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## Book of Mormon Concerns & Questions

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# BOOK OF MORMON

## *Concerns & Questions*

*“...the Book of Mormon is the keystone of [our] testimony. Just as the arch crumbles if the keystone is removed, so does all the Church stand or fall with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.”*

– PRESIDENT EZRA T. BENSON, THE BOOK OF MORMON - KEYSTONE OF OUR RELIGION

*“...everything in the Church -everything rises or falls on the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and, by implication, the Prophet Joseph Smith’s account of how it came forth...It sounds like a ‘sudden death’ proposition to me. Either the Book of Mormon is what the Prophet Joseph said it is or this Church and its founder are false, fraudulent, a deception from the first instance onward.”*

– ELDER JEFFREY R. HOLLAND, “TRUE OR FALSE”, NEW ERA, JUNE 1995

*“The Book of Mormon exists. (Now, that seems fairly fundamental.) That means somebody wrote it... Somebody created it before 1829. You have to explain who wrote it. It’s here. It’s physical. It cannot be waved away.*

– SENATOR ROBERT F. BENNETT, FINAL FIRESIDE, APRIL 10, 2016

1. What are 1769 King James Version edition errors doing in the Book of Mormon? A purported ancient text? Errors which are unique to the 1769 edition that Joseph Smith owned?

## SHORT ANSWER:

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**Your premise appears to be incorrect. The sources you cite do not provide evidence of 1769 King James Version edition errors unique to Joseph Smith's copy of the Bible.**

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## LONG ANSWER:

It's amazing to me that this objection is the first on your list, as typically people lead with their strongest argument. I would expect you to come out of the gate with something like polygamy or LDS racism or other things that I, too, find genuinely troubling in many respects. Instead, we begin with consideration of "errors" in a 1769 King James Bible.

But even that requires us to define terms and question assumptions. When you say "errors," for instance, what kind of errors are we talking about? Is this a version of the Bible that claims that the first people on earth really were Adam and Steve? Or that Monty Python's Brian of Nazareth is the true messiah? Or that cannibalism doesn't deserve the bad rap that it gets?

In my previous reply, your question included a link to [this Wikipedia article](#) that referenced "translation errors." Yet an interesting thing has happened in the two years since I first responded to your letter. The article you linked to used to say that the "King James Bible (1769) contains unique translation errors which also occur in the Book of Mormon, implying that the Book of Mormon used the KJV as a source." It's likely that language was the foundation for your question - i.e. Joseph Smith perpetuated errors unique to his copy of the Bible.

The problem is that the old article was incorrect, which means your question was in error, too.

The language in the 2016 version of the Wikipedia article has been replaced by a sentence stating that "[t]he KJV of 1769 contains translation *variations* which also occur in the Book of Mormon." [Emphasis added] The text choices are acceptable variations that adequately represent the meaning of the original, ancient text. Thus they are no longer defined as "errors," and they are certainly not errors unique to the 1769 version of the King James Bible.

That may be why you've abandoned that source and now linked to a lengthy piece by someone named Stan Larson - am I supposed to know who he is? - who is making an argument about Joseph Smith's 3 Nephi account of the Sermon on the Mount. Yet nowhere does Larson ever mention the 1769 edition of the KJV, and he frankly acknowledges that "the Book of Mormon is not a slavish copy of the KJV—there are numerous words deleted,

revised, or added to the text.” Yes, he is making a case critical of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, but it’s quite a different case from the one you reference in your question. So what seems to be happening here is that since your original source was wrong, you have found a different source, but you have not bothered to revise your original charge to reflect the new source.

Right out of the gate, that’s extraordinarily sloppy scholarship. Not a great way to begin.

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2. When King James translators were translating the KJV Bible between 1604 and 1611, they would occasionally put in their own words into the text to make the English more readable. We know exactly what these words are because they’re italicized in the KJV Bible. What are these 17th century italicized words doing in the Book of Mormon? Word for word? What does this say about the Book of Mormon being an ancient record?

## **SHORT ANSWER:**

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**It says absolutely nothing about the Book of Mormon being an ancient record, but it says a great deal about your fundamental misunderstanding of how translation works. Every word a translator uses is “their own words.” Your assumption that there’s some kind of irreducible, one-to-one, singularly correct correlation between words in two different languages makes no sense whatsoever.**

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## **LONG ANSWER:**

It’s amazing to me The insertions are more than occasional. You see italicized insertions in almost every verse. They’re usually verbs. In many cases, English uses them, and Hebrew does not. Without them, the text isn’t “less readable;” it’s essentially unreadable. Furthermore, without those words, the translation would not reflect the meaning of the original text.

You demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of how the KJV translation was performed to claim that only the italicized words, which are highlighted as an admission that they have no direct Hebrew antecedent, represent a KJV translator’s “own words.” Every word in the KJV represents a translator’s choice for how to best express the original text’s meaning as they understood it. So, really, every single word, italics or no, is a translator “put[ting] in their own words” what they think the original text means.

I saw an interesting example of this in, of all things, the latest Mission Impossible movie, where much of the action takes place in Paris. Tom Cruise ends up injuring an innocent French police officer, and he says to her, in French, “je suis désolée.”

If you put “je suis désolée” into Google Translate, it comes back with “I’m sorry.” But that’s not technically accurate. “Je” means “I,” “suis” means “am,” and “désolée” is the feminine

form of “sorry.” A perfect, word-for-word translation of Tom Cruise’s words would be “*I am sorry.*” But that’s awkward, so Google assumed we’d prefer the contraction instead.

But wait! There’s more!

When the scene was shown in the film, the subtitle came up as “I’m *so* sorry.” If you plug “I’m so sorry” into Google Translate, it offers a translation of “je suis vraiment désolé.” Except “vraiment” translates directly as “truly.” Yet if you stick “je suis vraiment désolé” back into Google translate, it tells you it means “I am *really* sorry,” not “I am *truly* sorry.”

So which is the one true translation?



The answer is all of them. Or none of them. The subtleties of language make perfect translations all but impossible, even in such a simple circumstance as this. So why did the person who wrote the subtitles add a “so” to the English version that wasn’t present in the French?

My guess is that they decided that that’s what Cruise’s character would have said had he been speaking in English, or, more specifically, that’s the best English rendition of how the police officer would have perceived the message. “I’m so sorry” is more intimate and kind than just “I’m sorry,” and it doesn’t have the awkwardness of “I am sorry.” It’s also more sincere than “I am really sorry” and less formal than “I am truly sorry.” It probably comes closest to expressing the communication that took place in that fictional moment.

Although, as a side note, it’s worth mentioning that Tom Cruise’s French pronunciation was atrocious.

Anyway, this is why you can have so many different Bible translations that express similar or close to identical meanings using widely varied vocabulary. That's also why Joseph Smith couldn't have plopped the golden plates into some 19th Century Babelfish to get the results.

This calls for another demonstration.

Here's your Question #2 again:

2. When King James translators were translating the KJV Bible between 1604 and 1611, they would occasionally put in their own words into the text to make the English more readable. We know exactly what these words are because they're italicized in the KJV Bible. What are these 17th century italicized words doing in the Book of Mormon? Word for word? What does this say about the Book of Mormon being an ancient record?

Now here's Question 2 translated into Hebrew via Google Translate:

2. בין 1604 ל KJV כאשר מתרגמים של המלך ג'יימס תרגמו את התנ"ך של 1611- הם היו מכניסים מדי פעם את המילים שלהם לטקסט כדי להפוך את האנגלית לקריא יותר. אנחנו יודעים בדיוק מה המילים האלה כי הם נטויים בתנ"ך מה הם אלה מילים מהמאה ה-17 המופיעה בספר מורמון? מילה במילה? KJV. מה זה אומר על הספר של מורמון להיות שיא עתיק?

Pretty impressive, no? Hey, just for fun, let's take that same text and translate it from Hebrew into Korean. Now it looks like this:

2. k'sr mtrgmym şl hmlk g'yymş trgmw 't htn"k şl KJV byn l 1604 -1611, hm hyw mknysym mdy p'm 't hmylym şlhm ltqst kdy lhpwk 't h'nglyt lqry' ywtr. 'nhnw ywd'ym bdywq mh hmylym h'lh ky hm ntwyym btn"k KJV. mh hm 'lh mylym mhm'h h -17 hmwpy'h bspr mwrwn? mylh bmylh? migug dalleoe daehan jumun-eun?

Keep in mind that we haven't added any of our own words, so the translation should still be solid. So we can take the Korean version and see how it translates to Bulgarian.

2. K'cp mpprmmim i şmlkg'iyms trgmmt "k" i KJV ot l 1604 -1611, çtttmşmitmtttttatatalatata tatalata KJV. mh hm'lh mylym hmh h -17 hmwpy'h bspr mwrwn? mylh bmylh? мигъг далео дайхан-полунощ?

Here's Bulgarian to Swahili:

2. Mfumo wa upeo na ufuatiliaji wa maagizo ya biashara ya kisheria KJV. Mh hmhh mylym hmh h -17 hmwpy'h bspr

mwrnw? mylh bmylh? Je, ungependa kufanya nini?

And Swahili to Japanese:

2. 法的業務KJVガイドラインの範囲と監視。 Mh hmhh mylym  
hnh h -17 hmwpy'h bspr mwrnw? ミルビー? あなたは何を  
したいですか?

And Japanese to French, without adding “je suis désolée” even once:

2. Portée et suivi des lignes directrices de KJV des services  
juridiques. Mh hhhh mylym hnh h -17 hmwpy 'h bspr mwrnw?  
Milby? Que veux-tu faire?

Now if the way you have described translation is accurate, we shouldn't have any problem taking this six-time-translated version back into English, because we haven't added any of our own words. Every word should have gone in and out of each of these translations without the addition of italicized nonsense.

Yet when we try to bring it back to its original form, we get this:

2. Scope and Follow-up of KJV Legal Services  
Guidelines. Mh hhhh mylym hnh pm -17 hmwpy 'h bspr  
mwrnw? Milby? What do you want to do?

Wow! I knew it would be nonsense, but that exceeded my expectations.( And who's Milby?)



The point is that translation requires judgment and choices on the part of the translator, and it's unlikely that any two translations of any lengths will produce significantly similar, let alone identical, texts.

So when you ask “What does this say about the Book of Mormon being an ancient record?” you’re asking the wrong question. This doesn’t say anything about whether or not the Book of Mormon is an ancient record. The KJV verbiage is considered by most scholars to be a perfectly adequate representation of the original Isaiah text, so if the same original Isaiah text existed on the Small Plates of Nephi, the version in 2 Nephi would also constitute an acceptable rendition of the original author’s intent.

So the better question is the one you never quite ask but which is an unspoken assumption undergirding Questions 1 and 2: – regardless of errors or italics, why is there KJV language in the Book of Mormon at all?

If Joseph Smith’s translation were being performed in the same manner as the KJV translation was performed, then Joseph would have the responsibility to clothe the Hebrew concepts in the English language with his own word choices. And, as I noted above, his choices would not be at all likely to be significantly similar, let alone identical, to a 17th Century translator in Jacobean England. So the logical conclusion is the one your question implies – Joseph was a simple plagiarist.

Except it’s not nearly so simple.

Because the fact is that there are oodles of departures from the King James language in the Book of Mormon. 54 percent of the Isaiah verses in the Book of Mormon are at least slightly different from the KJV and many of them are very difficult to explain if all Joseph was doing was copying from a dusty Bible on the bookshelf. For instance, 2 Nephi 12:16 combines elements from the Septuagint (“upon all the ships of the sea”) and the KJV (“and upon all the ships of Tarshish”) in a way that no other version of Isaiah 2:16 does. Both wouldn’t be there if all Joseph were doing was cutting and pasting.

I don’t know what status you give Hugh Nibley – was he an official or unofficial apologist? He was on the BYU payroll, after all. Regardless of what badge he wore, he clarifies this issue better than I could. I will be quoting from the good Dr. Nibley repeatedly over the course of this reply, so I thought I’d set his words apart in a different color. I chose red, the color of fire, as Nibley’s words are often the crucible in which nonsense goes to die.

And why should anyone quoting the Bible to American readers of 1830 not follow the only version of the Bible known to them?

Actually the Bible passages quoted in the Book of Mormon often differ from the King James Version, but where the latter is correct there is every reason why it should be followed. When Jesus and the Apostles and, for that matter, the Angel Gabriel quote the scriptures in

the New Testament, do they recite from some mysterious Urtext? Do they quote the prophets of old in the ultimate original? Do they give their own inspired translations? No, they do not. They quote the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament prepared in the third century B.C. Why so? Because that happened to be the received standard version of the Bible accepted by the readers of the Greek New Testament. When "holy men of God" quote the scriptures it is always in the received standard version of the people they are addressing.

We do not claim the King James Version of the Septuagint to be the original scriptures—in fact, nobody on earth today knows where the original scriptures are or what they say. Inspired men have in every age have been content to accept the received version of the people among whom they labored, with the Spirit giving correction where correction was necessary.

We have precious little information about how the process actually worked, but the D&C suggests that it was not a passive exercise on Joseph's part. D&C 9, the only contemporaneous document we have that describes the Book of Mormon translation in any respect, implies that the process required Joseph to "study it out in [his] mind" ([D&C 9:8](#)). This would suggest that it was Joseph's responsibility to clothe the text in language, so his word choices may have influenced the final text in much the same way as any conventional translator's would have.

Yet there is also a growing body of really fascinating research to suggest Joseph was engaged in what some refer to as a "tight" translation that limited his input. Royal Skousen's "[Critical Text Project](#)" demonstrates that what initially seemed like bad grammar turns out to be consistent examples of Early Modern English, which dates from the the century prior to the KJV translation. Certainly Early Modern English would not have been the idiom Joseph Smith or any other 19th Century author would have used in writing an original work, nor is it an idiom that is present in anything else Joseph Smith wrote over the course of his lifetime.

In a tight translation, KJV language becomes far less problematic, as it would suggest that this was the language that the Lord gave Joseph Smith to read aloud to Oliver, and so the Lord, not Joseph, is responsible for the similarities between the two texts. For my part, it makes sense to me that the Lord would provide Joseph language with which he, and most of the Bible-reading world, would be comfortably familiar rather than an entirely different translation of the same material, as the mighty Hugh Nibley has argued.

And again, it's important to note that this material wasn't transcribed by Joseph but by Oliver, and there are plenty of witnesses to the process who insist that Joseph didn't have any manuscript from which to read. There are also sections of the original Book of Mormon manuscript that demonstrate that Oliver was receiving the information from Joseph aurally, not copying out of a book. We'll get to that in a moment.

Back to more of your Question #2, where you quote scriptures to prove your point.

ISAIAH 9:1 (KJV)

*Nevertheless the dimness **shall not be** such as **was** in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her **by** the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.*

2 NEPHI 19:1

*Nevertheless, the dimness **shall not be** such as **was** in her vexation, when at first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, and afterwards did more grievously afflict **by** the way of the **Red** Sea beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations.*

The above example, 2 Nephi 19:1, dated in the Book of Mormon to be around 550 BC, quotes nearly verbatim from the 1611 AD translation of Isaiah 9:1 KJV – including the translators’ italicized words. Additionally, the Book of Mormon describes the sea as the Red Sea. The problem with this is that (a) Christ quoted Isaiah in Matt. 4:14-15 and did not mention the Red Sea, (b) “Red” sea is not found in any source manuscripts, and (c) the Red Sea is 250 miles away.

We’ve dealt with the italics issue above - all the words are the translators words, Milby, and not just the italicized ones - but there’s absolutely no question that “Red Sea” is a mistake. What’s interesting, though, is that it’s a mistake that severely undermines your first accusation of plagiarism.

After all, this is a mistake that has nothing to do with a 1679 version of the KJV. It is a mistake that is unique to the Book of Mormon. And there’s another mistake in the Book of Mormon with no KJV antecedent that helps to explain what’s going on here.

3 Nephi 25:2 reads, “But unto you that fear my name, shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall.” This is identical to Malachi 4:2, except that the word “Son” is used in place of “Sun.” The two words are homophones in English but not similar at all in Hebrew or Egyptian.

Again, it’s a mistake, but it’s also evidence that the Book of Mormon was produced by the very process that Joseph described, with Joseph reading text aloud and Oliver transcribing what he heard. In this instance, Joseph probably said “Sun” and Oliver wrote “Son,” and that was that. (Your favorite “unofficial apologists” at [FAIR](#) describe why this is probably the same reason why the Red Sea makes its erroneous appearance in 2 Nephi 19:1.)

Many who have examined the original Book of Mormon manuscript have concluded from the handwriting that it was written in short bursts, with Oliver transcribing a few sentences, stopping, and then starting again.

From Richard Bushman's Rough Stone Rolling, page 72:

Close scrutiny of the manuscript (by a believing scholar) seems to support transcription. Judging from the way Cowdery wrote down the words, Joseph saw twenty to thirty words at a time, dictated them, and then waited for the next twenty to appear. Difficult names (Zenoch, Amalickiah) were spelled out.

Why would they do this? Nobody else was watching. If this is a fraud, why read out the whole thing in such a painstaking, time-consuming process, especially the words of the King James Bible that they could have been copied using far simpler methods? Isn't this a ridiculously clumsy way to plagiarize? Doesn't it suggest that maybe something else was happening?

Those probably are not the kind of question that interest you, because they don't easily lend themselves to your theory that the Book of Mormon is a transparent fraud. But there is an important question raised by my admission of mistakes in the Book of Mormon text - namely, if this is the word of God brought forth by miraculous means, then why would it have any errors in it at all?

The Book of Mormon itself provides the definitive answer to that question on its very first page. "And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ." Again, that's on the first page. The *first frickin' page*. It's been on the first page since 1830 when the book was originally published. How can anyone claim that the Book of Mormon ought to be inerrant when the Book of Mormon itself has always announced its errancy on its very first page?

Latter-day Saint theology puts the doctrine of agency at the center of our faith. Agency is the one thing God will never interfere with and never deny. Yet agency and infallibility are wholly incompatible, and we live in a fallen, imperfect world. We do not believe in infallible or inerrant prophets; inerrant scripture, or anything produced by mortals that cannot be mistaken. That requires each of us to rely solely on the Lord Jesus Christ, the only perfect being to ever walk the earth.

The Book of Mormon draws us closer to God, but it is not God, and we do not worship it. We should not be surprised that human weakness has not been excised from its pages.

#### MALACHI 3:10 (KJV)

*...and pour you out a blessing, that **there shall not be room enough to receive it.***

#### 3 NEPHI 24:10

*...and pour you out a blessing that **there shall not be room enough to receive it.***

In the above example, the KJV translators added 7 italicized words to their English translation, which are not found in the source Hebrew manuscripts. Why does the Book of Mormon, which is supposed to have been completed by Moroni over 1,400 years prior, contain the exact identical seven italicized words of 17th century translators?

We've covered this. Just about every verse in Isaiah has these kinds of italicized words, and your citation of them demonstrates a profound ignorance of how conventional translation works. So how does this add to your argument?

But okay, just for funsies, let's take out those seven words. If Joseph had rendered 3 Nephi 24:10 as "... and pour you out a blessing that not enough," which would be the kind of one-to-one, word-for-word translation you seem to be expecting, would you then consider him a prophet? My guess is that you would probably complain that he had offered up a terribly incoherent translation.

And you would be right.

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3 . The Book of Mormon includes mistranslated biblical passages that were later changed in Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible. These Book of Mormon verses should match the inspired JST version instead of the incorrect KJV version that Joseph later fixed. A typical example of the differences between the BOM, the KJV, and the JST:

3 NEPHI 13:25-27

25: ...Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26: Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

MATTHEW 6:25-27

*(From the King James Version Bible – not the JST)*

25: Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26: Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

MATTHEW 6:25-27

*(Joseph Smith Translation of the same passages in the LDS Bible)*

25: And, again, I say unto you, Go ye into the world, and care not for the world: for the world will hate you, and will persecute you, and will turn you out of their synagogues.

26: Nevertheless, ye shall go forth from house to house, teaching the people; and I will go before you.

27: And your heavenly Father will provide for you, whatsoever things ye need for food, what ye shall eat; and for raiment, what ye shall wear or put on.

Christ's Sermon on the Mount in the Bible and the Book of Mormon are identical. But Joseph Smith later corrected the Bible. In doing so, he also contradicted the same identical Sermon on the Mount passage in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is "the most correct book" and was translated a mere decade before the JST. The Book of Mormon was not corrupted over time and did not need correcting. How is it that the Book of Mormon has the incorrect Sermon on the Mount passage and does not match the correct JST version in the first place?

## **SHORT ANSWER:**

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**"The most correct book" is a clear admission that the Book of Mormon is not inerrant. In addition, the Book of Mormon account of the Sermon on the Mount is actually significantly different from the King James Version account and entirely consistent with the JST, but you obscure that difference with the ellipsis you use at the beginning of your partial quote of 3 Nephi:25.**

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## **LONG ANSWER:**

To answer your question, I think we have to define some terms. The first is the idea that the Book of Mormon is "the most correct book." The second is the concept of translation as it specifically relates to the JST. We'll take them both in turn.

The idea of "the most correct book" comes from Joseph Smith's famous statement on the subject, which reads as follows:

I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.

Fair enough. But what does that mean, exactly?

