

The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon

Presentation on Parts 5 and 6 of Volume 3
of the Critical Text Project of the Book of Mormon

by Royal Skousen
with an Introduction by Stanford Carmack

Part 5
*The King James Quotations
in the Book of Mormon*

Part 6
*Spelling in the Manuscripts
and the Editions*

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In this part 5 of volume 3 of the critical text, we identify one more use of Early Modern English – in fact, a very specific one – in the original text of the Book of Mormon, namely, quotations from the King James Bible. Some of the important questions that we will consider here in KJQ are the following:

(1) *What counts as a literal biblical quotation in the Book of Mormon?*

When we search for strings of 16 identical words or more, we end up with 36 King James quotations in the Book of Mormon (two of which are quite lengthy). Most importantly, all 36 of these agree with our intuitions of what should count as a literal quotation. But when we consider strings of 15 identical words or less, we start to get paraphrastic quotations, common biblical expressions, and blended-in biblical phraseology in addition to shorter literal quotations.

(2) *Are all the biblical quotations from the King James Bible?*

Yes, except for one phrase from the 1535 Coverdale Bible in 2 Nephi 12:16: “and upon all the ships of the sea” (which quotes Isaiah 2:16 from the Greek Septuagint rather than from the Hebrew Masoretic text).

(3) *What edition of the King James Bible does the Book of Mormon cite from?*

It is difficult to be precise here, but taking all the substantive differences in the history of the King James text into account, we find that it dates from the 1670s or later. When we include differences in the accidentals (in particular, changes in the use of italics), the King James text seems to date from the 1770s or later.

(4) *Did Joseph Smith hand over a marked-up Bible to Oliver Cowdery when he came to the biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon?*

Oliver Cowdery’s misspellings tell us that the answer is no. Joseph Smith dictated the biblical quotations, just like all the rest of Book of Mormon.

(5) *When Joseph Smith produced his “New Translation” of the Bible in 1831-33 (now known as the Joseph Smith Translation), did he hand over a copy of the 1830 edition to the scribe to correct the biblical text from?*

In this case, we have clear evidence that this is precisely what Joseph Smith did (unlike what he did when he dictated the Book of Mormon text in 1828-29). There is at least one clear case of this procedure, and perhaps others as well.

(6) *Are there any significant differences in the biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon?*

Yes, and some are not only quite surprising but are also supported by other ancient textual sources.

(7) *How much of the textual differences in the biblical quotations rely on the use of italics in the King James Bible?*

Not a lot. Only about 23 percent of the differences involve italics. And of the italicized words themselves, only about 38 percent of them show differences. Even so, there are a few clear cases where differences are related to italics (or to the Hebrew original), in particular, six expressions that involve the linking *be* verb. But overall, there is little evidence for the role of italics, as can be seen when the Sermon on the Mount is quoted in 3 Nephi 12-14, where there are numerous differences without any influence from italics.

(8) *Do anachronistic elements show up in the King James biblical quotations?*

Yes. For instance, there are mistakes in translation, such as “instead of a girdle, a **rent**” (Isaiah 3:24, quoted in 2 Nephi 13:24), where *rent* is an error for *rope* (thus “instead of a belt, a **rope**”). In addition, there are cultural translations (that is, translations that made the reading understandable to Early Modern English speakers), but which were nonetheless wrong, such as “do men light a **candle**?” (Matthew 5:15, quoted in 3 Nephi 12:15), which should read “do men light a **lamp**?”

(9) *How do we deal with the problem of more than one Isaiah?*

Scholars have argued that Isaiah 40-55 was written by some unknown Second Isaiah who lived after the Jews were taken away into Babylonian captivity in 586 BCE, yet according to the Book of Mormon text this portion of Isaiah was on the plates of brass which Lehi and Nephi took away from Jerusalem prior to its fall. Although there are ways to deal with this problem, it isn't necessary to do so.

All of this quoting from the King James Bible is problematic, but only if we assume that the Book of Mormon translation literally represents what was on the plates. Yet the evidence in *The Nature of the Original Language* (parts 3 and 4 of volume 3 of the critical text) argues that the Book of Mormon translation is tied to Early Modern English, and that even the themes of the Book of Mormon are connected to the Protestant Reformation, dating from the same time period. What this means is that the Book of Mormon is a creative and cultural translation of what was on the plates, not a literal one. Based on the linguistic evidence, the translation must have involved serious intervention from the English-language translator, who was not Joseph Smith. Nonetheless, the text was revealed to Joseph Smith by means of his translation instrument, and he read it off word for word to his scribe. To our modern-day, skeptical minds, this is indeed “a marvelous work and a wonder”.

