herald* 31, no. 22 (31 May 1884): 339; emphasis added; punctuation modernized.

11. In N. L. (Nels Lars) Nelson, *The Mormon Point of View* 1, no. 2 (1 April 1904), 184; punctuation modernized; see also 183–85; see also *HC* 1:123.

12. Doctor Philastus Hurlbut, an apostate of the Church, and Eber D. Howe, a newspaper editor who was hostile to the Church, had heard rumors that there were some similarities between the Solomon Spaulding manuscript and the Book of Mormon, so they obtained the manuscript from Mr. Spaulding's widow with the intent to print it and expose the Book of Mormon as a fraud. To their great disappointment, however, they

could not find the similarities they had hoped for. Hurlbut admitted, “I obtained a manuscript . . . , which was reported to be the foundation of the ‘Book of Mormon.’ . . . Upon examination I found it to contain nothing of the kind, but being a manuscript upon an entirely different subject” (in affidavit, 10 January 1881, quoted in George Reynolds, “The Originator of the ‘Spaulding Story,’” *Juvenile Instructor* 17, no. 17 [1 September 1882]: 263).

In light of that discovery, these conspirators then claimed there was another manuscript that was the source of the Book of Mormon, but it was allegedly lost and therefore, conveniently, could not be compared to see if plagiarism had occurred. No such “later” manuscript has ever been found.

13. James H. Fairchild, “Solomon Spaulding and the Book of Mormon,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 42, no. 165 (January 1885): 174; emphasis added; punctuation modernized; see also 173–74. No wonder Sidney Rigdon, who was falsely alleged to have used the Spaulding manuscript in writing the Book of Mormon, called it “a moonshine story . . . [and] the most base of lies, without even the shadow of truth” (letter from Sidney Rigdon to the editors of the *Boston Recorder*, 27 May 1839, quoted in Parley P. Pratt, *Plain Facts: Showing the Falsehood and Folly of the Rev. C. S. Bush, [a Church Minister of the Parish of Peover,] Being a Reply to His Tract Against the Latter-day Saints* [Manchester: W. R. Thomas, 1840], 14).

Oliver Cowdery offered this further damaging testimony: “Sidney Rigdon did not write it. Mr. Spaulding did not write it. I wrote it myself, as it fell from the lips of the Prophet” (“Last Days of Oliver Cowdery,” 48; punctuation modernized).

14. Even other critics of the Book of Mormon saw the massive holes in this theory. Isaac Woodbridge Riley wrote, “The commonly accepted Spaulding theory is insoluble from external evidence and disproved by internal evidence” (*The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* [New York: Dodd, Mead, 1902], 172).

15. One of the chief proponents of this argument, Fawn M. Brodie, acknowledged, “Thus,

where *View of the Hebrews* was just bad scholarship, the Book of Mormon was highly original and imaginative fiction” (*No Man Knows My History*, 48). She claimed that, evidently, in some mysterious, inexplicable way, Joseph Smith had transformed a sow’s ear (*View of the Hebrews*) into a silk purse (the Book of Mormon)—hardly a rousing endorsement for an alleged act of plagiarism.

16. Some might ask, Why are there any possible parallels between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon? There is a very reasonable explanation. *View of the Hebrews* is a collection of the then existing Native American legends and archaeological evidences that pointed to some commonality with the ancient Hebrews. Where did these legends and archaeological remains originate? When the Nephite civilization was destroyed, the Lamanite civilization continued, but without any substantial written records. Their traditions and history were handed down to successive generations, largely by word of mouth. Some of these stories or legends were no doubt altered with time, and others no doubt contained some truth. Those that contained some truth might parallel similar accounts in the Book of Mormon because they may have been describing the same events—one through the written record of the Nephites, the other through the oral legends and stories of the Lamanites.

17. B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham D. Madsen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 58. Some claim that B. H. Roberts lost his testimony over this analysis done in 1922, but that is simply untrue. In a cover letter to President Heber J. Grant and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, dated March 15, 1922, Roberts wrote:

In writing out this my report to you of those studies, I have written it from the viewpoint of an open mind, investigating the facts of the Book of Mormon origin and authorship. Let me say once and for all, so as to avoid what might otherwise call for repeated explanation, that what is herein set forth does not represent

*any conclusions of mine. This report herewith submitted is what it purports to be, namely a “study of Book of Mormon origins,” for the information of those who ought to know everything about it pro et con, as well that which has been produced against it, and that which may be produced against it. I am taking the position that our faith is not only unshaken but unshakable in the Book of Mormon, and therefore we can look without fear upon all that can be said against it. [In Roberts, *Studies*, 57–58; quoted in Truman G. Madsen, “B. H. Roberts After Fifty Years: Still Witnessing for the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, December 1983, 13]*