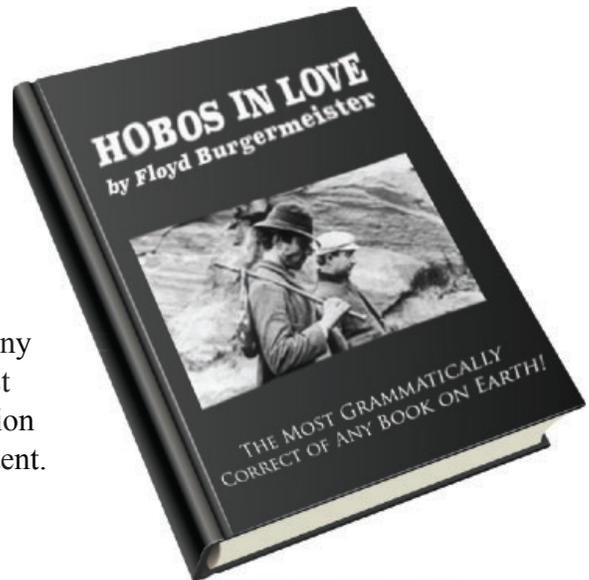
Your question implies that this is somehow a claim of Book of Mormon inerrancy, when, in fact, it's precisely the opposite. If the Book of Mormon is the "most correct" book, that means that all other books, to one extent or another, are less correct, and therefore contain a degree of error. But it also a clear admission that the Book of Mormon itself also contains error. Joseph Smith does not state that the Book of Mormon is "entirely correct," or "always correct," or "the perfectly correct book." He is offering a comparison rather than issuing an ultimatum.

If the Bible and other books were only, say, 2% correct, and the Book of Mormon were 3% correct, it would still be "the most correct" under those circumstances, even if 97% of it were incorrect. (I personally don't think the Bible is only 2% correct or that the Book of Mormon is only 3% correct; I'm pushing this to an extreme to illustrate the point.) The comparison highlights the fact that, while no religious texts are perfect, the Book of Mormon is the best

of the lot.

It's also necessary to define what Joseph Smith, and those who quote him, actually mean when they say the Book of Mormon is "correct" in any respect – least, most, or otherwise. How comprehensively should we interpret that adjective? Is it more correct than, say, Stephen Hawking's "A Brief History of Time" on the subject of black holes? No, the Book of Mormon doesn't even mention black holes, so Hawking's book is demonstrably more scientifically correct than the Book of Mormon. Okay, then is the Book of Mormon the most grammatically correct of any book on earth? It clearly isn't, although I don't know what book would be. ("Hey, Bob, you really ought to read *Hobos in Love* by Floyd Burgermeister. It's a terrible story, but it's the most grammatically correct of any book on earth.")

In the context of the original statement, it's clear Joseph is talking about the "precepts" that the Book of Mormon teaches and nothing else. In other words, if you're looking to learn godly precepts while you're stranded on a desert island, and you're only allowed to have one book with you, then you ought to choose the Book of Mormon, as it's your best bet for drawing closer to God. Science, grammar, spelling, penmanship – the correctness of any of those elements don't come into play at all. To insist that they do is to push a tortured legalistic interpretation of Joseph Smith's simple statement and distort his intent.



Now let's turn our attention to the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible, which is unlike the KJV translation or most other biblical translations in that it was not the transfer of religious text from language to another. Joseph loosely tossed the word "translation" around to describe a number of different processes, some of which were definitionally similar to what the KJV translators did, but many, indeed perhaps most, of which were not. The production of the JST was performed by a "translation" method that was, by all accounts, not that kind of translation at all.

In "translating" the Bible, Joseph read the English KJV text and then recorded revelations that he received in doing so. Large passages of text from the JST have no extant ancient text from which they were derived, nor did Joseph claim to have those ancient texts in his possession, although he did suggest that many such revelations were representations of ancient texts that had been lost. The most obvious example is the Book of Moses, which was revealed to Joseph during his "translation" of Genesis, despite the fact that, as far as we know, he never saw the original ancient text of the Book of Moses. Joseph would refer to this as a translation and insist that what he had written were indeed the words of Moses, but this process did not require him to read ideas in one language and find the proper words for them in English, which is what traditional translators do.

So, equipped with these two freshly-defined premises, let's return to your question. You seem concerned that the JST is "correcting" the KJV and the Book of Mormon, a book Joseph

described as “the most correct.” But there’s absolutely no reason to see the JST language as “correcting” anything in the Book of Mormon. The precepts stated in the B of M version of the Sermon on the Mount are still correct precepts. The JST simply offer additional information that supplements rather than corrects the original information, just as the Book of Moses doesn’t replace Genesis but, rather, adds to it.

Actually, you could make a case that the JST is “correcting” the KJV, since the KJV version offers a general application for the “take no thought what ye shall eat” principle, while the JST suggests that this was advice specific to the apostles, not the general church membership.

But the irony, here, is that this is identical to the precepts put forward in the Book of Mormon.

In your question, you use an ellipsis when you quote 3 Nephi 13:25, which would lead a casual reader to assume that 3 Nephi 13:25 is identical to Matthew 6:25. It isn’t. You left out a very important part.

Here’s 3 Nephi 13:25 in full:

And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he looked upon the twelve whom he had chosen, and said unto them: Remember the words which I have spoken. For behold, ye are they whom I have chosen to minister unto this people. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

So it turns out the Book of Mormon directs this passage to the apostles and not to the church membership at large and therefore departs from the KJV in precisely the same way the JST does, only it does so using different language. Thus the JST isn’t correcting the Book of Mormon at all; they’re both saying the same thing.

And if you’re going to be intellectually consistent, I don’t think you can complain that the same ideas are being expressed in different language, when your initial objection to the Book of Mormon is its inclusion of identical language to translate the same ancient text.

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4. DNA analysis 10 has concluded that Native American Indians do not originate from the Middle East or from Israelites but rather from Asia. Why did the Church change the following section of the introduction page in the 2006 edition 11 Book of Mormon, shortly after the DNA results were released?

“...the Lamanites, and they are the principal ancestors of the American Indians”

to

“...the Lamanites, and they are among the ancestors of the American Indians”

UPDATE: The Church conceded in its January 2014 [Book of Mormon and DNA Studies essay](#) that the majority of Native Americans carry largely Asian DNA . The Church, through

this essay, makes a major shift in narrative from its past dominant narrative and claims of the origins of the Native American Indians.

## SHORT ANSWER:

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**The change in a non-scriptural introduction was made because the new sentence is likely more accurate than the original sentence. If the translated text of the Book of Mormon concedes that it contains errors, surely we shouldn't expect a non-revelatory introduction written well over a century after Joseph Smith's death to be inerrant, should we?**

**As for DNA, we are both way out of our depth, although it's safe to say that your facile conclusion that all Native Americans are of Asiatic descent is scientifically indefensible.**

---

## LONG ANSWER:

I first responded to the CES Letter in 2016, so I presumed the [Church's 2014 DNA essay](#) had been incorporated into that earlier version. I can understand why you ignored it, as it decimates your contention that DNA science has issued a definitive conclusion about Native American ancestry. Anyone who still has questions or concerns about what DNA research has to say about the Book of Mormon ought to read that essay, as it covers topics that neither you nor I have any qualifications to address.

What's important to realize is that science rarely, if ever, reaches a final answer. It is always open to new information, some of which it received in 2013 when a [study determined](#) that some Native Americans do, in fact, have Middle Eastern and European DNA. [Another 2014 study](#) found that "Cherokee Native Americans have Middle Eastern ancestry - ancestry that cannot be accounted for by modern admixture, but which is rooted in the ancient origins of the people."

Indeed, a great deal of scientific information has come out about Native American origins since you first published your letter and the Church published its essay. [The Journal of Nature](#) conducted research which found that the conventional theory about an initial migration across a Bering Strait ice bridge is probably false. As reported in the [LA Times](#), the journal Science discovered evidence of Australian and Micronesian ancestry in Native American DNA and concluded that "that founding migrations occurred in more than one wave."

Certainly none of this proves the Book of Mormon - are Australian Nephites fair dinkum? - but it demonstrates that reaching a sweeping, final



conclusion about Native American origins is, at this point, scientifically impossible.

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5. Anachronisms: Horses, cattle, oxen, sheep, swine, goats, elephants, wheels, chariots, wheat, silk, steel, and iron did not exist in pre-Columbian America during Book of Mormon times. Why are these things mentioned in the Book of Mormon as being made available in the Americas between 2200 BC - 421 AD?

Unofficial apologists claim victories in some of these items but closer inspection reveals significant problems. It has been documented that apologists have manipulated wording so that steel is not steel, sheep become never-domesticated bighorn sheep, horses become tapirs, etc.

## **SHORT ANSWER:**

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**The second paragraph of your question is an acknowledgment that there are fewer Book of Mormon anachronisms now than in the past, which is demonstrably true. That's not how it's supposed to work. Frauds always look clumsier over time, while precisely the opposite has happened with the Book of Mormon.**

---

## **LONG ANSWER:**

You added that second paragraph since the last time I responded, and while it includes a reference to tapirs, I'm glad it doesn't refer to BYU Professor Daniel Peterson as "Tapir Dan," which seems to be the preferred epithet you use when you're not addressing Dr. Peterson as "Danny Boy." For someone who bristles at even the hint of insults and ad hominem attacks, you often seem quite comfortable in slinging them at those with whom you disagree.

Regardless, Paragraph #2 here strikes me as an admission of the weakness of your argument. Because even in the two years since the first version of this reply, evidence has come forward that suggests perhaps these things are not as anachronistic as you claim them to be.

Just this year, carbon dating in Mexico uncovered new evidence for (non-tapir) horses in America at the time of the Nephites. LiDAR technology has uncovered astonishing evidence of massive ancient cities in Guatamala, the area where most believing scholars argue that the Book of Mormon took place. Researchers now insist that these people were far more technologically advanced than previously assumed, which means that many more discoveries likely await.

From my perspective, the value of the LiDAR data cannot be overstated. Modern scientific descriptions of "the ubiquity of defensive walls, ramparts, terraces, and fortresses" almost sound like they were lifted right out of the Book of Alma. LiDAR also has found compelling evidence of animal domestication that could make many more of your charges against Book

of Mormon anachronisms obsolete. Of course, it's impossible to predict the future.

What's remarkable, however, is that the Book of Mormon, as your question's second paragraph concedes, is actually *less* anachronistic than it was when you first wrote your letter.

It's not supposed to work that way.

With the passage of time, frauds look increasingly obvious, and more and more anachronisms pile up. With the Book of Mormon, time has reduced the anachronisms rather than added to them. Long after Joseph Smith and his generation were long gone, scholars have discovered ancient poetic forms and authentic Hebrew and Egyptian names in the Book of Mormon text, and they've even identified specific locations along Lehi's trail. Nahom is a significant problem, indeed, but it's a problem for you, not the "unofficial apologists."



*"And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom."  
- 1 Nephi 16:34*

*An altar at Nahom, a burial site, discovered after Joseph Smith's death, that is exactly where the Book of Mormon said it would be. A significant problem for unofficial church critics.*

My late father tested the waters of unofficial apologetics when he wrote a book a few years ago titled *Leap of Faith: Confronting the Origins of the Book of Mormon*, which was published by Deseret Book. It offers a unique perspective I haven't found from any other source, as it compares and contrasts the Book of Mormon with his firsthand accounts of modern frauds he encountered while working for billionaire Howard Hughes way back in the day.

Dad was the head of PR for Howard Hughes for several years until Hughes died, leaving no will behind. Shortly thereafter, a man named Melvin Dummar plopped a forged Hughes will

onto the front desk of the Church Office Building. It left 1/14th of Hughes's estate to Dummar, a Utah gas station attendant, because Dummar had supposedly picked Hughes up when he was hitchhiking in Las Vegas. (This became the plot of the Oscar-winning movie *Melvin and Howard*.) A lot of people were persuaded at the time that the will was genuine, but two glaring anachronisms doomed Dummar's dreams of inherited wealth.

From *Leap of Faith*, pages 27-28:

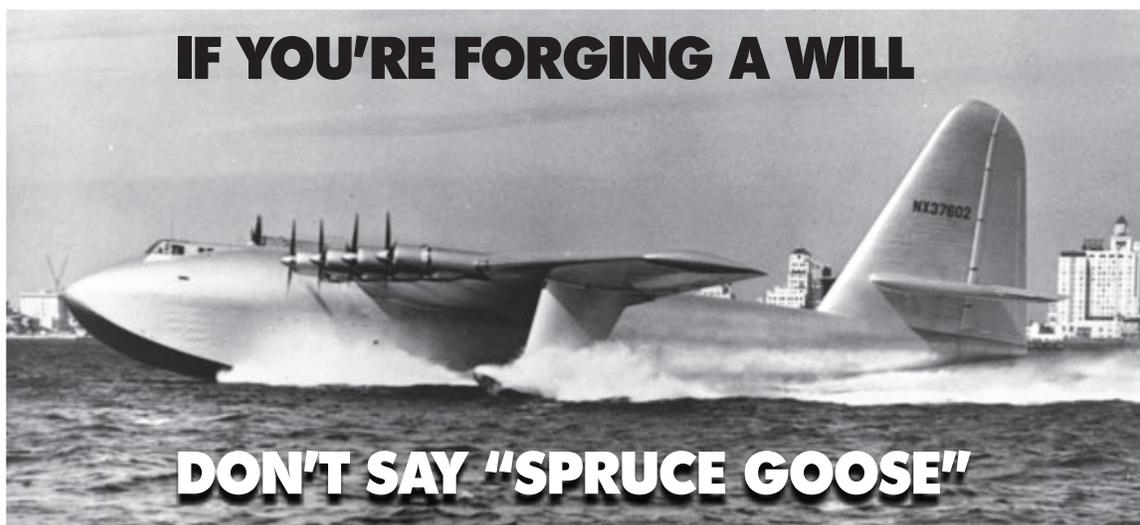
The "will" contained many references to things considered known items of Hughes lore. Two examples:

It named Noah Dietrich as executor of Hughes estate and directed that the "Spruce Goose," Hughes most famous airplane, be given to the City of Long Beach.

Dietrich had been Hughes' Chief Executive for many years and the plane had been housed in a Long Beach hanger for over three decades, so, for many reporters, these two provisions seemed very logical and demonstrated that Hughes had, in fact, written the will. Their stories treated it as genuine.

For those of us who worked for the Hughes companies and knew his history, however, either one of these stipulations demonstrated conclusively that Hughes had not written the will. He and Dietrich had a serious falling out, and Dietrich was fired in a bitter parting. He would have been the last man Hughes would have named to handle his estate.

As for the airplane, neither Hughes nor anyone close to him ever called it the *Spruce Goose*. The title had been made up by the press because the plane was made almost entirely of wood (metal materials were scarce in the Second World War) and Hughes hated the name, considering it a trivializing insult to a serious effort. He would never have written a will referring to the plane as anything but the *Flying Boat* or its formal designation, the HK-1.



These were the biggest mistakes Dummar made, but they were not the only ones. As time passed, the glaring errors in the fraud were transparently obvious. But whereas the Dummar Will is typical of forgeries, the Book of Mormon is anything but.

From Leap of Faith, page 216:

Picture a ledger sheet with the arguments of believers on the right side and of the critics on the left. Label it 1830.

In 1830, all the external evidence was on the left side of the ledger, in favor of the critics. Writing on metal plates? Ridiculous; an obvious invention. Large cities in America, inhabited by the ancestors of the Indians? Nonsense; the Indians are nomadic tribesmen who live in tents...

Think of the same ledger sheet, labeled 2009. Metal plates with writing on them, hidden in the ground for later generations to find? Joseph was right on that one; move it from the left side of the ledger to the right, as a mark in the book's favor. Big cities among the Indians? Whether they were Nephite cities or not, there were clearly big cities with large populations in Meso-America before Columbus... Add to those items the others we have covered in the previous chapters that have come to light in just the last half century, and it is clear that the passage of time has put a good many new items on the right side of the ledger (in favor of the book) and removed some of the old ones on the left (against it).

Such a trend is significant, because truth is the daughter of time. With most forgeries, the farther you get from its date of production, the clumsier it looks. In the case of the Book of Mormon, the farther we get from the date of its production, the better it looks.

Since 2009, when that book was published, there have been more things that have been added to the right side of the ledger. And I'd be willing to bet there will be many more, as well as a decreasing number of anachronisms and an increasing number of "significant problems" for you.

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6. Archaeology: There is absolutely no archaeological evidence to directly support the Book of Mormon or the Nephites and Lamanites, who were supposed to have numbered in the millions.

## **SHORT ANSWER:**

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**Nonsense. There is a great deal of direct Old World archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon, as well as a growing body of archaeological evidence in the New World, too.**

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## LONG ANSWER:

My short answer covers all of your question, but I'm going to need to break the the full text of Question #6 into bite-sized chunks, as your lengthy question raises a host of issues that need to be comprehensively addressed in turn.

One of the biggest canards of critics of the Book of Mormon is that there is “no archaeological evidence” to support it. But the fact of the matter is that's simply not true.

The bulk of the events chronicled in the Book of Mormon take place in the New World, and the debate still rages as to where, specifically, readers ought to place the geographical setting for the Nephite narrative. But there is no debate as to where the book of 1 Nephi takes place. Lehi's family left Jerusalem, traveled on foot across Arabia, stopped at the water, and built a ship to sail across the ocean. These events took place in verifiable locations, and modern discoveries have archaeologically verified the trajectory of Lehi's journey in every respect.

My father wrote about this extensively, and since his passing, I've gotten digital copies of *Leap of Faith*. The following is a lengthy excerpt from the fourth digital draft of his book, so it may vary slightly from the printed edition:

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A great deal of new information is now available. The bulk of Nephi's story takes place in the wilderness between Jerusalem and the Red Sea, lands that have not changed appreciably from that time to this, and this area is now more open to Westerners than it has ever been before. That means we can check on the details Nephi mentions, something that [B.H.] Roberts could not do. A few examples:

### *The presence of water:*

Nephi says the family camped in a valley, three days journey from Jerusalem, in which there was a river, flowing continually to the Red Sea. It is from this site that he and his brothers went back to Jerusalem to fetch the Brass Plates from Laban. This statement has raised considerable skepticism because Saudi Arabia, which is presumably where such a camp site would have been, is known as one of the few countries on Earth that has no rivers. For many years, the book's supporters had no answer for this discrepancy. Now, some of them think they have.

Some Western scholars were in Arabia in 1996 on a search for the Biblical Mount Ararat. As they talked with local Arabs about ancient geography, they were referred to an area known as the “Waters of Moses,” a site where water comes out of the ground, reputed to have been the spot where Moses struck a rock with his staff to provide water for the thirsty Israelites in the wilderness. The Americans went there more for curiosity than anything else.

When they arrived in the area, they found, not far from the “Waters of Moses,” a stream running through a valley all the way to the Red Sea. There was every indication that it ran year round, and, like most of the topography of the region, had been there for centuries if not millennia. Those familiar with The Book of Mormon

began to wonder if they had, in fact, found the river of which Nephi spoke, even though one would be hard pressed to call this stream a river in terms of the mighty rivers of the world.

The valley through which this river runs is seventy five miles south of Jerusalem, which puts it within the three days journey time that Nephi mentions. It is unknown and unmarked on any Western maps. Whether it is or isn't the place spoken of by Nephi is open to debate, but its discovery demonstrates that Nephi's story is entirely plausible on this point.

And it is in a place that no Westerner knew about before 1996.

*Archeology and the route of the march:*

Nephi says that the party proceeded in a Southeastern direction. The narrative is specific – very specific – about where they went, in a desert where conditions have not changed over the millennia. Nephi's description is so precise that it is possible to reconstruct a map of the possible wanderings of the family, as follows:



From *Lehi in the Desert* by *Hugh Nibley*, page 112

That means that Nephi's description of the journey can now be tested against current conditions and locations in the area, and it must meet a very rigorous standard with respect to its archeology.

It does.

In just the past few years, believing scholars have traveled along the route suggested by the map and discovered some very interesting things:

The route closely approximates what is known as the "Incense Trail," a route followed in the ancient world by those trading in incense and other goods. One location on that trail was a mining site, from which a great deal of precious metal – primarily gold – was taken. Many archeologists believe that this site was the one known as "King Solomon's Mines."

Nephi said that he made the plates on which his narrative was engraved himself. This stop along the route supposedly followed by Lehi's party is a very logical source from which the gold he used could have come.

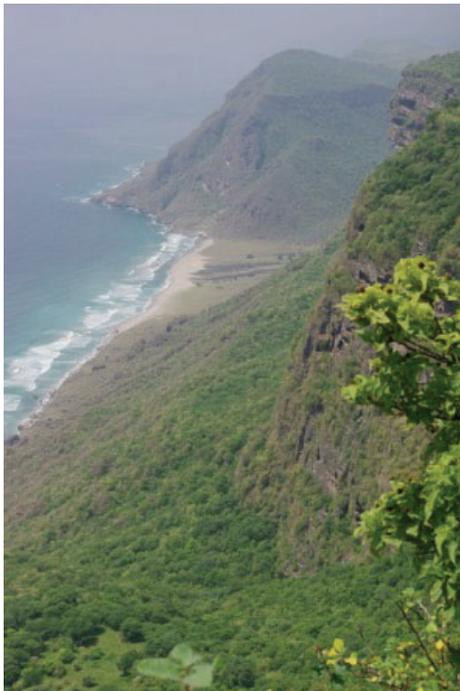
After the mines, the route goes by what was once an important city, one whose ruins have only recently been discovered. Modern archeologists have found that the name of the city, engraved in stone, was NHM, a word written without vowels, as was the Hebrew tradition in the centuries before Christ.