Part 6, *Spellings in the Manuscripts and Editions* (SPL), to appear in early 2020
Royal Skousen, with the collaboration of Stanford Carmack

Many will naturally suppose that nothing of any importance can come out of studying misspellings in the Book of Mormon, but they would be mistaken. One purpose of this book, dedicated entirely to the spellings in the manuscripts and the editions, is to show the numerous ways in which spelling issues have had an important impact in the critical text project of the Book of Mormon. Here is a sample of just what simple spellings errors can tell us:

(1) Joseph Smith's pronunciations of names

Amalickiah was pronounced with stress on the first syllable, not the second

Mosiah was pronounced like *Messiah* (with an *s* rather than a *z*) based on Joseph's own misspelling of *Messiah* as *Mosiah* in 1 Nephi 12:18

(2) Joseph Smith's pronunciation of a word can lead to a scribal error:

scourge was pronounced as *scorge*, not as *scurge*, so *scorched* in Mosiah 17:13 was misheard as *scourged* (thus "scorched > scourged with fagots")

(3) the dialectal pronunciations of the scribes (perhaps also Joseph Smith's):

Oliver Cowdery: *wage* pronounced like *wedge*; *grievious* instead of *grievous*

Martin Harris: *deaf* pronounced as *deef*

Christian Whitmer: *Nazareth* pronounced as *Nathareth*

(4) the written form in the original manuscript was misread by Oliver Cowdery when he copied it into the printer's manuscript:

Christian Whitmer's *prf* *sing* in 1 Nephi 8:31 was misread as *feeling*

Cut was misread as *Put* in Alma 5:35, thus Oliver Cowdery wrote in the printer's manuscript: "ye shall not be **put** down"

(5) a name was misinterpreted because of preceding examples in the text:

Muloch in Helaman 6 and 8 was twice misinterpreted as *Mulek* because of preceding examples of *Mulek* in Alma 51-52 and Helaman 5

Ramah in 2 Nephi 20:29 (Isaiah 10:29) was changed to *Ramath* because of the preceding *Hamath* (verse 9) and *Ajath* (verse 28)

(6) difficulty in determining what word a spelling refers to:

does *strait* mean *straight* or *strait*?

does *striped* in Alma 11:2 mean *stripped* or *striped*?

(7) detecting forgeries in the University of Chicago acquisition (Alma 3-5), dating from the early 1980s and intending to be in Oliver Cowdery's hand:

three instances of *and*, yet Oliver never wrote *and* this way in either manuscript;

yet both Martin Harris and Hyrum Smith used both *&* and *and* in their copy work

reccord was never used by Oliver, only *reckord* (12×) and *record* (181×); yet *reccord* was used once by Martin Harris (along with *record*) and twice by Hyrum Smith

The first chapter of part 6 will reverse the common belief among LDS people that spelling had not yet been standardized when the Book of Mormon was published in 1830. Although in the early 1800s individuals showed great variety in spelling in their own writing, typesetters had been using an informally agreed upon spelling standard for English, one that dated from Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755-56. John Gilbert, the typesetter for the 1830 edition, set the type for that edition of the Book of Mormon using standardized spellings, not Oliver Cowdery's misspellings.

In the second chapter, the error rate in spelling is measured for John Gilbert as well as for Oliver Cowdery and the other Book of Mormon scribes: John and Christian Whitmer (scribes in the original manuscript for the first part of 1 Nephi); and Martin Harris and Hyrum Smith (who accounted for about 15% of the printer's manuscript). Oliver Cowdery was by far the best scribe. Although he was a second-rate speller, he made relatively few scribal slips, which is the crucial issue. We can also show that Oliver's spelling improved as he proofed the 1830 typeset sheets against his manuscript copy; unlike the other scribes, he was learning how to spell better as the 1830 Book of Mormon was being printed. Martin Harris (scribe 2 of the printer's manuscript provides a significant contrast: his spelling was actually better than Oliver Cowdery's, but his scribal errors were extremely high and made him an unreliable scribe. Christian Whitmer and Hyrum Smith are, on the other hand, the worst scribes, not only in their poor spelling but also in their numerous scribal slips. We are fortunate that Oliver Cowdery was the scribe for most of the original and printer's manuscripts.

The majority of part 6 is dedicated to a complete analysis of all the nonstandard spellings in the manuscripts and the editions, organized according to sounds. For instance, under the sound /p/ the following misspellings are described (with specifications of who made them and where they were made, either in the manuscripts or in the editions):

in the manuscripts

p > pp

pp > p

non-doubling of *p* with endings

opperation, opperate; sepparateth; uppon

hapen, hapened; hapy; suplicate, suplication;

disapointment; soposing, suposed

claped, shiping, sliped, stoped, striped

in the editions

spelling variation for *p ~ pp*

worshiped ~ worshipped, worshiping ~ worshipping,
worshipers ~ worshippers

And finally, at the end of part 6, there is a complete word index for all of the misspellings and variant spellings.