18. In his *Ensign* article in 1983, Truman G. Madsen related the following:

Just before his death in September 1933, Elder Roberts was visited at his office by a long-time friend, Jack Christensen. He placed on Elder Roberts’s desk a second edition of the Ethan Smith volume. During the conversation, B. H. Roberts spoke of his Book of Mormon studies and then gave Christensen his considered judgment: “Ethan Smith played no part in the formation of the Book of Mormon.” [Interview with Jack Christensen, 25 April 1979; from Madsen, “B. H. Roberts After Fifty Years,” 17–18]

Interestingly, critics are quick to quote the possible parallels Elder Roberts cited but for some reason fail to quote his decisive and concluding opinion that *View of the Hebrews* played no part in the formation of the Book of Mormon. I leave it to you to decide the reason for this recurring omission.

19. As I gave weight to the few parallels versus the many nonparallels in these two books, it reminded me of the dilemma of the farmer who couldn’t tell one horse from another—they both ran at the same speed, carried the same load, and were of the same weight. Finally, as a last resort, he measured them, and, sure enough, the white horse was six hands higher than the black one. Such is the difference between the Book of Mormon and *View of the Hebrews*.

20. In this spirit Isaac Woodbridge Riley opined that Joseph Smith was an epileptic (see Riley, *Founder of Mormonism*, 345–66).

21. Harry M. Beardsley, *Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931), 81.

22. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 68–69; emphasis added.

23. Dan Vogel noted that “literary critic Bernard DeVoto’s theory that Smith’s visions and revelations were entirely the result of paranoid delusions has not fared well” (Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004], x–xi); see also Bernard DeVoto, “The Centennial of Mormonism,” *American Mercury* 19, no. 73 (January 1930): 5.

24. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 49; emphasis added.

25. See Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999); see also William D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith, Jr. and the Dissociated Mind* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1998).

26. These alleged mental disorders are claimed to have given Joseph the incentive and drive to write the Book of Mormon and also served as the source of the book’s tone and tenor.

27. See Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 105–32. The suggestion that Joseph Smith researched and read a substantial portion of these books or newspapers is a far distant cry from his mother’s observation of him that he was “less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children” (Lucy [Mack] Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph [Smith] by His Mother* [Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1902], 84).

28. Joseph Smith referred to *View of the Hebrews* in *Times and Seasons* in June 1842 (twelve years after the Book of Mormon was published); see Joseph Smith, “From Priest’s American Antiquities,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 15 (1 June 1842): 814.

29. Louis C. Midgley, a Church scholar, added this note:

Critics of the Book of Mormon now seem forced to follow the agenda set out by Brodie—they must locate nineteenth-century sources for all its contents. And they must explain how Joseph Smith was able to locate, digest, winnow, and then fashion these materials into a coherent form. [“Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?” 129]

30. Emma Smith was once asked in an interview if Joseph had read from any books or notes while dictating. She replied, “He had neither manuscript nor book to read from. . . . If he had had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me” (in Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald* 26, no. 19 [1 October 1879]: 289–90).

Noel B. Reynolds noted, “All accounts agree that Joseph never paused to review even the previous page or sentence, and he used no notes, books, or other reference materials” (Reynolds, “Shedding New Light on Ancient Origins,” *Brigham Young Magazine* 52, no. 1 [spring 1998]: 39; quoted in K. Douglas Bassett, *Doctrinal Insights to the Book of Mormon, Volume One: 1 Nephi Through 2 Nephi* [Springville, Utah: CFI, 2007], 134).

As one critic admitted, “Smith’s method of dictation did not allow for rewriting. It was a more-or-less stream-of-consciousness composition” (Vogel, *Making of a Prophet*, xix). I don’t believe I have ever written a substantive talk or thesis or book without rewriting. Have you?

31. There are certainly other magnificent chapters on the Atonement, including, but not limited to, 2 Nephi 25, Jacob 4, Mosiah 15, Alma 34, Alma 40–42, Ether 12, and Moroni 8.

32. Emma Smith, in “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” 290.

33. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, volume 5 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: The Book of Mormon, ed. John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews,

and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 121–22.

34. Emma Smith, in “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” 290; emphasis added.

35. Recently, as I reread the Doctrine and Covenants, I was reminded of the multiple occasions in which Joseph Smith acknowledged his weaknesses. What does that do for his credibility concerning the origin of the Book of Mormon? It tells me that he was not perfect but that he was honest.

36. This is consistent with the words of Nephi: “And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 33:10; see also Mormon 7:8–9).

37. Some of those confirmations have come in the form of impressions to be a better person. Joseph Smith taught in reference to the Book of Mormon that “a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (HC 4:461).