Nephi's narrative records the death of Ishmael and identifies the place where he was buried as "Nahom." Archeologists working in NHM have found a significant burial ground that contained both Egyptian and non-Egyptian graves. Putting name and function together, a believing scholar calls the discovery of NHM/Nahom "an archeological bulls-eye" in support of Nephi's story.

Toward the end of their eight year period in the desert wilderness, the record says that they came to a land so rich with vegetation that they named it "Bountiful." Nephi says that they did this after turning eastward; previously they had been traveling in southeast direction. One Church leader, John A. Widstoe, in a book titled, *Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?* says that the turn eastward occurred at the nineteenth parallel. He quotes Joseph Smith himself as the source of this information.

Turning directly east on the nineteenth parallel would have taken Lehi's family to a geographical location on the Arabian Peninsula that fits Nephi's description of "Bountiful" perfectly, the Qara mountains.

In his book, *Arabia Felix*, Bertram Thomas describes them:



*What a glorious place! Mountains three thousand feet high basking above a tropical ocean, their seaward slopes velvety with waving jungle, their roofs fragrant with rolling yellow meadows, beyond which the mountains slope northwards to a red sandstone steppe. . . Great was my delight when in 1928 I suddenly came upon it from out of the arid wastes of the southern borderlands.*

Thomas is reported to be one of the first Europeans to see this location, a century after Joseph Smith. I have searched through books on Palestine that were current in the 1820s, to see if Joseph Smith could have had a contemporary source for this knowledge, and I have not been able to find a similar description. The first recorded Western discovery of similar mountains in what is now Oman, on the twenty-fifth parallel, came in 1838, too late to have been available to a forger in 1829.

All of this is important because one of the most persistent criticisms of The Book of Mormon is that it fails the test of archeology; it does not give any recognizable descriptions of landmarks that have been uncovered in pre-Colombian America... A careful reading of it makes it clear that it is never specific enough in its description of places in the Western Hemisphere to justify anyone saying, for certain, “This is a Book of Mormon site.” ... In the Middle East, however, as we have seen, the situation is very different. Whoever wrote the portion of the “book within a book” attributed to Nephi knew the geography of the Arabian Peninsula very well – better than anyone in America in Joseph Smith’s time (or B. H. Roberts’ time, a century later, for that matter.) I have not been able to find any published challenges to believers’ claims regarding the specificity of these locations.

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The Old World parallels in 1 Nephi are overwhelming, but in terms of geography, archaeology, and literary references that would have been unavailable in 1829. As Hugh Nibley stated in *Lehi in the Desert*:

“It would have been quite as impossible for the most learned man alive in 1830 to have written the book as it was for Joseph Smith. And whoever would account for the Book of Mormon by any theory suggested so far—save one—must completely rule out the first forty pages.”

It simply will not do to say that there is “absolutely no archaeological evidence” in support of the Book of Mormon. As demonstrated above, in the Old World, there is a great deal of evidence that you never address or even acknowledge in your letter. Why do you ignore it? Don’t the people who donate to your foundation deserve to know all the facts?

I’ll get to the New World evidence as I address the rest of your question.

This is one of the reasons why unofficial apologists have developed the Limited Geography Model (it happened in Central or South America)...

No. The theory that the Book of Mormon took place in Central or South America can be documented to have been around since at least 1842, when the Times and Seasons, the Church paper edited by Joseph Smith at the time, published three unsigned editorials detailing Mesoamerican Book of Mormon theories.

Even earlier, in September of 1841, Joseph Smith received a copy of the book titled *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* from a recent convert named John Bernhisel. The prophet then wrote a letter to Bernhisel that said the following (original spelling and punctuation preserved):

I received your kind present by the hand of Er [Elder] Woodruff & feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship which to me is the more interesting as it unfolds & developes many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon; I have read the volumes with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that of all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprehensive.

To say that the idea of the Book of Mormon in a Central American setting is a late product of “unofficial apologists” is to ignore the words of the prophet himself.

... and claim that the Hill Cumorah mentioned as the final battle of the Nephites is not in Palmyra, New York but is elsewhere. This is in direct contradiction to what Joseph Smith and other prophets have taught.

It is not, in fact, in direct contradiction to anything Joseph Smith taught. Joseph never made reference to the hill in New York as Cumorah. No identification of the drumlin in New York as Cumorah can be found in the Doctrine and Covenants or any canonized revelation.

Even a cursory reading of the Book of Mormon makes it clear that the Hill Cumorah isn’t the hill in upstate New York where Joseph got the plates. In Mormon 6:6, Mormon states that he “hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, *save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni.*” [Emphasis added.] So the plates Moroni had after the massive bloody battle at Cumorah were specifically *not* plates that had been buried there. Moroni then spends decades wandering with these plates, presumably getting as far away from Cumorah as possible, and then buries them up for Joseph to find in an area far removed the Cumoran carnage.

It is correct to say that many Church leaders have equated the New York Hill with Cumorah, but the Church's official position on Book of Mormon geography has always been one of neutrality, and they have scrupulously avoided officially jumping in to the long-running debate over where the Book of Mormon took place.

Now is it true that many – but not all – prophets, apostles, and members have long believed, and many still believe, that the New York hill is the BoM Cumorah. We keep coming back to infallibility and the lack thereof, and so many of your objections are rooted in the idea that if even apostles make mistakes like this, the Church can't be true.

That's not just wrong; it's bad doctrine.

Mormons ought to realize that agency trumps infallibility every single time. In the absence of direct revelation, speculation fills the gaps. There is no direct revelation about the specific whereabouts of any Book of Mormon location, so prophets and anyone else are perfectly capable of acting in good faith and still reaching incorrect conclusions, which seems to be precisely what they did in this instance. Like it or not, that's how agency works. That's mortality. That's life, in and out of the Church.

It also makes little sense in light of the Church's visitor's center near the Hill Cumorah in New York and the annual Church-sponsored Hill Cumorah pageants.

It makes a great deal of sense. It's still the hill where Joseph got the plates, so it's quite significant to Book of Mormon history.

We read about two major war battles that took place at the Hill Cumorah (Ramah to the Jaredites) with deaths numbering in the tens of thousands – the last battle between Lamanites and Nephites around 400 AD claimed at least 230,000 deaths on the Nephite side alone. No bones, hair, chariots, swords, armor, or any other evidence of a battle whatsoever has been found at this site.

None in upstate New York, no, which is not at all surprising, as the Book of Mormon itself makes it crystal clear that that's not where either Cumorah or Ramah actually was.

John E. Clark, director of BYU's archaeological organization, wrote in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 17 :

*“In accord with these general observations about New York and Pennsylvania, we come to our principal object – the Hill Cumorah. Archaeologically speaking, it is a clean hill. No artifacts, no walls, no trenches, no arrowheads. The area immediately surrounding the hill is similarly clean. Pre-Columbian people did not settle or build here. This is not the place of Mormon's last stand. We must look elsewhere for that hill.”*

And I agree with him. As do a growing number of faithful Church members.

Compare this with the archaeological evidence of other hillside battle sites. Caerau Hillfort, in the Wales capital of Cardiff, was found to have abundant archaeological evidence of inhabitants and weapons of war dating as far back as 3600 BC in the form of stone arrowheads, tools, and pottery.

That's because a battle took place there, and no battle took place at the New York drumlin. Given that the most respected Book of Mormon scholars currently writing agree with you that the New York drumlin wasn't the Book of Mormon Cumorah, I don't understand what you accomplish by belaboring this point.

Compare the absent evidence of remains of Book of Mormon civilizations to the archaeological remains of other past civilizations such as the Roman occupation of Britain and other countries. There are abundant evidences of their presence during the first 400 years AD such as villas, mosaic floors, public baths, armor, weapons, writings, art, pottery, and so on. Even the major road systems used today in some of these occupied countries were built by the Romans. Additionally, there is ample evidence of the Mayan and Aztec civilizations as well as a civilization in current day Texas that dates back at least 15,000 years . Another recent discovery has been made of a 14,000-year-old village in Canada .

There is also, as I noted earlier in discussing the LiDAR data, abundant and growing evidence of a Mesoamerican civilization consistent with Book of Mormon descriptions in an area that is the consensus location among scholars as to where the Book of Mormon took place.

Admittedly, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but where are the Nephite or Lamanite buildings, roads, armors, swords, pottery, art, etc.?

Where indeed? What would Nephite buildings, roads, armors, swords, pottery, art, etc. look like?

You do realize that the Mayan and Aztec civilizations didn't label themselves as such, right? Those titles represent transliterations of ancient pronunciation and symbols that, back when these civilizations were flourishing, probably bore no resemblance to how we reference them in modern English.

What would be the difference, for instance, between a Mayan bowl or a Nephite bowl? What would distinguish a Lamanite brick from an Aztec brick? How many Mayan roads, armors, or swords say "Property of the Mayan" on them? Any cultural impact of a Nephite, Lamanite, or Jaredite civilization would be impossible to verify based on examining ancient artifacts, regardless of how many may have survived.

How can these great civilizations just vanish without a trace?

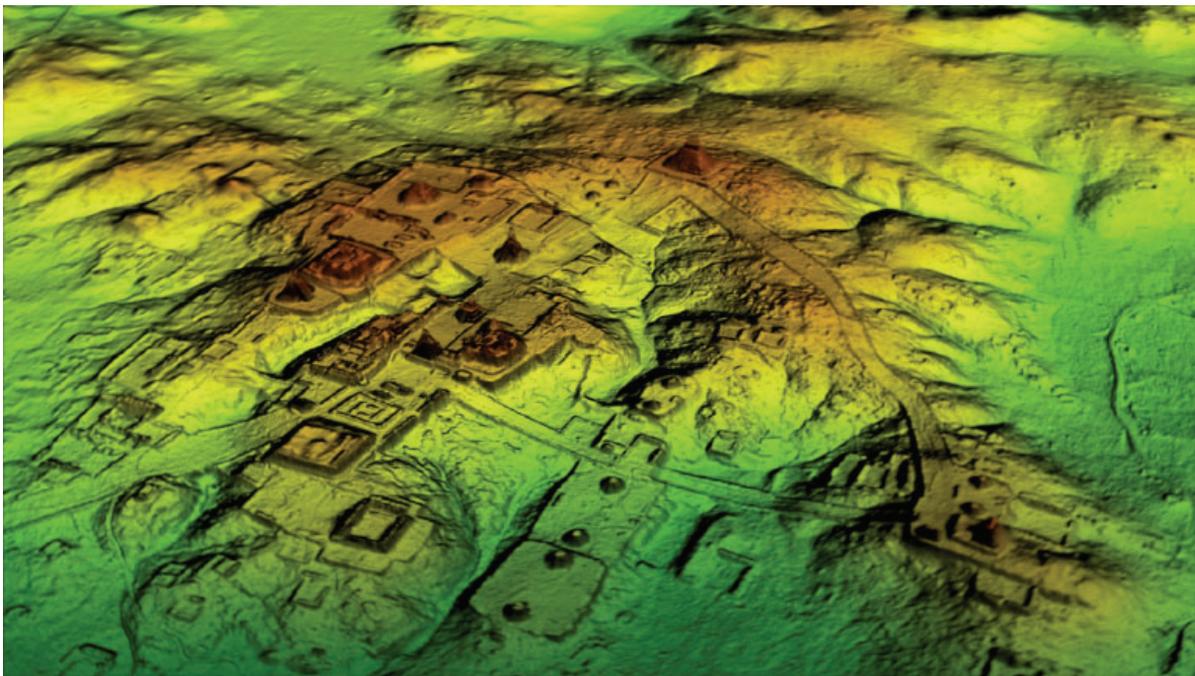
That's a nonsensical question. They left behind far more than a trace. Even since your last CES Letter revision, new evidence has surfaced that has utterly redefined how we understand ancient America.

From National Geographic:

Using a revolutionary technology known as LiDAR (short for “Light Detection And Ranging”), scholars digitally removed the tree canopy from aerial images of the now-unpopulated landscape, revealing the ruins of a sprawling pre-Columbian civilization that was far more complex and interconnected than most Maya specialists had supposed.

“The LiDAR images make it clear that this entire region was a settlement system whose scale and population density had been grossly underestimated,” said Thomas Garrison, an Ithaca College archaeologist and National Geographic Explorer who specializes in using digital technology for archaeological research...

“LiDAR is revolutionizing archaeology the way the Hubble Space Telescope revolutionized astronomy,” said Francisco Estrada-Belli, a Tulane University archaeologist and National Geographic Explorer. “We’ll need 100 years to go through all [the data] and really understand what we’re seeing.”



*LiDAR image of the Guatemalan jungle. Vanished without a trace? Please.*

Source: <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2018/02/maya-laser-lidar-guatemala-pacunam/>

This is why it's never wise to jump to a final conclusion on scientific matters. The whole field can be rewritten in an instant with a new discovery like this one.

Latter-day Saint Thomas Stuart Ferguson was the founder of BYU's archaeology division (New World Archaeological Foundation). NWAF was financed by the LDS Church. NWAF and Ferguson were tasked by BYU and the Church in the 1950s and 1960s to find archaeological evidence to support the Book of Mormon. After 17 years of diligent effort, this

is what Ferguson wrote in a February 20, 1976 letter about trying to dig up evidence for the Book of Mormon:

*“...you can't set Book of Mormon geography down anywhere – because it is fictional and will never meet the requirements of the dirt-archaeology.*

*I should say – what is in the ground will never conform to what is in the book.”*

I had never heard of Thomas Stuart Ferguson before reading your letter, and it's likely that the overwhelming majority of Latter-day Saints have never heard of him, either. He was a lawyer by trade, not a trained archaeologist, anthropologist, or geologist – an amateur, not an academic – and he's at least as “unofficial” in his criticism as the apologists you so readily deride. Your argument is pretty weak if he's the best witness you've got.

Dr. John Sorenson, a man with impeccable academic credentials who worked with Ferguson, had this to say about him:

[Stan] Larson implies that Ferguson was one of the "scholars and intellectuals in the Church" and that "his study" was conducted along the lines of reliable scholarship in the "field of archaeology." Those of us with personal experience with Ferguson and his thinking knew differently. He held an undergraduate law degree but never studied archaeology or related disciplines at a professional level, although he was self-educated in some of the literature of American archaeology. He held a naive view of "proof," perhaps related to his law practice where one either "proved" his case or lost the decision; compare the approach he used in his simplistic lawyerly book *One Fold and One Shepherd*. His associates with scientific training and thus more sophistication in the pitfalls involving intellectual matters could never draw him away from his narrow view of "research." (For example, in April 1953, when he and I did the first archaeological reconnaissance of central Chiapas, which defined the Foundation's work for the next twenty years, his concern was to ask if local people had found any figurines of "horses," rather than to document the scores of sites we discovered and put on record for the first time.) His role in "Mormon scholarship" was largely that of enthusiast and publicist, for which we can be grateful, but he was neither scholar nor analyst.

Ferguson was never an expert on archaeology and the Book of Mormon (let alone on the book of Abraham, about which his knowledge was superficial). He was not one whose careful "study" led him to see greater light, light that would free him from Latter-day Saint dogma, as Larson represents. Instead he was just a layman, initially enthusiastic and hopeful but eventually trapped by his unjustified expectations, flawed logic, limited information, perhaps offended pride, and lack of faith in the tedious research that real scholarship requires. The negative arguments he used against the Latter-day Saint scriptures in his last years display all these weaknesses.

In any case, I'm sorry he lost his faith. Although I wonder if that would have been the case had he lived to see the LiDAR data.

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7. Book of Mormon Geography: Many Book of Mormon names and places are strikingly similar to many local names and places of the region where Joseph Smith lived.

## SHORT ANSWER:

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No, they're not.

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## LONG ANSWER:

I'm genuinely surprised this section is still in your letter. You have frequently admitted online that this is the weakest of all your arguments, and when you were crowdsourcing the writing of your document on Reddit, you said three years ago that you were "about 90-95% on removing the entire Book of Mormon Geography/Vernal Holley Maps out of the CES Letter."

Looks like the 5% prevailed, which is too bad. Even in a document riddled with sloppy scholarship, what follows is an exceptionally flimsy argument on your part.

But once more unto the breach...

The following two maps show Book of Mormon geography compared to Joseph Smith's geography.



BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY



JOSEPH SMITH'S GEOGRAPHY  
*(Northeast United States & Southeast Canada)*

The first map is the “proposed map,” constructed from internal comparisons in the Book of Mormon.

No, the first map was constructed from comparison with the second map. Or, rather, the first map *is* the second map, only with Book of Mormon names placed in substitution for real-world locations that have similar-sounding names. The problem is that many of the “proposed” first-map Book of Mormon sites directly contradict their actual geographical references in the Book of Mormon, making the first map pretty much worthless.

For example, there’s Jacobsburg down near the southwest corner of the second map. (Everybody wave. Hi, Jacobsburg!) But 3 Nephi 7:12 describes Jacob, a wicked man appointed as the king of a secret combination, as he commands his followers “that they should take their flight into the northernmost part of the land, and there build up unto themselves a kingdom,” a kingdom which is identified as Jacobugath in 3 Nephi 9:9. (“And behold, that great city Jacobugath, which was inhabited by the people of king Jacob, have I caused to be burned with fire because of their sins and their wickedness...”)

In what universe can the lower southwest be considered the “northernmost part of the land?”

Alma 22:28 describes the land of Lehi-Nephi as being “on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore.” Yet there’s Lehigh County, PA, inconveniently on the eastern, not western, seashore, and not really “on the west” of anything.

Perhaps the most brazen error in Map #1 is the proposed location of “Ramah,” which this map equates with a Canadian town using the same name without an H. But Ether 15:11 identifies Ramah as the Jaredite name for “Cumorah,” a location this map pins in Joseph Smith’s hometown of Palmyra. (“Palmyra” sounds very different from “Cumorah,” but we’ll let it slide for now.) How can Ramah/Cumorah be both in Canada and New York at the same time? And weren’t you previously upset about the possibility of two Cumorahs?

Throughout the Book of Mormon we read of such features as “The Narrow Neck of Land” which was a day and a half’s journey (roughly 30 miles) separating two great seas.

Yes, we do. That makes me wonder why your erroneous map doesn’t bother to identify the narrow neck of land. I can see at least two possible candidates for it, but since most members of the Church in the 19th Century believed in a hemispheric model and assumed this had reference to Panama, I’m not quite sure what your point is here.

We also read about the Hill Onidah and the Hill Ramah – all place names in the land of Joseph Smith’s youth.

“All?” You provide only two examples. Don’t you mean “both?” In any case, you can only claim one, as the Rama Indian Reservation didn’t exist until 1836, six years after the Book of Mormon was published. How could that possibly qualify as being in the land of Joseph Smith’s youth?

You grew up in Southern California, and so did I. You were in Whittier; I was in Calabasas. These two cities are separated by a distance of 37 miles. Would you consider Calabasas to be in the land of your youth? Sure, maybe. For my part, I’d probably claim Whittier as one of my youthful lands, as they are both in the SoCal area, although I can’t ever recall spending any time in Whittier as a kid.

But let’s reach out 1,811 miles and see if that description could still apply. See, that’s the distance between Palmyra and the tiny Rama Indian Reservation, and it’s also roughly the distance between Whittier, California and Keokuk, Iowa, which is, apparently, one of the lands of Jeremy Runnells’s youth. And what a youth it must have been! You probably have great memories of all those wonderful Keokuk summers, the joint scout camps with Troop 43 (the Keokuk troop) and maybe kissing a girl for the first time outside Keokuk’s old Iowa Movie Theater at 414 Main Street, Keokuk, IA.

Oh, sorry, that theater was torn down in 1975, years before you were born. But, really, that’s not unlike Joseph Smith stealing the name “Rama” six years before it actually existed.

This gets very silly very quickly.



*A picture from the land of Jeremy Runnells’s youth*

We read in the Book of Mormon of the city of Teancum named for a warrior named Teancum who helped General Moroni fight in the Land of Desolation. In Joseph's era, an Indian Chief named Tecumseh fought and died near the narrow neck of land in helping the British in the War of 1812. Today, the city Tecumseh (near the narrow neck of land) is named after this Chief.

Today it is, yes. But it wasn't named Tecumseh until 1912, nearly a century after the Book of Mormon was published. Although if you're looking for more information about Teancum, I recommend the highly entertaining and historically accurate film "Javelin Man," written by yours truly and featuring a guest appearance by Former Senator Robert F. Bennett as "Not Gordon B. Hinckley."



We see the Book of Mormon city Kishkumen located near an area named, on modern maps, as Kiskiminetas.

On modern maps, yes. But not any map Joseph Smith could have seen. This area wasn't named Kiskiminetas until a year after the Book of Mormon was published. And, as demonstrated above, the supposed Book of Mormon locations in the map you provided are highly speculative and often demonstrably incorrect.

There are more than a dozen Book of Mormon names that are the same as or nearly the same as modern geographical locations.

Wow. "More than a dozen." Out of 337 total proper names in the text, 188 of which are unique to the Book of Mormon. And given that you consider things like "Jacobsburg" and "Jacobugath" to be "nearly the same," I'm surprised you could only come up with forced parallels for less than 5% of the names in total.

Still, let's take a look at the "more than a dozen."

<b>Actual Place Names</b>	<b>Book of Mormon Place Names</b>
Alma	Alma, Velley of
Antrim	Antum
Antioch	Ani-Anti
Boaz	Boaz
Hellam	Helam
Jacobsburg	Jacobugath
Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Jordan	Jordan
Kishkiminetas	Kishkumen
Lehigh	Lehi
Mantua	Manti
Moraviantown	Morianton
Oneida	Noah, Land of Onidah
Oneida Castle	Onidah, Hill
Rama	Ramah
Ripple Lake	Ripliancum, Waters of Sidom
Shiloh	Shilom
Sherbrooke	Shurr

*Source: Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look, Vernal Holley*

Yep, that's more than a dozen, all right. 18, to be precise. Although why do you cite "Oneida" twice? Did Joseph really name the "land" of Onidah after the city and the hill after "Oneida Castle?" And since the Book of Mormon never refers to the "Land of Onidah," why do you get to stick that one in there? So really, we're down to 17.

So allow me to reproduce this list with my comments in a third column. (Most of my comments come from information provided by the [unofficial apologists at FAIR you so despise](#), but since the info seems to be accurate on this subject, I see no reason to avoid using it.)

Actual Place Names	Book of Mormon Place Names	Survey Says?
Alma	Alma, Velley of	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> An unincorporated area called Centerville at the time of B of M publication.
Antrim	Antum	<b>Bullseye!</b> Antrim was around in 1830, ripe for the picking for Joseph's plagiarism.
Antioch	Ani-Anti	<b>Bullseye!</b> Although "Antioch" doesn't sound much like "Ani-Anti" to me.
Boaz	Boaz	<b>Hmmm.</b> Boaz is a biblical name. Wouldn't it have been easier for Joseph to find it there?
Hellam	Helam	<b>Bullseye!</b> And a pretty close match, too.
Jacobsburg	Jacobugath	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> Jacobsburg doesn't show up on maps until a year after the Book of Mormon was published.
Jerusalem	Jerusalem	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> Another Biblical name. And this tiny town doesn't show up on many maps then or now, as it's pretty small - just .2 square miles.
Jordan	Jordan	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> Another well-known biblical name. It was also on only a handful of maps in 1830.
Kishkiminetas	Kishkumen	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> Kishkiminetas - no H – got its name after the Book of Mormon was published
Lehigh	Lehi	<b>Hmmm.</b> Lehi is also a biblical name.
Mantua	Manti	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> Mantua Village got its name in 1898.
Moraviantown	Morianton	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> This wasn't a town in 1830.
Oneida	Noah, Land of Onidah	<b>Bullseye!</b> Well done. But you can only use it once.
Oneida Castle	Onidah, Hill	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> Only once, I said!
Rama	Ramah	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> This town didn't exist in 1830.
Ripple Lake	Ripliancum, Waters of Sidom	<b>Hmmm.</b> It existed, yes, but it was and is very tiny and obscure and is usually ignored by most modern maps, let alone those in 1830.
Shiloh	Shilom	<b>Bzzzt. Try again.</b> Shilom is only a "Census Designated Place" used for statistical purposes and is not listed on maps.
Sherbrooke	Shurr	<b>Hmmm.</b> The tiny fishing village of Hyatt's Mill was, indeed, officially renamed "Sherbrooke" in 1819, but most people still called it "Hyatt's Mill" until 1832 when the Brits arrived.

So, to sum up, out of The Book of Mormon's 337 total proper names, you cite 17 that you believe were lifted from locales within a 2,000-mile radius of Joseph's home, yet 9 of those names didn't apply to locations in 1830, and Joseph's knowledge of an additional 3 would have been unlikely, leaving 4 geographical names that are similar, but not identical, to Book of Mormon names.

And thus it is that 1.2% of all Book of Mormon names may or may not have been adapted from precisely four place names out of thousands in a geographical area roughly the size of half of the United States, a tenuous correlation at best that still requires you to think "Ani-Anti" is a clear derivative of "Antioch."

**Why are there so many names similar to Book of Mormon names in the region where Joseph Smith lived?**

There aren't. A better question might be "why are there so few names that can be rammed into forced parallels?" Because there are only four such names out of 337, and they're taken from an area within a 2,000 mile radius if, applied today, would make Keokuk, Iowa part of "the region where Jeremy Runnells lived" in Whittier, California.

**Is this really all just a coincidence?**

Pretty much, yeah. That is, if you can call a measly 4 out of 337 anything close to a "coincidence." You really should have dropped this section like you were planning to do.

**UPDATE:** Additional information and analysis can be found at [cesletter.org/maps](http://cesletter.org/maps)

Near as I can tell, that's just a collection of videos with the same erroneous info you've provided here. Overall, it's weak sauce and, again, you'd do well to abandon it.

## **BONUS SECTION: ZOMBIES!**

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I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to address the issue of Vernal Holley, Daniel Peterson, and Solomon Spaulding. (Also zombies.)

The maps you use in Question #7 come from *Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look* by Vernal Holley. In that 1983 treatise, Holley argues that the Book of Mormon was plagiarized from a manuscript by Solomon Spaulding. The problem, of course, is that he's wrong.

For any not familiar with the Spaulding Theory, I turn again to my father's *Leap of Faith* book, with words again taken from his digital manuscript:

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Sometime prior to 1829, a former Presbyterian Minister named Solomon Spaulding was known to have written a novel called "The Manuscript Found," in which a fictional Indian describes events that took place in America before Columbus.

Joseph's detractors focused on the similarity between this plot line and the story of The Book of Mormon and insisted that Joseph was a simple plagiarist. Somehow, they say, he had come across the Spaulding book and pilfered it for his own purposes.

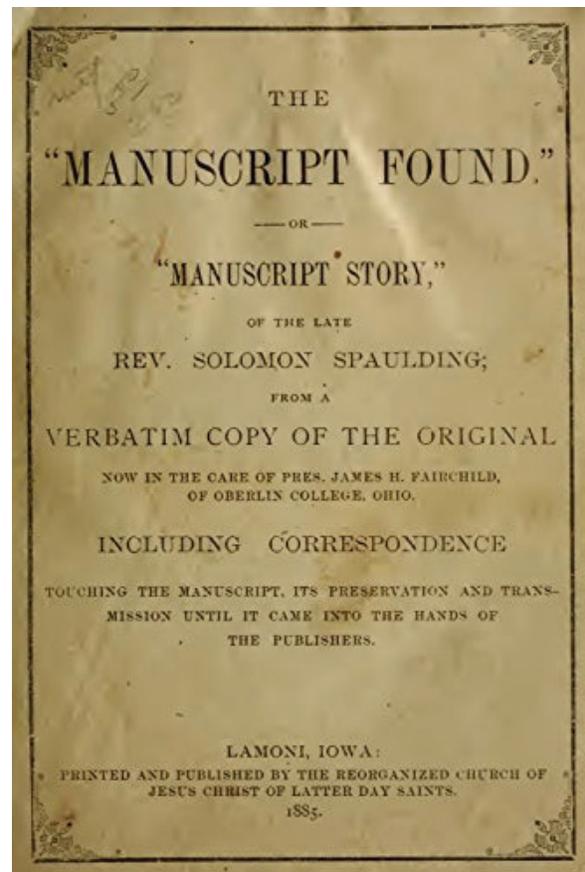
The theory started in 1834 and grew in scope and detail over the years. Its final version was laid out in the book, *New Light on Mormonism*, by Mrs. Ellen E. Dickinson. In the Preface, to establish her credentials, Mrs. Dickinson reports that "the Rev. Solomon Spaulding, the author of the romance called 'The Manuscript Found,' from which the 'Book of Mormon' was formulated, was my mother's uncle by marriage." I assume she is telling her readers that she is a credible source because she is family.

She talks of visiting Spaulding's daughter and only child, who "made a sworn statement as to her father's authorship of the work which has been used with such disastrous effect by crafty men." Her book, she says, "is the only attempt of the Rev. S. Spaulding's relatives to set this matter in its proper light."

In her first chapter she describes Spaulding's novel as "an account of the peopling of America by the lost tribes of Israel, the tribes and their leaders having very singular names; among them Mormon, Moroni, Lamnite and Nephi – names found nowhere else in literature. So much interest was awakened by this romance, and it was such a distinction, at the time, to write a book, that he determined to publish it."

She tells how Spaulding took his novel to a publisher named Patterson. "A young printer, named Sidney Rigdon, was in Mr. Patterson's printing house. . . he had followed Mr. Spaulding from Conneaut . . . and having heard him read 'The Manuscript Found,' . . . devised a treachery toward both author and publisher, which the world has reason to remember. This same Sidney Rigdon figured prominently twenty years later as a preacher among the Mormons."

That's the theory and it has a grain of truth in it - Sidney Rigdon was in fact once employed as a printer. In 1829, he was a minister in another faith, but he converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the first year of its organization and brought a good portion of his congregation with him. He quickly became Joseph's trusted counselor.



If the entire scheme had been pre-arranged between the two of them, it is logical that Sidney would have wanted to wait on the sidelines to see if the book would catch on before associating himself with it. That way, if it failed, it would not embarrass him. However, if it succeeded, he could show up as a convert and then, later on, maybe even supplant the unlearned Joseph as the head of a successful new Church. That he was ambitious for Church position is demonstrated by the fact that he contested the succession issue in the Church after Joseph was killed...It is easy to understand why the Spaulding theory was accepted as the final word on the issue by critics for nearly half a century, appearing as the settled explanation for the book's origin in an article in *Encyclopedia Americana*.

No more. Spaulding's actual manuscript turned up after all, and ruined everything. In 1884 it was found and placed in the library at Oberlin College, Ohio, where it is still available for examination; it has been circulated in printed form and I have gone through it. It bears no resemblance to Book of Mormon at all, with none of the Book of Mormon names in it, as Mrs. Dickenson had claimed, and no religious content whatsoever. The Spaulding theory, once the staple of all commentary on the book offered from outside of the Church, never comes up anymore.

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Unfortunately, Dad was incorrect. Almost exactly a century after the Spaulding theory was authoritatively debunked by the appearance of the actual manuscript, it came up again in the form of Vernal Holley's book. The quasi-official apologists at FARMS reviewed the book back in 1989, and they said the following:

When Mormon scholar Lester Bush wrote his historical survey of the Spaulding Theory eleven years ago, he made a comment at the tail end of his paper which bears repeating: "One therefore can reasonably expect that new variants [of the Spaulding theory] will, like the influenza, reemerge every now and then."<sup>1</sup>

Vernal Holley's 1983 booklet, *Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look*, is one of the more recent strains of this particular virus.

This same viral metaphor may well have colored Daniel Peterson's 2014 presentation about the CES Letter, which has been the main source of ire over on your site in your "debunking" section.

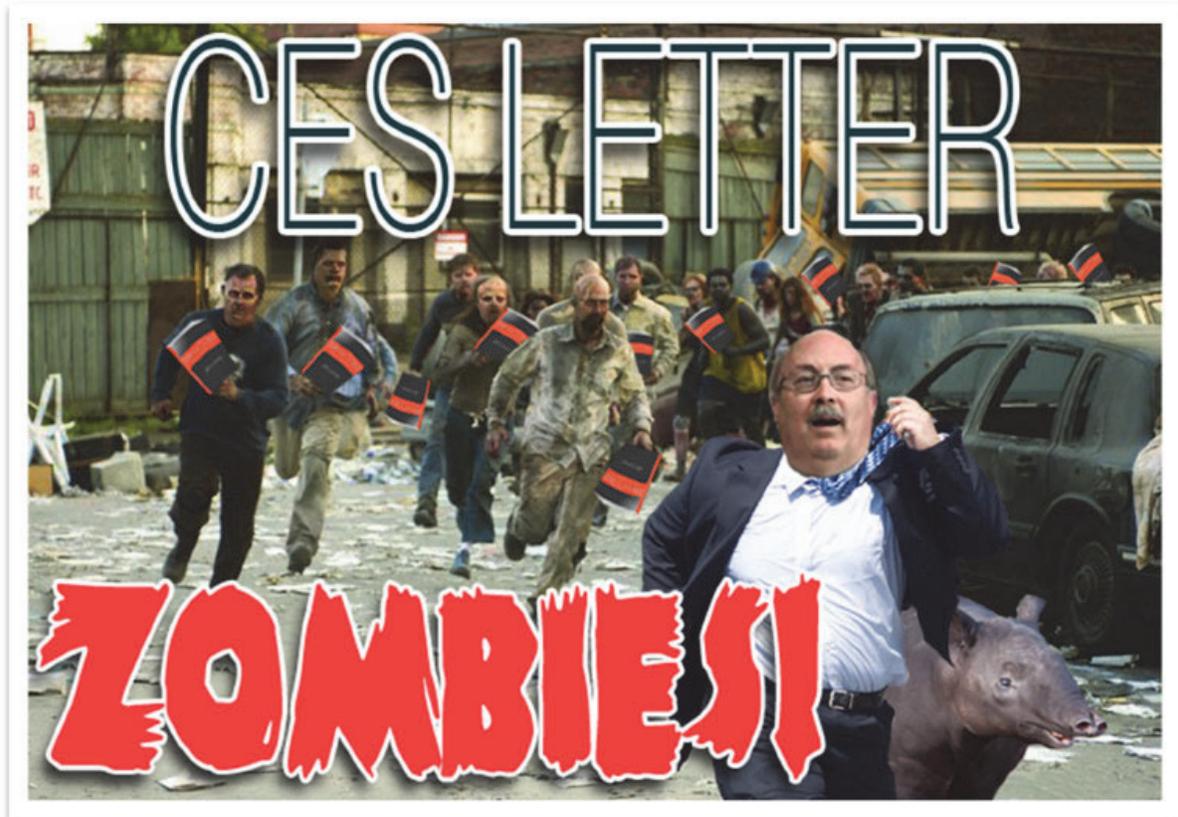
Here's the offending passage from Dr. Peterson's speech:

This is his fourth objection: Book of Mormon Geography, and he uses Vernal Holley, who relied on the Solomon Spalding theory of the Book of Mormon, which has been exploded, detonated so many times that it's exasperating to see it keep coming back. I've mentioned, I think, here before that Bill Hamblin and I have wanted to do a film that we call tentatively, "Bill and Dan's Excellent Adventure in Anti-Mormon Zombie Hell." The idea is that these just keep coming back. I mean, you shoot them between the eyes and they don't stop because there's no brain in there, right? And, to see the Spalding manuscript theory just keep coming and coming...

And here's how you characterize these remarks:

Another reference was made about followers of the 'CES Letter' being Zombies or Zombie-like... Peterson compares me and *CES Letter* supporters who support and push information such as the Vernal Holley maps to zombies with no brains... Peterson's ad hominem attack... Unfortunately, Peterson's above ad hominem provides zero substance... I do not welcome outrageous personal ad hominem attacks...

Lest anyone miss what ad hominem attack you're talking about, you titled your piece "A Zombie's Reflections on That Mormon Apologist's Reflections." You also include a goofy picture of the man you derisively call "Tapir Dan" running alongside his favorite non-horse animal away from a horde of the undead, with the caption "CES Letter Zombies."



*Ha ha! It's funny because it's wrong. (And aren't those unofficial apologists mean?)*

If anyone needed a clear demonstration of how sloppy you are with your scholarship, they need look no further than this insulting post.

Words mean things, and Dr. Peterson's message here is not hard to decipher. The antecedent to "zombie" in Dr. Peterson's speech is the "Solomon Spalding [sic] theory of the Book of Mormon." It's "exasperating to see *it* keep coming back," he says, "*it*" being the Spaulding theory, not you or your supporters. When he mentions his zombie movie, he talks about it being appropriate because "*these* just keep coming back," with "*these*" being variations of the Spaulding theory that have been "exploded, detonated so many times," yet, still, all the different permutations of "the Spaulding manuscript theory just keep coming and coming..."

So unless either you or your supporters are the living embodiment of the Solomon Spaulding theory of Book of Mormon authorship, at no point did he call you, or any CES Letter supporters, zombies or zombie-like. Indeed, you do not mention the Spaulding theory in your letter, so there is no possible way this reference could apply to you. Yet your article responding to this supposedly egregious example of name-calling runs almost as long as the entire CES Letter, and its central premise is predicated on a blatant misreading of what Dr. Peterson actually said.

In addition, all your complaints about how viciously we unofficial apologists have treated you ring hollow as you take to message boards to demean and insult everyone who disagrees with you, including ol' "Danny Boy" and, of course, me. (Lest anyone forget, I'm "suffocatingly conceited," and my family hates me.)

You rewrote the CES Letter to get rid of the "tone problems" that included a great deal of insulting language. Perhaps it's time you revisited your "Debunking" section with the same purpose.

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### HILL CUMORAH

Off the eastern coast of Mozambique in Africa is an island country called "Comoros." Prior to its French occupation in 1841, the islands were known by its Arabic name, "Camora." There is an 1808 map of Africa that refers to the islands as "Camora."



Looks a bit like "Comora" to me, but I'll let it slide. Maybe.

The largest city and capital of Comoros (formerly “Camora”)? Moroni .

Very cool, except Moroni didn’t become the capital of Camora/Comora/Comoros until 1876 and it wasn’t on any of these maps. There’s no contemporaneous source through which Joseph could have found the name Moroni, let alone made a connection between these two names.

“Camora” and settlement “Moroni” were names in pirate and treasure hunting stories involving Captain William Kidd (a pirate and treasure hunter) which many 19th century New Englanders – especially treasure hunters – were familiar with.

No, they weren’t. If they were, those like Grant Palmer and others who lean heavily on the Captain Kidd theory for Moroni and Cumorah’s origins would be able to provide actual references from such stories to back this up, particularly if they were “common names,” which, given the obscurity of the Comora reference and the non-existent pre-1830 references to the Moroni settlement, they clearly were not. Near as I can tell, no such citations exist. (You certainly don’t provide any.) And if these really were common names in popular stories, then why do none of Joseph’s legion of critics notice supposedly obvious Kidd/Cumorah/Moroni connection during Joseph’s lifetime? Why do we have to wait until Grant Palmer comes along in the 21st Century before anyone notices it at all?

In his letters, Kidd himself makes reference to the nearby islands of Madagascar, Johanna, and Mahala, but he says nothing of Camora or Moroni. The best that Palmer can do to tie these names to Kidd and then to Joseph is to point out that Kidd operated “in the vicinity” of these two places, because Kidd makes no direct mention of them. Making the leap from being “in the vicinity” of locations Kidd never mentions to a presumption that the unmentioned locales constituted “common names” in stories about Kidd strains credulity to the breaking point. If Kidd’s exploits truly were the linguistic inspiration for the setting of the last great Nephite/Lamanite battles, we’d be much more likely to be reading about the Hill Mahala than the Hill Cumorah.

Another thought – if we are to presume that Moroni in the Book of Mormon was inspired by the exploits of a glamorous pirate like Captain Kidd, then why is Moroni as un-Kidd-like a figure as it is possible to be? Where’s Moroni’s ship? Where’s his merry band of fellow brigands? Where are all his death-defying scrapes, dashing romances, and fantastical adventures? Moroni is a gloomy loner who wanders the empty landscape for decades without any companions at all and no enemies to face. He’s a great prophet, sure, but he makes for a pretty lousy pirate story.



**Moroni: Great Prophet, Lousy Pirate**

In fact, the uniform spelling for Hill Cumorah in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon is spelled “Camorah.”

Which, just to nitpick, is different from “Camora,” which is the spelling of the location on the map you provide. Which, to me, still looks like “Comora.”

Pomeroy Tucker was born in Palmyra, New York in 1802, three years before Joseph Smith. He is considered to be a contemporary source. This is what he said about Joseph Smith:

*“Joseph ... had learned to read comprehensively ... [reading] works of fiction and records of criminality, such for instance as would be classed with the ‘dime novels’ of the present day. The stories of Stephen Buroughs and Captain Kidd, and the like, presented the highest charms for his expanding mental perceptions.”*  
– *Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress*, p.17

You feel it necessary to point out that Tucker was born in Palmyra three years before Joseph Smith, but you neglect to mention that “Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress” was published in 1867, twenty-three years after the prophet’s death and roughly fifty years after Joseph was allegedly poring through “works of fiction and records of criminality” with special emphasis on the stories of Buroughs and Kidd. I’m left to wonder how many people from my own childhood about whom I could confidently describe their reading habits with any degree of specificity half a century after the fact.

This would be a challenge for me if I were asked to provide such information about my closest friends, let alone someone like Tucker, who makes it clear that he had nothing but contempt for Joseph. (More on that later.) There’s no plausible reason for Tucker to take such a keen interest in Joseph’s early reading habits.

And, of course, Tucker’s opinion on this subject contradicts the entirety of contemporaneous testimony about Joseph’s literary tastes. His enemies unanimously dismissed him as illiterate and ignorant – as does Tucker elsewhere in his book, despite the obvious contradiction with the tidbit you quote - while even his own mother described him as the one of her children least inclined to reading. If Joseph truly were devouring all the dime novels he could get his hands on in order to accommodate his “expanding mental perceptions,” why did it take nearly five decades for anyone to notice?

Oh, and by the way, why doesn’t *Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress* say a single word about Kidd’s and Joseph’s supposed connection to the Island of Camora and the settlement of Moroni? If these were, indeed, “common names,” you’d think Tucker, of all people, would be the first to cry foul.

Some apologists say that Tucker’s *Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress* is anti-Mormon and thus anything in the book cannot be trusted.

“Some apologists?” Who?

If this is true, why then did LDS scholar and Church History compiler B.H. Roberts quote Tucker for background information on Joseph Smith? Also, FairMormon has an article in which they quote Tucker's book 4 times as support for Joseph, and they even refer to Tucker as an "eyewitness" to Joseph and his family. Is Tucker's peripheral information only useful and accurate when it shows Joseph and the Church in a positive and favorable light?

Given that you haven't provided a link to anyone who insists that nothing in Tucker's book can be trusted, your questions here are problematic. It's a bit like saying, "Some people say Donald Trump eats his own children, but if that's true, then why are so many of them still alive?" No one is under any obligation to respond to such nonsense unless we're told who these "some people" are. Are "some people" the same as "some apologists?" And did Donald Trump eat them?

As for Tucker's credibility, there's no reason to ignore any good information that can be found in his book, but there's every reason to be skeptical of what he says about Joseph Smith.

One more, I invoke the Official Grand Poobah of Quasi-Official Mormon Apologists, none other than the late, great Hugh Nibley himself. I refer you to his penetrating and remarkably funny book *The Myth Makers*, which was reprinted as part of his collection [\*Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass\*](#), available to be read in its entirety online at no charge.

*The Myth Makers* is written as the transcript of a mock trial, in which a "Chairman" directly questions witnesses against Joseph Smith using their published words as testimony. In the excerpts I quote here, Pomeroy Tucker is coming under withering cross examination. Once again, Nibley's words are in dark red, the color of fire.

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Chairman: Now Mr. Tucker, I would like to ask you, first of all, just how well you knew Joseph Smith.

Tucker: Very well indeed: "he is distinctly remembered by me . . . from the age of twelve to twenty years."

Chairman: And Smith was an important figure in Palmyra from the age of twelve to twenty years?

Tucker: Don't make me laugh, sir. "From the age of twelve to twenty years he is distinctly remembered as a dull-eyed, flaxen haired, prevaricating boy—noted only for his indolent and vagabondish character."<sup>10</sup>

Chairman: So during all the time you knew him, Smith was noted for one thing only—being a lazy tramp. Was he much of a public figure?

Tucker: On the contrary, "taciturnity was among his characteristic idiosyncrasies, and he seldom spoke to anyone outside of his immediate associates. . . . He nevertheless evidenced the rapid development of a thinking, plodding, evil-brewing mental composition—largely given to inventions of low cunning, schemes of mischief and deception, and false and mysterious pretensions. He . . . was never known to laugh."<sup>11</sup>

Chairman: From what you say, Mr. Tucker, it is clear that you not only remember Joseph Smith distinctly, but that you knew him very well indeed—perhaps better than anyone else. It is plain that Smith was exceedingly hard to get acquainted with and that he was devilishly secretive, but even if he had been frank and open, the intimate knowledge you profess of his mental composition could only come from the closest association. Now, what was it that induced you, a very hard-working and ambitious young man, to spend your time with a perfectly worthless vagabond four and a half years your junior? You were no child when you first met Smith.

Tucker: You don't have to be a man's close friend to observe his character.

Chairman: According to you, you had to get close to Smith to observe him at all, since he wouldn't even speak to anyone "outside of his associates." And to say immediately what any man "largely" devoted his time and energy to, and what things he "was never known" to do, requires spending a good deal of time with him—unless, of course, your famous firsthand report is only hearsay. Did you think associating with Smith could contribute to your career? Did you perhaps find him an interesting person—even in a bad way?



***Nibley: 1, Tucker: 0***

Tucker: Of course not. As I told you, he was "noted only for his indolent and vagabondish character." He was "a dull-eyed, flaxen-haired, prevaricating boy" who never spoke to anybody and "was never known to laugh."

Chairman: That answers my question. It would be hard to imagine duller company.

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The whole exchange is well worth reading. It also turns out Tucker left Palmyra and lived thirty miles away for nearly four of the eight years during which he supposedly knew Joseph Smith, a fact he conveniently omits from his own dubiously detailed history.

In his book, he invents a great of patently false nonsense, including a massive cave on the outskirts of town in which Joseph hunkered down to translate the Book of Mormon as a cadre of armed guards stood watch, which somehow went unnoticed by anyone else, a fact Tucker attributes to the idea that this bizarre and fascinating spectacle was somehow boring and "scarcely attracted the curiosity of outsiders."

As for your Tucker citations, how can one have an insatiable literary appetite and "expanding mental perceptions" when one is "indolent," "vagabondish," "dull-eyed," and "never known to laugh," as well as taciturn to the point of complete withdrawal from the community at large?

*"We are sorry to observe, even in this enlightened age, so prevalent a disposition to credit the accounts of the marvellous. Even the frightful stories of money being hid under the surface of the earth, and enchanted by the Devil or Robert Kidd (Captain Kidd), are received by many of our respectable fellow citizens as truths." – Wayne Sentinel, Palmyra, New York, February 16, 1825*

I don't understand why you think this quote adds anything to your point. It comes from an unsigned article that makes no reference to Joseph Smith whatsoever. It was not written about him. Rather, it's criticism of an unnamed "respectable gentleman in Tunbridge." What have you got against respectable gentlemen in Tunbridge?

Notice that this is considered "prevalent" and "received by many of our respectable fellow citizens as truths." The above contemporary 1825 Palmyra, New York newspaper quote was not tainted by any desire to damage Joseph Smith.

Of course, because it has nothing to do with Joseph Smith. How could it possibly "damage" him? (Just as relevant: I recently read an article about Sacha Baron Cohen trying to get OJ Simpson to confess to murder. It was not tainted by any desire to damage you or the CES Letter.)

This article provides a snapshot of the worldview of 1825 New England.

If that's true, then it's rather helpful to Joseph Smith. It demonstrates that he wasn't nearly as notorious in 1825 as Tucker and others later claimed. If he were, surely his name would have been all over this, as he would sell far more papers than just another respectable gentleman in Tunbridge. And, curiously, it doesn't seem to mention the supposedly "common names" of Camora or Moroni at all.

The Hill Cumorah and Moroni have absolutely nothing to do with Camora and Moroni from Captain Kidd stories?

Correct, because Camora and Moroni are not in any Captain Kidd stories.

Stories that Joseph and his treasure hunting family and buddies were familiar with?

They were not, because such stories do not exist. There are Captain Kidd stories, but none of them have Camora or Moroni in them. Those names can't be found in any factual accounts about Kidd, either.

The original 1830 Book of Mormon just happens to have the uniform "Camorah" spelling?

Which, again, is different from the spelling on the 1808 map you provide - Camora - and the spelling that actually seems to be on the map - Comora.

This is all just a mere coincidence?

This barely rises to the level of incidence, let alone coincidence.

Maybe that's unfair. Certainly Moroni and Cumorah are far more central to the Book of Mormon narrative than the tiny Canadian town of Rama that didn't yet exist but was still somehow part of the "lands of Joseph's youth." Furthermore, Moroni (the man) and Cumorah are linked together, as are Moroni (the town) and Comoros (the island.) So the possible correlation here is, indeed, stronger and more noteworthy than your youthful adventures in Keokuk.

So I want to take a step back and hypothetically concede your point. That is to say, I want to imagine for a moment that Joseph found a contemporary reference to Comoros and Moroni and then decided to make one a hill and one a warrior/writer/nomad/angel in a fictional magnum religious opus about ancient Americans.

How does that explain anything about how the Book of Mormon came to be?

So much of your criticism of the Book of Mormon strains at gnats and swallows camels. Even if Joseph had lifted all these names, or carelessly copied biblical mistakes, or faked having a bunch of plates and spectacles, there's still the issue of the Book of Mormon itself. It's here. It exists. It had to come from somewhere. To quote my father again:

If we reject the book's own claims, there is no clear indication as to who [wrote the Book of Mormon], but this much is clear - whoever did it had a broad background in ancient cultures and languages, Middle Eastern geography, military strategy and Biblical scholarship, and went to a great deal of painstaking effort. Such a person does not easily come to mind and coming up with a clear explanation of how a forgery this large and this complex might have been done is very difficult.

A handful of plagiarized names and bunch of Old Testament excerpts aren't nearly enough to account for more than 265,000 words of an intergenerational and internally consistent thousand-year history that has endured over a century of scrutiny and still confounds critics and defies easy explanation. You pick two names off a map, and you still have 264,998 words to go.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said it better than I could:

If anyone is foolish enough or misled enough to reject 531 pages of a heretofore unknown text teeming with literary and Semitic complexity without honestly attempting to account for the origin of those pages—especially without accounting for their powerful witness of Jesus Christ and the profound spiritual impact that witness has had on what is now tens of millions of readers—if that is the case, then such a person, elect or otherwise, has been deceived; and if he or she leaves this Church, it must be done by crawling over or under or around the Book of Mormon to make that exit.

**UPDATE:** Additional information and analysis can be found at [cesletter.org/cumorah](https://cesletter.org/cumorah)

Lots more references to Kidd there, and zero links to any stories about Kidd that mention Comoros or Moroni. Kidd without Comoros/Moroni is meaningless.

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8. There was a book published in 1823 Vermont entitled *View of the Hebrews* .

## SHORT ANSWER:

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**Yes, I know. I had to read the whole thing in order to respond to your letter. No one should have to read *View of the Hebrews*, because it's an extraordinarily boring and inaccurate book, and it bears only a superficial, cursory resemblance to the Book of Mormon. Anyone who thinks Joseph Smith plagiarized from it has clearly never bothered to read it.**

**(That includes you, Jeremy.)**

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## LONG ANSWER:

A century after the fact, *View of the Hebrews* was republished by Brigham Young University, which suggests that the Church is not at all concerned if people read *View of the Hebrews* and compare it to the Book of Mormon. (They still have the entire *V of the H* text posted [on the BYU website](#).) Incidentally, Joseph Smith was equally unconcerned, and he even cited *View of the Hebrews* in 1842 as evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It would be a very curious thing, indeed, for a plagiarist to call attention to his source material.

To read a single page of Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* is to instantly recognize that the Book of Mormon did not plagiarize from it. In fact, for the benefit of those reading this, let's do precisely that. I'm going to pluck a paragraph at random and reproduce it here and let readers make a determination for themselves.

So here it is: the second paragraph from Chapter Three of *View of the Hebrews*, entitled "The Present State of Judah and Israel." Enjoy:

*The whole present population of the Jews has been calculated at five millions. But the probability is, (as has been thought by good judges,) that they are far more numerous. \* One noted character says, that in Poland and part of Turkey, there are at least three millions of this people; and that among them generally, there is an unusual spirit of enquiry relative to Christianity. Mr. Noah says, that in the States of Barbary, their number exceeds seven hundred thousand. Their population in Persia, China, India, and Tartary, is stated (in a report of the London Society for the conversion of the Jews,) to be more than three hundred thousand. In Western Asia the Jews are numerous; and they are found in almost every land.*

In which part of the Book of Mormon can we expect to find Joseph's bastardized version of this?

And lest you think I'm plucking out a section that is unrepresentative of the majority of the *View of the Hebrews* text, feel free to reproduce any other section from *V of the H* and look

for where Joseph adapted it in to his own allegedly derivative work. In addition, *View of the Hebrews* is just over 47,000 words long, compared to over 265,000 words in the Book of Mormon. If Joseph was just ripping off *V of the H*, how is it that Joseph’s version is more than five times longer than his source material? True, Peter Jackson was able to pad out *The Hobbit* into a trilogy of three-hour movies, but this is even more ridiculous than that. (And *The Hobbit* movies were pretty darn ridiculous.)

It’s an apples-to-oranges comparison. *View of the Hebrews* is a polemical essay about Ethan Smith’s theory that the Indians are Israelites. It is not, like the Book of Mormon, a narrative history. It’s a recitation of historical facts and speculation; it has no story at all. In addition, the “evidences” that Ethan Smith provides to link the Indians to Israel are completely ignored in the Book of Mormon. You won’t find chiasmus or much in the way of King James-style English in V of the H. There are no Nephites, Lamanites, Jaredites, or Liahonas, or cureloms or cumoms, or any Book of Mormon proper names or places. Even Captain Kidd is nowhere to be seen.

Below is a chart comparing the *View of the Hebrews* to the Book of Mormon:

Okay, let’s take a look.

	<b>VIEW OF THE HEBREWS</b> <i><u>Online Source</u></i>	<b>BOOK OF MORMON</b> <i><u>Online Source</u></i>
<i>Published</i>	<i>1823, first edition 1825, second edition</i>	<i>1830, first edition</i>
<i>Location</i>	<i>Vermont Poultney, Rutland County</i>	<i>Vermont Sharon, Windsor County</i>
	<i>NOTE: Oliver Cowdery, one of the Book of Mormon witnesses, lived in Poultney when <b>View of the Hebrews</b> was published.</i>	<i>NOTE : Windsor County is adjacent to Rutland County.</i>

NOTE: You are incorrect. The Book of Mormon was first published in Palmyra, Wayne County, New York, not Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont.

Windsor is the county where Joseph Smith was born, 24 years prior to the Book of Mormon’s publication. The fact that Windsor County is adjacent to Rutland County is about as relevant as the fact that Keokuk, Iowa is where the Des Moines River meets the Mississippi.

	<b>VIEW OF THE HEBREWS</b> <i>Online Source</i>	<b>BOOK OF MORMON</b> <i>Online Source</i>
The destruction of Jerusalem	√	√
The scattering of Israel	√	√
The restoration of the Ten Tribes	√	√
Hebrews leave the Old World for the New World	√	√
Religion a motivating factor	√	√
Migrations a long journey	√	√
Encounter "seas" of "many waters"	√	√
The Americas an uninhabited land	√	√
Settlers journey northward	√	√
Encounter a valley of a great river	√	√
A unity of race (Hebrew) settle the land and are the ancestral origin of American Indians	√	√
Hebrew the origin of Indian language	√	√
Egyptian hieroglyphics	√	√
Lost Indian records	√  <i>A set of "yellow leaves" buried in Indian hill. Elder B.H. Roberts noted the "leaves" may be gold.</i>	√  <i>Joseph Smith claimed the gold plates were buried in Hill Cumorah</i>
Breastplate, Urim & Thummim	√	√

	<b>VIEW OF THE HEBREWS</b> <i>Online Source</i>	<b>BOOK OF MORMON</b> <i>Online Source</i>
The destruction of Jerusalem	√	√
A man standing on a wall warning the people saying, “Wo, wo to this city...to this people” while subsequently being attacked.	√ <i>Jesus, son of Ananus, stood on the wall saying “Wo, wo to this city, this temple, and this people.”</i> <i>- Came to preach for many days</i> <i>- Went upon a wall</i> <i>- Cried with a loud voice</i> <i>- Preached of destruction of Jerusalem</i> <i>- Had stones cast at him</i> <i>(View of Hebrews, p. 20)</i>	√ <i>Samuel the Lamanite stood on the wall saying “Wo, wo to this city” or “this people”.</i> <i>- Came to preach for many days</i> <i>- Went upon a wall</i> <i>- Cried with a loud voice - Preached of destruction of Nephites - Had stones cast at him</i> <i>(Helaman 13-16)</i>
Prophets, spiritually gifted men transmit generational records	√	√
The Gospel preached in the Americas	√	√
Quotes whole chapters of Isaiah	√	√
Good and bad are a necessary opposition	√	√
Pride denounced	√	√
Polygamy denounced	√	√
Sacred towers and high places	√	√

	<b>VIEW OF THE HEBREWS</b> <i>Online Source</i>	<b>BOOK OF MORMON</b> <i>Online Source</i>
The destruction of Jerusalem	√	√
Messiah visits the Americas	√ Quetzalcoatl, the white bearded "Mexican Messiah"	√
Idolatry and human sacrifice	√	√
Hebrews divide into two classes, civilized and barbarous	√	√
Civilized thrive in art, written language, metallurgy, navigation	√	√
Government changes from monarchy to republic	√	√
Civil and ecclesiastical power is united in the same person	√	√
Long wars break out between the civilized and barbarous	√	√
Extensive military fortifications, observations, "watch towers"	√	√
Barbarous exterminate the civilized	√	√
Discusses the United States	√	√
Ethan/Ether	√ Elder B.H. Roberts noted: "Ethan is prominently connected with the recording of the matter in the one case, and Ether in the other."	√

*Source: B.H. Roberts, Studies of the Book of Mormon, p.240-242,324-344*

Poor B.H. Roberts. You have so woefully misrepresented his work on this subject that it's almost criminal. We'll get to that later.

My initial plan was to make another chart where I add a fourth column describing why these supposed parallels are largely insignificant and, in some cases, ridiculous, but each point requires more text than a small box can allow. So I guess we have to do this the old fashioned way.

### **A. Both books reference the destruction of Jerusalem**

Well, sort of, and one much more than the other. Ethan Smith begins his essay with a discussion of the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, and then proceeds to describe all that immediately followed, lamenting the evils of Thadeus, Felix, Nero, and other Roman notables and quoting all the scripture in which Jesus foretold Jerusalem's sad fate. His entire first chapter is a historical recounting of the fate of Jerusalem after Christ, citing events and figures that play no role in the Book of Mormon whatsoever. More than 1/5th of its entire text is a synopsis and commentary on a slice of Palestinian history completely removed from anything in the Book of Mormon.

In contrast, the Book of Mormon recounts the family of Lehi escaping from the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem 670 years earlier and never mentions the Romans at all.

Furthermore, its narrative leaves Jerusalem behind entirely after the 14th of its 531 pages and never goes back. With the exception of Jerusalem and Jesus Himself, none of the people, places, or events referenced in V of H's first 47 pages correlate in any way to the Book of Mormon. In content, length, and literary structure, the treatment of both books of two different historical accounts couldn't be more different.

Again, let's remember what *View of the Hebrews* is. As a treatise postulating an Israeli genealogy for Native Americans, it could not make its case without citing recorded historical events that overlap with events of concern to the Book of Mormon. How many other books have been written about these widely known and researched historical events? Should we assume that all of them have plagiarized each other?

### **B. Both books reference the Scattering of Israel**

This should be considered a subsidiary of the first point, as Ethan Smith describes at great length Israel's scattering in the context of the Roman sacking of Palestine. The Book of Mormon, however, contains no description of any actual scattering and only makes reference to it in passing and in a much different doctrinal context. Ethan Smith focuses exclusively on the Lost Ten Tribes, which get a few passing mentions but don't really figure into the Book of Mormon narrative at all.

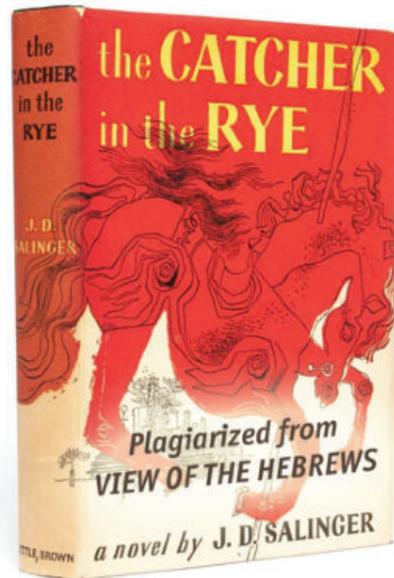
### **C. Both books reference the Restoration of the Ten Tribes**

Well, yes, but with entirely different purposes and focus. In the Book of Mormon, the Ten Tribes are almost an afterthought – Lehi's family descend from Joseph, not the Lost Tribes, which is in direct contrast to Ethan Smith's theory that all Indians come from the Ten Tribes.

### **D. Both books reference Hebrews leaving the Old World for the New World**

Yes, in very different contexts. Ethan Smith postulates that the Lost Tribes wandered into the Americas over the Bering Strait. Furthermore, he doesn't tell us any specific expeditions thing about any specific people in their company- remember, V of H isn't a story; it's an essay. The Book of Mormon introduces us to a group of people with names who leave

Jerusalem, wander in the wilderness, build a ship, and arrive in America – never specifically identified as America in the text itself – by sea, not by land. The events are different, as is the literary approach. It's the difference between reading an academic essay about boys in New England boarding schools and reading *Catcher in the Rye*.



### **E. Religion a motivating factor**

Why, yes, it was. Why is this a separate category? When you're talking about the scattering and gathering of Israel, isn't religion going to be a motivating factor? All of these initial objections are essentially subsets of the main charge repeated with only slight variations.

### **F. Migrations a long journey**

Again, a distinction without a difference, as it's just another element of the original charge. Would it have made a difference here if the migration in one of the books had been a short journey? You could add a category that said "In both books, people ate food in the course of the referenced migrations" and it would be as noteworthy as saying, essentially, "it's a long way from Israel to America," which is all you're saying here.

### **G. Encounter "seas" of "many waters"**

The word "seas" appears in *View of the Hebrews* precisely three times.

*"This writer says, "They entered into the Euphrates by the narrow passages of the river." He must mean, they repassed this river in its upper regions, or small streams, away toward Georgia; and hence must have taken their course between the Black and Caspian seas." – p. 76*

*"We have a prediction relative to the ten tribes, which fully accords with the things exhibited of them, and of the natives of our land... They shall run to and fro, over all the vast regions, the dreary wilds, which lie between those extreme seas." – footnote, p. 107*

*"Such texts have a special allusion to the lost tribes of the house of Israel. And their being called over mountains, and over seas, from the west, and from afar, receives an emphasis from the consideration of their being gathered from the vast wilds of America." – p. 159*

Nobody seems to be actually encountering seas in any of these quotes.

The phrase "many waters" does not appear in *View of the Hebrews*.

### **H. The Americas an uninhabited land**

Contrary to Ethan Smith, the Book of Mormon makes no claim that America was uninhabited when Lehi arrived. In fact, the text argues precisely the opposite conclusion, as they were

preceded by the Jaredites and encounter Coriantumr, who clearly got there before they did. (Perhaps it was uninhabited when the Jaredites got there; I can't find a definitive statement on that subject one way or the other, but I may have missed it.) But if we're arguing for parallels, we probably ought to focus on the proposed Israeli ancestry of the Indians, which has no bearing on the Jaredites, who were not of the House of Israel.

### **I. Settlers journey northward**

Yes, some settlers do tend to do that. How Joseph Smith would have imagined settlers going north without *View of the Hebrews*, I'll never know.

The word "northward" appears only once in *View of the Hebrews* on page 51: "Thence northward, on the shore of the said sea, as far as the point due west of Mount Lebanon." He's talking about the boundaries of Abraham's territory with no mention of settlers.

The word "north" appears 68 times, mostly in reference to the Lost Tribes who, according to the Bible, will come forth "out of the land of the North," which would suggest their journey was or will be in a direction other than north. If there's a direct mention of a specific northward trek by any settlers in *View of the Hebrews*, I couldn't find it. And in the Book of Mormon, settlers travel in every direction. I don't see how this is a parallel of any significance, even if it were accurate, which it doesn't seem to be.

And why does this matter, exactly? Would it help if all settlers referenced in the Book of Mormon only went south?

### **J. Encounter a valley of a great river**

This seems to be the only reference in *View of the Hebrews* that might apply.

*"Other tribes assure us that their remote fathers, on their way to this country, 'came to a great river which they could not pass; when God dried up the river that they might pass over.' – page 106*

No valleys are mentioned in connection with any rivers, great or otherwise.

Ethan Smith uses the tradition referenced on page 106 to describe his speculation that God must have allowed the Indians to cross the "Bering's Straits" by drying up rivers all over the place. This is markedly different from the Book of Mormon's River of Laman and Valley of Lemuel, as the river was both crossable and un-dried up.

### **K. A unity of race (Hebrew) settle the land and are the ancestral origin of American Indians**

*View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon differ dramatically on this point. Ethan Smith can't stop yapping about the Ten Tribes, and how they came out of the north countries across the Bering Strait to escape Roman oppression. The Book of Mormon ignores the Ten Tribes as possible ancestors of the Indians, instead focusing on the non-lost tribes of Joseph and Judah in describing the Lehites and the Mulekites, respectively. Then, for good measure, it adds a group – the Jaredites – that are utterly un-Hebrew and dominate the land well before the House of Israel even comes along.

So much of *View of the Hebrews* is devoted to tying the fate of the Lost Tribes to the history of the Indians that Joseph Smith would have had to discard just about everything Ethan Smith wrote when producing the Book of Mormon, including all of the supposed evidences of Hebraism among the Indians that Ethan Smith cites, not a single one of which makes its way into the Book of Mormon. Why plagiarize a text when you ignore its central premise and all supporting evidences? In fact, how can that be said to be plagiarism at all?

#### **L. Hebrew the origin of Indian language**

Sort of. The Jaredites didn't speak Hebrew, and the Mulekites had all but forgotten it, and the Nephites kept records in Reformed Egyptian. Again, since Ethan Smith's theories tied the Indians to Israel, this, too, is just another subset of the original charge.

#### **M. Egyptian hieroglyphics**

What about them? The word "hieroglyphics" does not appear in either *View of the Hebrews* or the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon claims that the Lehites wrote in "Reformed Egyptian," which are presumed to be hieroglyphics, but *View of the Hebrews* has nothing approaching a comparable reference. It makes no claims that the Indians wrote anything in Egyptian. It does claim, without any supporting material, that there appears to be some Egyptian influence in ancient American art. The Book of Mormon doesn't mention art at all.

#### **N. Lost Indian records**

You expand that to say that this has reference to "yellow leaves" buried in a hill that B.H. Roberts supposedly speculated might be made of gold. Yet the phrase "yellow leaves" does not appear in *View of the Hebrews*.

You're likely referencing the four folded pieces of parchment, yellowed with age, dug out of an Indian grave that supposedly had a handful of Bible verses on them written in Hebrew, as mentioned on page 220 of *View of the Hebrews*. No reference to "Lost Indian records" on this parchment, unless you consider Deuteronomy to be a "lost Indian record."

If B.H. Roberts or anyone else believes this old paper, which is described as being wrinkled and getting torn in half, might be made out of gold, that would be truly bizarre, as would presuming that this served as any kind of inspiration for the golden plates. Not only are they wholly dissimilar in form, they are also wholly dissimilar in function. Ethan Smith posits that the scraps of paper were discarded because the Indians could no longer read them and considered them worthless, while the golden plates recorded an intergenerational history and were buried specifically to preserve the history for future generations.



### **O. Breastplate, Urim & Thummim**

Behold the sum total of references to the Breastplate, Urim and Thummim in *View of the Hebrews*:

“Before the Indian Archimagus officiates in making the supposed holy fire for the yearly atonement for sin, the sagan (waiter of the high priest) clothes him with a white ephod, which is a waist coat without sleeves. In resemblance of the Urim and Thum-inim, the American Archimagus wears a breast plate made of a white conch-shell with two holes bored in the middle of it, through which he puts the ends of an otter skin strap, and fastens a buck horn white button to the outside of each, as if in imitation of the precious stones of the Urim.” – page 173

None of this bears any resemblance to how the Urim and Thummim are referenced in the Book of Mormon itself or in its translation process, although I’m betting Joseph Smith could really have used some of those otter skin straps.

### **P. A man standing on a wall warning the people saying, “Wo, wo to this city...to this people” while subsequently being attacked.**

The implication is that this was where Joseph lifted dialogue for Samuel the Lamanite, who never said the words you quote. The closest I can find is “Yea, wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent” in Helaman 15:3. It’s got “wo,” “people” and some familiar prepositions in it, but it’s not close enough to constitute plagiarism, especially since its part of a much larger speech that has no antecedent in *View of the Hebrews*. And it’s obvious that 99.9999% of the dialogue in the Book of Mormon didn’t come from *View of the Hebrews* if this is the best example of supposedly plagiarized dialogue you can find.

The two men crying “wo” are quite different figures, too. Samuel was a prophet in the New World under attack on a wall and miraculously protected, while the *View of the Hebrews* guy was an old, frail dude who wandered the streets of Jerusalem and stayed off the walls for seven years while repeating the quote you provide ad nauseum – unlike in the case of Samuel, this single phrase constituted the entirety of his comments, which is probably why he was largely dismissed as a harmless quack. Yet when Jerusalem was under siege in 70 AD, “he ascended the walls, and in a voice still more tremendous than ever, he exclaimed, ‘Wo, wo to this city, this temple, and this people!’ And he then added, (for the first time for the seven years,) ‘Wo, wo to myself!’ The words were no sooner uttered, than a stone from a Roman machine without the walls, struck him dead on the spot!”

Looks more like an accident than an attack.

### **Q. Prophets, spiritually gifted men transmit generational records**

Not at all, at least in the *View of the Hebrews* case. Ethan Smith doesn’t identify a single person among the Indian population as a prophet, except perhaps Quetzalcoatl, a rather special case that we’ll address when he shows up later in your list. Traditional Christians like Ethan Smith believe that there have been no prophets after Christ, and *View of the Hebrews* explicitly states on page 127 that “We are to expect no new revelation from heaven.” E. Smith’s essay covers a time period solely after 70 AD, so it makes sense that he doesn’t name

any new prophets at all – maybe that’s why you add the qualifier “spiritually gifted men,” which is so broad a label as to be a meaningless distinction. Of course, the Book of Mormon is dripping with prophets before, during, and after the time of Christ.

As for the idea that these V of H dudes with spiritual gifts are “transmit[ting] generational records,” that’s just nonsense. Any records that Ethan Smith imagines being kept are also imagined as being thrown away or left behind in Jerusalem, because he posited that the Indians considered them worthless. Ethan Smith repeatedly laments the fact that no such records survive and that all the information we have about them comes from unwritten and unreliable oral histories.

### **R. The Gospel preached in the Americas**

*View of the Hebrews* references the preaching of the gospel in the Americas on page 187, which I quote at length here:

*It seems the Spanish missionaries found such traces of resemblance between some of the rites of the religion of the natives of Mexico, and the religion which they wished to introduce, that our author says, “They persuaded them that the gospel had in very remote times, been already preached in America. And they investigated its traces in the Aztec ritual, with the same ardour which the learned who in our days engage in the study of Sanscrit, display in discussing the analogy between the Greek mythology and that of the Ganges and the Burrampooter.” It is a noted fact that there is a far greater analogy between much of the religion of the Indians, and Christianity, than between that of any other heathen nation on earth and Christianity.*

In the Book of Mormon, the actual preaching of the gospel in the Americas is recorded firsthand by the people preaching it on page after page after page. Yet Ethan Smith never records the actual preaching of the gospel; he merely looks for parallels in Native American history and ritual and explores them at length. Those supposed parallels make up the bulk of Ethan Smith’s text, but the Book of Mormon completely ignores all of them. Many critics of the Book of Mormon claim that it is actually far too Christian, as it entirely lacks the Native American flavor that would have been there had Joseph been trying to manufacture a history of the Indians consistent with Ethan Smith’s premises.

And, again, note the style and subject of the above quoted paragraph. None of it has any corollary in the Book of Mormon.

### **S. Quotes whole chapters of Isaiah**

And yet only 8.3% of the Isaiah verses quoted in *View of the Hebrews* are also included in the Book of Mormon. This is silly, anyway, as Joseph already had a Bible. If he wanted to plagiarize Isaiah, why did he need to use V of H as a middleman?

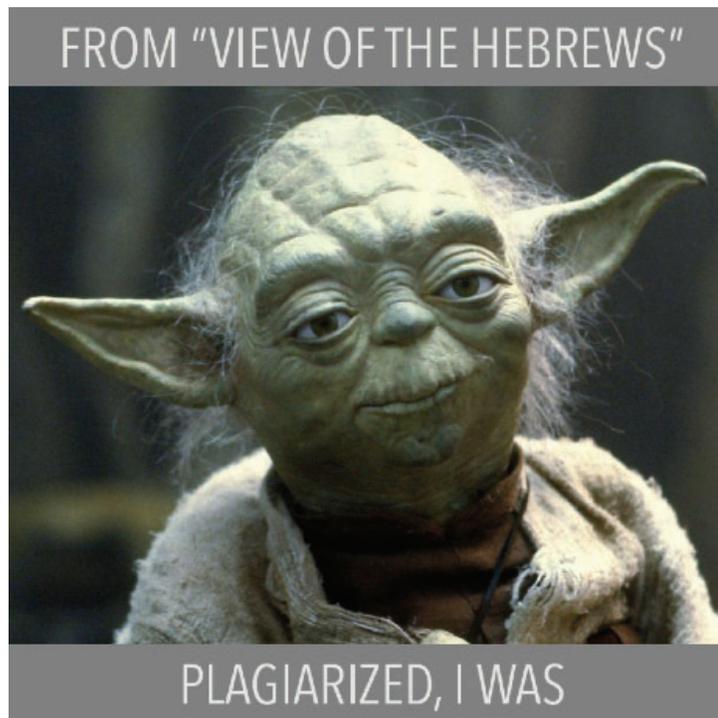
*View of the Hebrews* quotes a lot of stuff besides Isaiah, too, specifically Deuteronomy 30; Jeremiah 16, 23, 30-31, 35-37; Zephaniah 3; Amos 9; Hosea and Joel. Why didn’t any of those passages make their way into the Book of Mormon?

**T. Good and bad are a necessary opposition**

That's the message of Star Wars, too. Should we assume George Lucas also lifted it from *View of the Hebrews*?

**U. Pride denounced**

So did *View of the Hebrews* lift that from Greek mythology? Because the denunciation of pride is a common theme in world literature since the beginning of the written word. In fact, I think even the Bible has a thing or two to say about it.



**V. Polygamy denounced**

The word “polygamy” does not appear in either text. The Book of Mormon has Jacob Chapter 2, which accurately fits this description, but the nearest I can find to a denunciation of polygamy in *View of the Hebrews* is on page 104, where 19th Century missionaries visit a Delaware Indian chief and record their conversation.

“Long time ago, (he added) it was a good custom among his people to take but one wife, and that for life. But now they had become so foolish, and so wicked, that they would take a number of wives at a time; and turn them away at pleasure!”

This looks to be as much a denunciation of divorce as polygamy, and the context of this is quite different in both texts. This is the expression of one modern Indian chief’s personal opinion of ancient history, not a sweeping prophetic declaration of the will of the Lord. This chief’s opinion is not cited to define doctrine but rather to illustrate parallels in Indian and Christian traditions.

**W. Sacred towers and high places**

*View of the Hebrews* used the word “tower” fifteen times, all in reference to military towers in Jerusalem at the time of the 70 A.D. siege – nothing “sacred” about them. The “sacred towers” in the Book of Mormon – King Benjamin’s tower and the Zoramite tower of Rameumptom – have no antecedent in *View of the Hebrews*.

However, I must concede that both books, as well as pretty much every book ever written with any geographical information whatsoever, make reference to high places.

**X. Messiah visits the Americas**

Okay, this one’s a little too much fun.



It is impossible to review the history of ancient America without encountering the legend of Quetzalcoatl, who by most accounts was actually a winged serpent and not a white-bearded man. The irony is that the Book of Mormon not only doesn't mention him at all; it makes no attempt at all to tie Christ's visit to any of the Quetzalcoatl legends. Jesus in the Book of Mormon acts pretty much the same way as Jesus of the New Testament and not like any winged serpent. Why would a plagiarizing Joseph Smith leave the Quetzalcoatl legend entirely untouched?

You say *View of the Hebrews* mentions "Quetzalcoatl, the white bearded 'Mexican Messiah.'" Why don't you say "Jesus" instead?

Because Ethan Smith thought Quetzalcoatl was Moses. *Moses*, of all people!

Tying the serpent on a stick to the iconography of Quetzalcoatl, he sees the ancient legends as reference to Moses and not Christ. So should we assume Jesus the Messiah for everyone except Mexicans, because Moses gets "Mexican Messiah" duty?

### **Y. Idolatry and human sacrifice**

There's one reference to human sacrifice in *View of the Hebrews*, found on page 101. Here it is:

*This may account for the degeneracy of some Indians far to the west, reported in the journals of Mr. Giddings, in his exploring tour. He informs, "They differ greatly in their ideas of the Great Spirit; one supposes that he dwells in a buffalo, another in a wolf, another in a bear. another in a bird, another in a rattlesnake. On great occasions, such as when they go to war, and when they return, (he adds) they sacrifice a dog, and have a dance. On these occasions they formerly sacrificed a prisoner taken in the war; but through the benevolent exertions of a trader among them, they have abandoned the practice of human sacrifice.*

All we know about human sacrifice in *View of the Hebrews* is that one tribe stopped doing it at some point. The Book of Mormon doesn't have a lot to say about human sacrifice, either, but what it does say is entirely dissimilar to the passage here. References to idolatry are also scarce in the Book of Mormon.

The point with this item, and with many others, is that Ethan Smith is commenting and speculating on historical events in ancient America, and the Book of Mormon claims to be recounting historical events in ancient America. By most accounts, idolatry and human sacrifice were historical events in ancient America, so we should not be surprised to find independent references to them in both works.

How many works about World War II have been written? If two of them mentioned Nazi atrocities against Jews, would you accuse one author of plagiarism?

### **Z. Hebrews divide into two classes, civilized and barbarous**

*View of the Hebrews* speculates about this and provides no specifics, while the Book of Mormon is far more complex than that. In the initial division between Nephites and Lamanites, the Nephites are civilized and the Lamanites are barbarous. But these adjectives cannot be permanently applied to either group. At times, the Lamanites are more righteous than the Nephites, and for two hundred years there are “no manner of –ites” and everyone lives in peace. The subtleties and details of the Book of Mormon on this subject have no antecedent in *View of the Hebrews*.

### **AA. Civilized thrive in art, written language, metallurgy, navigation**

Really? Where does the Book of Mormon mention any art? Why does the *View of the Hebrews* lament the utter loss of written language among the Indians? *View of the Hebrews* mentions navigation with regard to biblical prophecy, but it makes no claims that Indians were capable of it, as Ethan Smith insisted they came to America by land and not by sea. In any case, there's historical evidence of an ancient American civilization that produced art, written language, metallurgy, and – debatably – navigation. What's notable is that the treatment of identified historical facts in both records is so strikingly different.

### **BB. Government changes from monarchy to republic**

Not at all. The government in the Book of Mormon changes from a monarchy to a “reign of the judges,” which bears little or no resemblance to a republic. The judges are only chosen by the voice of the people when one dies or resigns; otherwise, judgeships are passed down hereditarily, making this a modified monarchy more than a republic. There's no senate or congress; judges unilaterally make and enforce laws with no public input and no accountability to voters, although their judgments can be overturned by a group of “lesser judges.” Book of Mormon government is actually quite strange and quite different from American government, and it has no antecedent whatsoever in *View of the Hebrews*.

### **CC. Civil and ecclesiastical power is united in the same person**

Which person? Are we only talking about the monarchy and not the republic, a republic that doesn't exist in the Book of Mormon? Because in monarchies, then and now, ecclesiastical authority often rests with the king. That's not a concept that either Smith would need to invent or plagiarize. Even today, Elizabeth II is the head of the Church of England. What's striking is that in the Book of Mormon, this ecclesiastical authority extends to the judges once

the monarchy is disbanded, as opposed to *View of the Hebrews*, where this is not the case.

**DD. Long wars break out between the civilized and barbarous**

Yes. That's also true in Mel Gibson's Meso-American-based movie "Apocalypto," which he, too, must have plagiarized from *View of the Hebrews*. The historical evidence, then and now, suggested that in ancient America, long wars broke out between the civilized and barbarous. What would be remarkable is if any book dealing with ancient history in this region would fail to mention it.

**EE. Extensive military fortifications, observations, "watch towers"**

Every watchtower mentioned in *View of the Hebrews* is in Jerusalem of 70 AD, not in ancient America. As for military fortification and observations – yes, both books include observations, as does every book ever written – see item DD, above. Wars tend to have these sorts of things, and the idea of war is not something Joseph Smith would have had to plagiarize from Ethan Smith.

**FF. Barbarous exterminate the civilized**

Not in the Book of Mormon, they don't. The Nephites who perish at the end are every bit as barbarous as the Lamanites. The complexity of who's civilized and who's barbarous defies easy categorization in the Book of Mormon. Again, no antecedent to this in *View of the Hebrews*.

**GG. Discusses the United States**

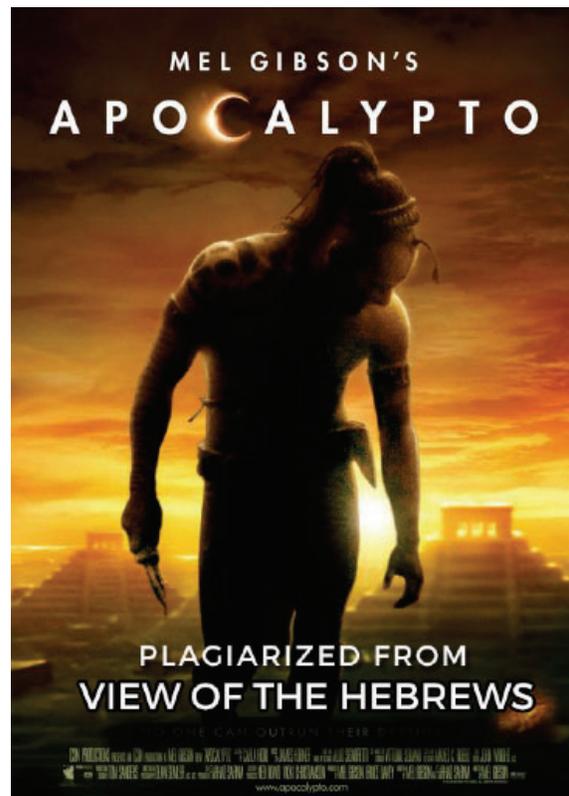
Nope. The Book of Mormon makes no reference to the United States whatsoever. In fact, it doesn't even explicitly identify its geography as being on the American continent. People, including church leaders, have interpreted many of its references to "this land" or "the land of promise" as references to the United States, but the text itself doesn't sustain that interpretation, particularly if you accept a Meso-American limited geography model.

**HH. Ethan/Ether**

Seriously?

This would be a good time to offer a view on *View of the Hebrews* from my favorite unofficial apologist, Hugh Nibley, once again in fiery red:

"If someone will show me how to draw a circle," cries the youthful Joseph Smith, "I will make you a fine Swiss watch!" So Joachim or Anselm or Ethan Smith or Rabelais or somebody takes a stick and draws a circle in the sand, and forthwith the adroit and wily Joseph turns out a beautiful running mechanism that tells perfect time! This is not an exaggeration. The Book of Mormon in structure and design is



every bit as complicated, involved, and ingenious as the works of a Swiss watch, and withal just as smoothly running. . . . The writer of that book brought together thousands of ideas and events and knit them together in a most marvelous unity. Yet the critics like to think they have explained the Book of Mormon completely if they can just discover where Joseph Smith *might* have got *one* of his ideas or expressions!”

Amen, Hugh! Testify, brother!

Reverend Ethan Smith was the author of *View of the Hebrews*. Ethan Smith was a pastor in Poultney, Vermont when he wrote and published the book. Oliver Cowdery – also a Poultney, Vermont resident – was a member of Ethan’s congregation during this time and before he went to New York to join his distant cousin Joseph Smith. As you know, Oliver Cowdery played an instrumental role in the production of the Book of Mormon.

Which is insignificant. Since the Book of Mormon text bears no resemblance to *View of the Hebrews*, it doesn’t matter at all whether or not Joseph or Oliver had seen it before 1830. Certainly Joseph was at least passingly familiar with the text later in life, as he cites it as evidence for the Book of Mormon’s authenticity – again, an odd thing for a supposed plagiarist of that material to do. Nobody in Joseph’s lifetime thought the two texts were similar enough to merit any accusation of plagiarism, and nobody who spends any significant time with both texts can plausibly claim that one was derived from the other.

This direct link between Joseph and Oliver and *View of the Hebrews* demonstrates that Joseph is very likely to have been aware of the theme and content of that book.

The fact that Joseph quoted from the book demonstrates that Joseph is very likely to have been aware of the theme and content of that book, at least after the Book of Mormon was published. That still doesn’t mean it was a source for the Book of Mormon, because the books are radically different in every important respect.

It gives weight to all the similarities described in the preceding comparison chart.

Since those aren’t really similarities at all, it would be impossible to add weight to them.

Apologists may point out that the Book of Mormon is not a direct, word-for-word plagiarism of *View of the Hebrews*, and indeed that is not the claim.

Indeed! Because that would be a ridiculous claim. So would a claim that Joseph borrowed anything at all from *View of the Hebrews* beyond the idea that Indians are Israelites, which was an idea that did not originate with either Ethan or Joseph Smith. And the case made by *View of the Hebrews* in support of that idea bears no resemblance whatsoever to the one made in the Book of Mormon.

Rather, the similarities should give any reader pause that two books so similar in theme and content would coincidentally be connected by Oliver Cowdery.

Except they are wildly divergent in theme and not even remotely similar in content. So what should really give your readers pause is that you, personally, have clearly never read *View of the Hebrews*.

I find that remarkable, and not in a good way.

You are no longer “just asking questions.” You have now chosen to devote your entire life to tearing down the faith of Latter-day Saints based on unexamined arguments that you have not bothered to investigate yourself. You have neglected firsthand study of essential primary sources and just taken whatever nasty anti-Mormon accusations come your way and thrown them up against the wall in the hopes that they stick.

That’s not just vicious; it’s lazy.

Given the amount of money you’re pulling in and the number of families you’re splitting apart, you have a profound duty to genuinely know what you’re talking about. If you had actually read *View of the Hebrews*, you would realize just how pathetically weak these arguments are. You would also realize that you are destroying testimonies with bad information and woefully misrepresenting B.H. Roberts’s work.

Speaking of which:

LDS General Authority and scholar Elder B.H. Roberts privately researched the link between the Book of Mormon and the *View of the Hebrews*, Joseph’s father having the same dream in 1811 as Lehi’s dream, and other sources that were available to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and others before the publication of the Book of Mormon. Elder Roberts’ private research was meant only for the eyes of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve and was never intended to be available to the public. However, Roberts’ work was later published in 1985 as *Studies of the Book of Mormon*. Based upon his research, Elder B.H. Roberts came to the following conclusion on the *View of the Hebrews*:

No, he didn’t.

I know I haven’t posted what that supposed conclusion is yet, but it’s important to point out that you are ignoring B.H. Roberts’s own direct, firsthand explanation as to how that “conclusion” is to be interpreted. In a letter to his fellow church leaders with reference to the report he prepared, Roberts said, “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.***” [Emphasis added. Strongly.]

The entire report, including the quote you provide, is written in the voice of a straw man critic he created, and these aren’t arguments he, himself, agreed with in real life. What I’m about to quote from your letter, therefore, is not actually BH Roberts’s conclusion, and you are irresponsible for stating that it is.

*“Did Ethan Smith’s View of the Hebrews furnish structural material for Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon? It has been pointed out in these pages that there are many things in the former book that might well have suggested many major things in the other. Not a few things merely, one or two, or a half dozen, but many; and it is this fact of many things of similarity and the cumulative force of them that makes them so serious a menace to Joseph Smith’s story of the Book of Mormon’s origin.”*

– B.H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, p.240

This statement was supposed to be interpreted as a “devil’s advocate” brief to present the best possible argument a critic of the Book of Mormon could make. I’m not sure his heart was in it, as the arguments listed above are really flimsy.

Roberts was a fierce defender of the historicity and divine nature of the Book of Mormon until the end of his life. To cite him without offering that context is to defame a good and faithful man and attribute opinions to him that were often diametrically opposed to what he actually believed.

*While this does not prove that the Book of Mormon was plagiarized from the View of the Hebrews...*

Of course it doesn’t. It doesn’t even assert that. Didn’t you, just a few paragraphs ago, concede that Joseph Smith did not take text from *View of the Hebrews*?

... it does demonstrate that key elements of the story of the Book of Mormon – i.e. Native Americans as Hebrew descendants, ancient records of natives preserved, scattering and gathering of Israel, Hebrew origin of Native American language, etc. pre-dated the Book of Mormon and were already among the ideas circulating among New England protestant Americans.

Where is that in dispute? That’s a widely accepted historical fact. Latter-day Saints have long conceded that the concept of Indians as Israelites was widely discussed prior to the Book of Mormon. What’s remarkable is how little the Book of Mormon coincides with the common theories of the time or with any of the theories advanced in *View of the Hebrews*.

With these ideas already existing and the previously cited issues with KJV plagiarism, errors, anachronisms, geography problems, and more issues to come, is it unreasonable to question Joseph Smith’s story of the Book of Mormon origins as Church Historian B.H. Roberts did?

Again, he didn’t, at least not in the way you’re characterizing it. But no, it is never unreasonable to ask questions. What’s unreasonable is to ignore substantive answers and refuse to listen to all points of view, which is what you have purposely done for half a decade.

Richard Bushman puts this all together. From *Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 96-98:

But for readers of Ethan Smith, the *Book of Mormon* was a disappointment. It was not a treatise about the origins of the Indians, regardless of what early Mormons said. The *Book of Mormon* never used the word “Indian.” The book had a different form and purpose than the earlier works on Indian origins. The assembling of anthropological evidence was the central endeavor of *View of the Hebrews* and the books that preceded it. Ethan Smith and his predecessors looked for signs of a deteriorating Jewish culture in Indian society, ticking off instances such as similarities in sacrifices and feasts. The *Book of Mormon* gave almost no attention to Old Testament parallels; its prophets taught pure Christianity. *View of the Hebrews* was an anthropological treatise, combining scripture and empirical evidence to propound a theory. The *Book of Mormon* was a narrative, not a treatise. Anyone

looking for a scientific investigation of Indian origins in its pages would have found ancient American Christianity instead.

And:

When other authors delved into Indian origins, they were explicit about recognizable Indian practices and the location of particular tribes. Solomon Spaulding's romance had characters traveling through a recognizable landscape from the east coast to the "Owaho" river formed by the confluence of two great rivers. There they met a people called "Kentucks" and another called "Delewans." A reader going through Spaulding's pages could readily locate Indian places on a modern map. Mounds in his manuscript reminded readers of modern remains. Readers easily oriented themselves in time and place on an Indian landscape.

The *Book of Mormon* deposited its people on some unknown shore - not even definitely identified as America - and had them live out their history in a remote place in a distant time, using names that had no connections to modern Indians... Once here, the *Book of Mormon* people are not given an Indian character. None of the trademark Indian items appear in the *Book of Mormon*'s pages. In his parody of the Book of Mormon, Cole dressed his characters in blankets and moccasins. They traveled in bark canoes and suffered from smallpox. Spaulding's Indians lived in wigwams and raised corn, beans, and squash. The *Book of Mormon* contains none of the identifying words like squash, pools, wampum, peace pipes, tepees, braids, feathers, and no canoes, moccasins, or corn. Burial mounds, supposedly a stimulus for investigation of the Indians, receive only the slightest mention. Nephites and Lamanites fought with bows and arrows, but also with swords, cimeters, slings, and shields, more like classical warriors than Native Americans... The *Book of Mormon* seems more focused on its own Christian message than on Indian anthropology. The book refuses to argue its own theory.

And:

All the efforts to situate the *Book of Mormon* in the nineteenth century are frustrated by contradictions like these. The book elusively slides off the point on one crucial issue after another. Mormons talked up the *Book of Mormon* as an explanation of Indian origins, but the book does little to identify its peoples with Indian culture. The Lamanites are both a cursed and a chosen people. The Indians, targets of prejudice, are also the true possessors of the lands whom the Gentiles must join or perish. The text repeatedly trespasses standard categories.

Now that's genuine scholarship. In contrast, your shallow criticisms of the Book of Mormon barely scratch the surface of any of this, Jeremy. You're affecting people's lives now. You really, really have to do better than this.

UPDATE: Additional information and analysis can be found at [cesletter.org/voh](http://cesletter.org/voh)

UPDATE FROM JIM: That link doesn't work.

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## 9. The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain :

### **SHORT ANSWER:**

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The supposed parallels between *The Late War* and the Book of Mormon are, as Jeff Lindsay states, “weak, scattered, and not very helpful to a would-be plagiarizer.” And with each additional explanation for the Book of Mormon’s origins, you weaken the case for any of them.

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### **LONG ANSWER:**

Once again, I’m breaking up your question into bite-sized chunks.

This book was an 1819 textbook written for New York state school children. The book depicted the events of the War of 1812 and it was specifically written in a Jacobean English style to imitate the King James Bible.

Yes, and that’s its only similarity to the Book of Mormon. The stories, characters, themes, and religious content bear no resemblance to anything in the B of M text.

This affected scriptural style was calculated to elevate the moral themes, characters and events depicted in the narrative to inspire the readers to “patriotism and piety.” Readers already accustomed to revere scriptural sounding texts in the ancient Bible would be predisposed to revere this history book which employs the same linguistic style.

It is not the only book designed to do that. Right after this, you offer up another one - *The First Book of Napoleon*. So which is it - did Joseph Smith rip off *The Late War* or *Napoleon*? Wait, wasn’t it *View of the Hebrews* that he was stealing from? Didn’t this all come from Captain Kidd and Keokuk-like lands of his youth?

Which is it, Jeremy? Pick one.

Because the Book of Mormon production process you’re now suggesting has Joseph poring over all different kinds of manuscripts – from childhood textbooks to Ethan Smith to that trusty, error-filled 1769 version of the KJV, rummaging through Captain Kidd’s letters and stories and maps of every tiny village across a 2,000 mile radius as well as maps of African islands – and lifting a word here, a two-or-three word phrase there, and somehow cobbling them into 265,000 words of an internally consistent, theologically complex, and Semitically-influenced tome that is markedly different from any and all of his supposed source materials.

What kind of plagiarist goes to that much trouble? What kind of writer could possibly work that way?

The first chapter alone is stunning as it reads incredibly like the Book of Mormon:

*1: Now it came to pass, in the one thousand eight hundred and twelfth year of the christian era, and in the thirty and sixth year after the people of the provinces of Columbia had declared themselves a free and independent nation;*

*2: That in the sixth month of the same year, on the first day of the month, the chief Governor, whom the people had chosen to rule over the land of Columbia;*

*3: Even James, whose sir-name was Madison, delivered a written paper to the Great Sannhedrim of the people, who were assembled together.*

*4: And the name of the city where the people were gathered together was called after the name of the chief captain of the land of Columbia, whose fame extendeth to the uttermost parts of the earth; albeit, he had slept with his fathers...*

You and I have a very different definition of “stunning.” Since this was deliberately written to sound like the King James Bible, the only way it can be said to be “incredibly like the Book of Mormon” is to be surprised that any other book would also choose to mimic the KJV. No one would be stunned to acknowledge that this reads “incredibly like the King James Bible.” In fact, nobody would be likely to say that at all, even though the phrases you later insist were lifted out of this book can all be found in the Bible, too, which is where the Late War authors got them.

In substance, this textbook is absolutely nothing like the Book of Mormon. The story is completely different; the characters are completely different. There’s no mention of the War of 1812 in the Book of Mormon, and there are no lengthy religious sermons in the Late War. It would certainly help your argument if at some point when the Jaredites were fighting, Napoleon were to show up. I guess we have to wait until you talk about the next candidate you propose as a Book of Mormon source.

*In addition to the above KJV language style present throughout the book, what are the following Book of Mormon verbatim phrases, themes, and storylines doing in a children’s school textbook that was used in Joseph Smith’s own time and backyard – all of this a mere decade before the publication of the Book of Mormon?*

Rubbish. There are some (very) short Biblical phrases that appear in both the Book of Mormon and The Late War, but that’s it. No common themes, and certainly no common storylines. Do you have information to the contrary? If so, you haven’t provided it. Your link to “many, many more parallels” just gives me more snippets of text that the two books have in common. Nowhere on your site can I find any evidence of themes and storylines that are similar in the two books.

You haven't read *View of the Hebrews*, and you clearly haven't read this one, either. Does it embarrass you that you don't even understand your own argument?

But okay, let's get into this. Here are the "stunning" parallels.

- Devices of "curious workmanship" in relation to boats and weapons.
- A "stripling" soldier "with his "weapon of war in his hand."
- "A certain chief captain... was given in trust a band of more than two thousand chosen men, to go forth to battle" and who "all gave their services freely for the good of their country."
- Fortifications: "the people began to fortify themselves and entrench the high Places round about the city."
- Objects made "partly of brass and partly of iron, and were cunningly contrived with curious works, like unto a clock; and as it were a large ball."
- "Their polished steels of fine workmanship."
- "Nevertheless, it was so that the freeman came to the defence of the city, built strong holds and forts and raised up fortifications in abundance."
- Three Indian Prophets.
- "Rod of iron."
- War between the wicked and righteous.
- Maintaining the standard of liberty with righteousness.
- Righteous Indians vs. savage Indians.
- False Indian prophets.
- Conversion of Indians.
- Bands of robbers/pirates marauding the righteous protagonists.
- Engraving records.
- "And it came to pass, that a great multitude flocked to the banners of the great Sanhedrim" compared to Alma 62:5: "And it came to pass that thousands did flock unto his standard, and did take up their swords in defense of their freedom..."
- Worthiness of Christopher Columbus.
- Ships crossing the ocean.
- A battle at a fort where righteous white protagonists are attacked by an army made up of dark-skinned natives driven by a white military leader. White protagonists are prepared for battle and slaughter their opponents to such an extent that they fill the trenches surrounding the fort with dead bodies. The surviving elements flee into the wilderness/forest.
- Cataclysmic earthquake followed by great darkness.
- Elephants/mammoths in America.
- Literary Hebraisms/Chiasmus.

- Boats and barges built from trees after the fashion of the ark.
- A bunch of “it came to pass.”
- Many, many more parallels .

I’ll bet! The “many, man more parallels” include 75 parallels from the common fill-in-the-blank copyright statement that was used by all books published in the same area. When a computer combs through two different texts without considering context, it’s pretty easy to find all kinds of things that have surface similarities but not much else.

The parallels and similarities to the Book of Mormon are astounding.

Color me unastounded.

I probably should go through each of these one by one, but so many of them are ridiculous on their face that they don’t merit comment. Wow, two books referencing ships crossing the ocean? And both books also have elephants in them? What are the odds?!

As I implied above, these “staggering parallels” were not discovered by means of reading both books and looking for common themes or passages; they were discovered by means of a computer analysis looking for identical words in thousands of different texts. Conceptually, the passages containing these “parallels” are generally referencing starkly different things and events, and they are using similar short phrases to describe stuff with no relationship to each other. Furthermore, none of the identical phrases are longer than five words long – i.e. “and it came to pass,” a Biblical phrase – and almost all are only two or three words long.



**Pictured: A 19th Century Persian Book about elephants with “astounding” parallels to the Book of Mormon. (Because elephants.)**

So you provide things like the quote “partly of brass and partly of iron, and were cunningly contrived with curious works, like unto a clock; and as it were a large ball” as if that phrase appears in the Book of Mormon, which it doesn’t. Mormons, however, would read that phrase and assume it has reference to the Liahona, which was an item made of brass and of “curious workmanship.” But the Late War is here describing a torpedo, an item as unlike a Liahona as it is possible to be. So for this to be a Book of Mormon source, one has to think Joseph Smith scoured this text to find a phrase – “curious works” – and modify it into “curious workmanship” and add “brass” and “ball” and apply it to a concept that has no corollary whatsoever in Late War. That’s convoluted nonsense, and it’s just not a reasonable explanation for how the Book of Mormon came to be.

Also, take the phrase “rod of iron” in Late War. It’s on page 15, and it reads like this:



**Hold to the rod/The Iron Rod/'Tis strong and bright and true...**

*Then will we rule them with a rod of iron; and they shall be, unto us, hewers of wood and drawers of water.*

The phrase “rule them with a rod of iron” is a Biblical phrase used twice in the Book of Revelation – see verses 2:27 and 12:5 – and a variation is in the Old Testament in Psalm 2:9, which says “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron.” In both Late War and the Bible, the rod of iron is a weapon, probably used to smack people over the head. Nowhere in the Book of Mormon do we find a seven-word quote from “Late War,” so the Biblical “rule them with a rod of iron” becomes merely “rod of iron.” And, furthermore, Lehi’s rod of iron is some kind of a long handrail used to guide people through mists of darkness toward the Tree of Life, utterly unlike a rod of iron you rule people with, and with no head-smacking in sight.

Three identical words; two completely unrelated concepts. Yet we’re supposed to presume this where Joseph got the idea for Lehi’s “rod of iron?” That’s just goofy.

There’s also a great deal in this list that’s disingenuous on its face. For instance, in an attempt to beef up the list, you cite “false Indian prophets” and “three Indian prophets” as two separate parallels, likely in the hopes that readers will equate the one with the wicked Korihor or Nehor, and the other with the righteous Three Nephites. But the reality is that the “false Indian prophets” and the “three Indian prophets” are one and the same - three “savages” executed in cold blood after being hunted down on the field of battle. It’s not a story with any clear parallel in the Book of Mormon, and certainly it has nothing to do with the Three Nephites, who, as we all know, are still at large, changing tires.

This web page outlines very clearly and simply just how phenomenally unlikely it is that so many common rare phrases and themes could be found between these books without the *Late War* having had some influence on the Book of Mormon.

Whereas this web page outlines very clearly and simply why your web page is bunk.

Anyone can punt to other webpages to make their arguments for them. What this demonstrates, again, is that you are passing along someone else's work without actually examining it, which, short of plagiarism, is the worst thing any scholar can do.

(At least, the worst thing in terms of scholarship, that is. Killing people would be worse. Probably.)

Former BYU Library Bibliographic Dept. Chairman and antique book specialist Rick Grunder states in his analysis of *The Late War* (p.770)

“The presence of Hebraisms and other striking parallels in a popular children's textbook (*Late War*), on the other hand – so close to Joseph Smith in his youth – must sober our perspective.” – p.770

When you offered this quote from the good Mr. Gruber in your previous version of your reply, you didn't provide his credentials, and it was clear that he was the sole author of this deeply flawed study and the only source for this accusation against the Book of Mormon.

Here, you slather on the BYU cred and imply that “his analysis” is something other than the website and analysis upon which you've based this entire accusation. You seem to be making an attempt to hold up Gruber as a faithful, Church-approved source verifying someone else's conclusions. That's misleading, and it gives the illusion that more people than just this one guy think that these weak *Late War* parallels merit any concern whatsoever. Which, you know, they don't.

10. Another fascinating book published in 1809, [The First Book of Napoleon](#)

## **SHORT ANSWER:**

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**What's fascinating is that, by the logic you use in this flawed question, you prove that the true author of the CES Letter is none other than Keith Richards, guitarist for the Rolling Stones.**

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## **LONG ANSWER:**

Again, I'll tackle each part of this question in turn.

Another personal interlude, if I may.

I got an MBA from Brigham Young University in 1999. And in my first year of study, my

finance professor taught us how to calculate the net present value of an asset. He said there are four or five different methods to do just that.

“You know what that means, don’t you?” he asked the class.

We didn’t.

“It means,” he said, “that none of them are any good.”

In other words, if there were one simple, easy, and reliable way to calculate an NPV, there would be no need for another.

Similarly, every time you add a new volume as the supposed smoking gun of where Joseph cribbed the Book of Mormon, you weaken your argument. If there were one verifiable and undeniable source for his plagiarism, there would be no need to come up with half a dozen others. And if Joseph really was combing through such voluminous amounts of maps and literature and memorizing all these disconnected snippets and then reciting them to Oliver without referencing the texts themselves and all doing so unnoticed, he was likely even more of a genius than even most Mormons would imagine.

But okay, let’s see what’s so fascinating.

The first chapter:

1. And behold it came to pass, in these latter days, that an evil spirit arose on the face of the earth, and greatly troubled the sons of men.
2. And this spirit seized upon, and spread amongst the people who dwell in the land of Gaul.
3. Now, in this people the fear of the Lord had not been for many generations, and they had become a corrupt and perverse people; and their chief priests, and the nobles of the land, and the learned men thereof, had become wicked in the imagines of their hearts, and in the practices of their lives.
4. And the evil spirit went abroad amongst the people, and they raged like unto the heathen, and they rose up against their lawful king, and slew him, and his queen also, and the prince their son; yea, verily, with a cruel and bloody death.
5. And they moreover smote, with mighty wrath, the king’s guards, and banished the priests, and nobles of the land, and seized upon, and took unto themselves, their inheritances, their gold and silver, corn and oil, and whatsoever belonged unto them.
6. Now it came to pass, that the nation of the Gauls continued to be sorely troubled and vexed, and the evil spirit whispered unto the people, even unto the meanest and vilest thereof...

...and it continues on. It's like reading from the Book of Mormon.

Actually, it's more like reading from *The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain*. Do I smell plagiarism? How else could the Napoleon writers come up with the phrase "it came to pass" in verses 1 and 6? Also, both books include the phrase "for many generations" and "unto the people." Am I supposed to assume this is merely coincidence?

This, too, is clearly written to mimic King James English. It's supposed to be like reading from the Bible. Which it is, as much or more than it's like reading from the Book of Mormon.

When I first read this along with other passages from *The First Book of Napoleon*, I was floored.

Floored, huh? Whereas you were stunned, staggered, and astounded by the *Late War* parallels. Your thesaurus is about to run dry, although you still haven't used "flabbergasted."

Here we have two early 19th century contemporary books written at least a decade before the Book of Mormon that not only read and sound like the Book of Mormon but also contain so many of the Book of Mormon's parallels and themes as well.

Nonsense. In both cases, all you've been able to come up with is some cosmetic similarities and two/three word snippets of similar texts in two books written in King James English. You've cited zero evidence of parallel themes.

The following is a side-by-side comparison of selected phrases the Book of Mormon is known for from the beginning portion of the Book of Mormon with the same order in the beginning portion of *The First Book of Napoleon* (note: these are not direct paragraphs):

They sure aren't! In order to get this supposed parallel, you have to comb through *twenty-five pages* of the First Book of Napoleon and link up unrelated short phrases by means of ellipses, and then perform a similar surgery on the Book of Mormon text. Let's take a look, shall we?

#### **The First Book of Napoleon:**

Condemn not the (writing)...an account...the First Book of Napoleon...upon the face of the earth...it came to pass...the land...their inheritances their gold and silver and...the commandments of the Lord...the foolish imaginations of their hearts...small in stature...Jerusalem...because of the perverse wickedness of the people.

#### **Book of Mormon:**

Condemn not the (writing)...an account...the First Book of Nephi...upon the face of the earth...it came to pass...the land...his inheritance and his gold and his silver and...the commandments of the Lord...the foolish imaginations of his heart...large in stature...Jerusalem...because of the wickedness of the people.

Keith? Is that you?

When I first saw this goofy sleight of hand as I was first replying to your letter, I reached at random for the nearest book I could find to demonstrate that this sort of exercise is deeply

and profoundly stupid. That book was *Life*, the by Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards. It turns out that your CES Letter directly plagiarizes the work of a rock legend! And what really is odd is that they both start with same word! Am I supposed to just assume this is a coincidence?

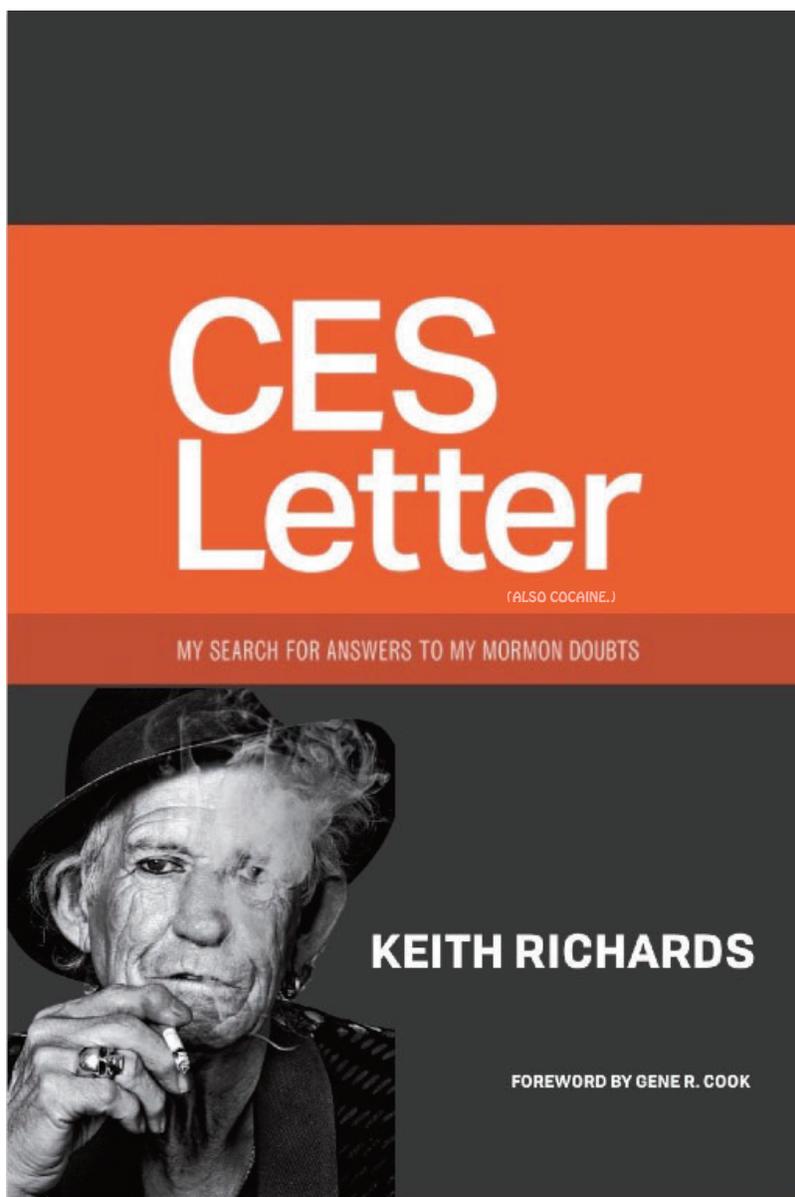
The following are a side-by-side comparison of the beginning of the CES Letter and the beginning of *Life* by Keith Richards. Frankly, I'm flabbergasted.

**CES Letter:**

Thank you... you're going to have... a real insight... [into] the laws of the land...  
There is no direct evidence...I found [cocaine]... in that which is to come...

*Life* by Keith Richards:

Thanks and praises... you're not going to have... a real education... on this little point of law... there is a problem here about evidence...we found cocaine in that damn car...



...and it continues on. It's like reading from Letter to a CES Director!

Also, both the CES letter and *Life* mention elephants. ("There was a huge business of getting elephants on stage in Memphis." – *Life*, page 12.)

Just one more coincidence, huh? You really expect me to believe that?

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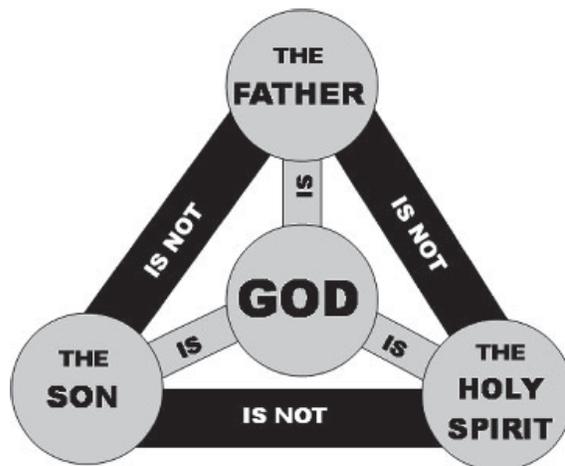
11. The Book of Mormon taught and still teaches a Trinitarian view of the Godhead. Joseph Smith's early theology also held this view.

## SHORT ANSWER:

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**Not so. By definition, the Trinitarian view is incomprehensible and requires extra-scriptural creeds to make any sense of it at all. Most people, in and out of the Church, view God in Latter-day Saint terms, and the Church's theology has been consistent over time.**

## LONG ANSWER:



Clear as mud

People have been trying to explain the Trinity for over a thousand years, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that I need more than two sentences to do likewise.

As part of the over 100,000 changes to the Book of Mormon, there were major changes made to reflect Joseph's evolved view of the Godhead.

100,000 is a pretty big number, but most of those "changes" aren't changes at all. The Book of Mormon was submitted to the printer without any punctuation whatsoever, along with heaven knows how

many spelling errors. (Oliver, why couldn't you have been an infallible speller?)

E.B. Grandin, the Book of Mormon printer who was not a member of the Church and made no claims to inerrancy, went through and added punctuation where he saw fit. So every single item of punctuation added can rightly be considered a change in the original manuscript, and in a document of 265,000 words with no punctuation, those "changes" add up quickly.

Yet you seem to be conflating the procedural process of punctuation additions and spelling corrections with "major changes." That's silly. Out of an estimated 100,000 changes, you identify precisely four that could be termed "major." Yes, those four are "part" of the 100,000 changes, but on the face of it, a .00004% error rate is pretty good.

Let's take a look at the four that are giving you Trinitarian heartburn.

Original 1830 Edition Text <a href="#">View Online</a>	Current, Altered Text <a href="#">View Online</a>
<p><a href="#">1 Nephi 3 (p.25):</a> And he said unto me, Behold, the virgin whom thou seest, is the mother of God, after the manner of the flesh.</p>	<p><a href="#">1 Nephi 11:18:</a> And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of <b>the Son of</b> God, after the manner of the flesh.</p>
<p><a href="#">1 Nephi 3 (p.25):</a> And the angel said unto me, behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father!</p>	<p><a href="#">1 Nephi 11:21:</a> And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even <b>the Son of</b> the Eternal Father!</p>
<p><a href="#">1 Nephi 3 (p.26):</a> And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Everlasting God, was judged of the world;</p>	<p><a href="#">1 Nephi 11:32:</a> And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, <b>the Son of</b> the everlasting God was judged of the world;</p>
<p><a href="#">1 Nephi 3 (p.32):</a> These last records...shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father and the Savior of the world;</p>	<p><a href="#">1 Nephi 13:40:</a> These last records...shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is <b>the Son of</b> the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world;</p>

Your problem seems to be that the text was originally Trinitarian, while the changes are not. But that demonstrates a misunderstanding of doctrine of the Trinity, because even with the changes, these verses remain perfectly consistent with Trinitarian creeds.

No Trinitarian would object to calling Jesus Christ the Son of God, or the Son of the Eternal Father. They fully believe that Jesus is the Son of God. They also believe that Jesus is his own father, as well as a separate individual from his Father, but that he is also not separate from his Father. They believe there are definitely three Gods, but more importantly, there is definitely only one God.

And if that makes no sense, it's because, by definition, it's not supposed to.



are they three Beings in one body or substance?”

Twenty-seven percent responded similar to the Mormon belief that they are separate beings. Sixty-six percent answered in line with traditional Christian beliefs that they are “three beings in one body or substance.”

The other half of Christians surveyed were given a different question about the Trinity: “The New Testament says that God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost are one. Do you believe that means they are one in purpose or one in body?”

This time the answers went the other direction. Those answering the traditional “one in body” were 31 percent. Those answering “one in purpose” were 58 percent.

Lawrence said that Mormons say the oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the New Testament is an oneness of purpose. The positive response of Christians to this concept in the second question surprised Lawrence. “I was wondering if there was a difference. I wasn’t expecting a flip-flop. But it was. It just shifts from two-to-one one way and almost two-to-one the other way,” Lawrence said.

What caused the shift? Lawrence said it is in the way the questions were asked. The first question focused on contrasting separateness and oneness — “separate beings” versus “three beings in one body or substance.”

The second question focused on the meaning of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’s oneness — a physical (or metaphysical) oneness versus a purpose oneness.

“If it is presented in the way Mormons interpret scripture versus the opposite, they come toward the Mormon view,” Lawrence said. “If you focus on physical characteristics, you get another one.”

– *Courtesy of the Deseret News*

The confusion over how to interpret the creeds is still with us, and it was definitely present in the 1830s. The accepted definition of the Trinity did not arrive until centuries after the Crucifixion, and only then after a great deal of heated – and even on occasion bloody – disagreements. The biblical verses used to support it are in no way self-evident. As my mission president Joseph Fielding McConkie used to say, if you had no additional information, you could easily read the Bible from now until the Millennium and never have it occur to you that Jesus is his own father.

I offer all that to suggest that Joseph’s thinking on the Trinity very likely did evolve, but not in the way you imply. That is to say, he likely didn’t fully understand that believing in the Father and the Son as separate physical beings required you to simultaneously not believe they were separate physical beings. The Trinity is a logical impossibility, and it probably wasn’t until the Church started to attract attention that Joseph grasped the implications of how heretical his position really was.

But as to these verses, why were they changed? My guess is that they sounded too Catholic for Joseph's taste, not necessarily Trinitarian. The phrase "mother of God" is uniquely Catholic and carries doctrinal implications that would likely have made Joseph uncomfortable, Trinitarians notwithstanding. All the other changes are in close textual proximity to that first one, so Joseph probably wanted to make sure this passage remained consistent. The changes really don't change the doctrine – Jesus is both God and Son of God, after all, and Trinitarians fully accept that.

Of course, to accept that Joseph could make such changes is to accept that he could have made an error during the translation process, or that he may have made an error with this change, which, as I've repeatedly pointed out, is not hard for me to accept at all. That may have come as a shock to you, but, again, that introduction that warns about "the mistakes of men" has been in print for almost two hundred years, so it's pretty hard to say the Church has been covering up that possibility.

In addition to these revised passages, the following verses are among many verses still in the Book of Mormon that can be read with a Trinitarian view of the Godhead:

#### ALMA 11:38-39

*38: Now Zeezrom saith again unto him: Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?*

*39: And Amulek said unto him: Yea, he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last;*

#### MOSIAH 15:1-4

*1: And now Abinadi said unto them: I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people.*

*2: And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son –*

*3: The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the*

*Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son –*

*4: And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.*

#### ETHER 3:14-15

*14: Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.*

*15: And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.*

MOSIAH 16:15

*15: “Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father. Amen.”*

Yes, and these verses take the bottom out from under your argument. If Joseph’s purpose in altering 1 Nephi was to purge Trinitarianism from the Book of Mormon, why would he leave these untouched? Also, you left out a big one from your list. The same title page that announces the Book of Mormon is not inerrant also says the purpose of the Book of Mormon is “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations.” [Caps in original]

Again, there it is, right on the first page. The verses you quote, coupled with the announcement of its purpose, make it clear Christ is God and that he is the Eternal Father as well as the Son, and it does so more explicitly than the verses Joseph changed. Even if he somehow forgot about all these other verses – highly unlikely – surely he wouldn’t let that Trinitarian title page hang out there like a big steaming matso ball, would he? In addition, the Doctrine and Covenants makes no attempt to shy away from these doctrines – several revelations begin by announcing that it is the Father speaking, and they end in the name of Jesus Christ.

What’s going on?

The answer, paradoxically, is that these verses are no more intrinsically Trinitarian than the changes are un-Trinitarian.

The Trinity relies on extra-Biblical creedal language to interpret scripture. In other words, one has to learn from creedal texts outside the Bible that God doesn’t make any sense at all and then graft that interpretation on the scripture after the fact. The plain meaning of the text will not automatically guide you to that bizarre conclusion. So these verses are consistent with Bible verses that make similar pronouncements, and no one, including Joseph Smith, has to apply the external Trinitarian lens to read them correctly.

After all, Jesus stated that “this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3) If our eternal life depends on us knowing God, how can we do that if he’s incomprehensible?

That verse comes from what I believe to be the most profoundly spiritual chapter in all of scripture. John 17, the Great Intercessory Prayer, offers the solution. It provides the clearest possible understanding of what God means when he says he is the Father and the Son, and it does so in what seems to me to be explicitly Latter-day Saint terms:

## JOHN 17: 20-23

*20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;*

*21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

*22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:*

*23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*

So we're all supposed to be one, just as Christ and his father are one. Do we imagine that involves all of us becoming the same person? To be saved, does Jeremy Runnells have to become Jim Bennett and become Jesus Christ, too? Are we all to be some giant blobular God together, and yet be somehow also separate at the same time?

As Paul would say, Heaven forbid! This is a unity of purpose Christ is talking about, not an esoteric Trinitarian paradox. These verses in the Book of Mormon, and similar-sounding verses in the Bible, are teaching the essential nature of unity. To paraphrase BYU professor Robert Millet, they're to teach us that the Father and the Son are infinitely more alike than they are separate. I think we often overcorrect in the Church and go out of our way to emphasize their distinct physical forms and lose sight of their innate and magnificent spiritual unity. These verses remain in order to teach us a profound lesson that we overlook at our spiritual peril.

When I teach this doctrine, I liken it to children who try to play one parent off the other. Kids often hold out hope that if Mom says no, maybe they can convince Dad to say yes. A perfectly united marriage wouldn't have this problem, as the mother would be able to perfectly speak for the father, and vice versa.

In the Godhead, Jesus's agenda is identical to the Father's agenda – you can't play one off of the other. So when people read scriptures and ask, "well, is this the Father or the Son speaking," Jesus's answer is – doesn't matter in the least. We speak for each other without the slightest deviation. I am so in line with the Father that I can speak for the Father, in the first person as the Father, as if I were the Father.

That's what Christ expects from us – to become one, to have His agenda be our agenda, for all of to be perfectly united and "knit together in love." It's a beautiful doctrine, and, at its core, astonishingly simple, as opposed to the Trinity, which is ridiculously complex and impossible to understand.

Boyd Kirkland made the following observation :

*“The Book of Mormon and early revelations of Joseph Smith do indeed vividly portray a picture of the Father and Son as the same God...why is it that the Book of Mormon not only doesn't clear up questions about the Godhead which have raged in Christianity for centuries, but on the contrary just adds to the confusion? This seems particularly ironic, since a major avowed purpose of the book was to restore lost truths and end doctrinal controversies caused by the “great and abominable Church's” corruption of the Bible...In later years he [Joseph] reversed his earlier efforts to completely ‘monotheise’ the godhead and instead ‘tritheised’ it.”*

Are we supposed to know who Boyd Kirkland is? In your last edition of the CES Letter, you referred to him as “LDS Scholar Boyd Kirkland,” so I googled him, and all I came up with was a Wikipedia article about “an American television director of animated cartoons. He was best known for his work on X-Men Evolution.” So I googled him again, adding the word “Mormon” to the search, and the same article popped up.

Sure enough, under his biographical information, it points out that he was a Mormon who wrote articles about controversial issues. To reference him as an “LDS Scholar,” however, implies some kind of unique authority or academic status that he didn't have – his educational background is a B.S. in business administration from Weber State, and he was an animator by profession. He's no more an “LDS scholar” than I am – he was an unofficial critic to counter us unofficial apologists. So I'm glad you corrected your own error.

In any case, it's sad to read that he passed away at age 60. Far too young.

Again, he's welcome to his opinion, as are you, but I don't see any need to agree with either, and I don't think his argument necessarily carries any more weight than anyone else's.

Although I'm thrilled that he was, in fact, the “producer for Attack of the Killer Tomatoes: The Animated Series,” which may well be the greatest thing I've ever heard.

*Attack of the Killer Tomatoes!*  
*Attack of the Killer Tomatoes!*

*They'll beat you, bash you,  
Squish you, smash you  
Serve you up for brunch  
And finish you off...*

*For dinner or lunch!*



UPDATE: Additional information and analysis can be found at [cesletter.org/trinitarian](http://cesletter.org/trinitarian)

UPDATE FROM JIM: No, it can't, because that link doesn't work, either. But additional information about killer tomatoes can be found at "10 Saucy Facts about Killer Tomatoes."

Assuming that the official 1838 first vision account is truthful and accurate, why would Joseph Smith hold a Trinitarian view of the Godhead if he personally saw God the Father and Jesus Christ as separate and embodied beings a few years earlier in the Sacred Grove?

Good question. The answer is that he wouldn't and didn't. Certainly you have provided no evidence that he did, although you have provided sufficient evidence that you, yourself, don't understand Trinitarianism. Alas, it's just one more argument you unquestioningly pass along without bothering to actually understand what you're saying.

Boyd Kirkland would have never done that.

