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Do We Need to Make Changes to the Book of Mormon Text?



Royal Skousen

There have been three important findings in the critical text project of the Book of Mormon. The first is that Joseph Smith received an English-language text word for word, which he read off to his scribe. The second finding is that the original English-language text itself was very precisely constructed; where textual error has occurred in its transmission, the earliest reading is usually the superior reading. The third finding is the recent identification of 256 changes in the text that make a difference in the meaning or in the spelling of a name, ones that would show up in any translation of the book. Ultimately, these findings have led me to the conclusion that any serious study of the Book of Mormon requires the most accurate text possible.

The most important of the proposed changes to the text can be found in the appendix to *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, edited by me and published by Yale University Press in 2009. This appendix, referred to as “Significant Textual Changes”, lists 719 alternative readings that have occurred in the history of the Book of Mormon text. These changes make important differences in the text and provide significant information about the nature of that text. Yet from the list itself, the changes look rather innocuous. To get a full understanding of the significance of these textual changes, one must turn to volume 4 of the critical text of the Book of Mormon, namely, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, published in six parts from 2004 to 2009 by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) at Brigham Young University. These books are for the serious scholar and cannot be casually approached. The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the more significant changes introduced by the Yale text of the Book of Mormon (and argued for in volume 4 of the critical text). My intent here is to show why these changes are necessary for a scholarly study of the Book of Mormon.

In reviews of the Yale edition, a number of objections have been voiced about whether these changes need to be made in the standard canonized text. One objection has been that the changes are insignificant, or appear to be so.¹ And since they don't change the doctrine or the basic narrative of the book, some have felt that there's no need to make any changes at all.² For some general readers of the Book of Mormon, this may well be the case. Readers get spiritual confirmation of the book despite the fact that there are textual errors in it. Mine came to me 33 years ago, in 1969 as I was reading the story of the conversion of king Lamoni's queen, in Alma 19:28-30, when the Spirit witnessed to me that "this really happened". The Lord provides spiritual confirmation of his book despite its errors. But there are two ways to read the Book of Mormon. Once we move beyond a casual reading of the text (or the need to quote a random passage) and turn to study the Book of Mormon in detail, the textual differences become important.

One further objection has been that some of the readings in the Yale edition restore earlier readings that Joseph Smith himself removed in his editing for the second and third editions of the Book of Mormon (in the 1837 Kirtland edition and in the 1840 Cincinnati / Nauvoo edition).³ Indeed, the Yale edition does reverse most of Joseph Smith's later editing of the text. Yet it is worth noting that the editors for the canonical 1981 LDS edition also reversed some of Joseph's editing:

- In four places the 1981 edition restored *founder*, which had been changed to *foundation* by Joseph Smith in his editing for the 1837 edition (in 1 Nephi 13:6 and 1 Nephi 14:17, and twice in 2 Nephi 26:22).
- In his editing for the 1837 edition, Joseph Smith replaced the strange *preparator* in 1 Nephi 15:35 with *foundation*. The 1981 edition restored the strange word, while the Yale edition emends *preparator* to *proprietor*.
- In Alma 62:36, the 1981 LDS edition rejected Joseph Smith's 1840 emendation (which states that king Ammoron had one servant protecting him) by supplying its own conjectural emendation (which states that there were several servants protecting the king):

earliest extant reading

but behold the king did awake his **servant** before he died
insomuch that **they** did pursue Teancum and slew him

1840 conjectural emendation

servant ... **he**

1981 conjectural emendation

servants ... they

There is more than one servant guarding Ammoron, just as there was more than one servant guarding his brother Amalickiah when he was assassinated by Teancum earlier in the war: “and he did cause the death of the king immediately that he did not awake his **servants**” (Alma 51:34). In Alma 62:36, the loss of the plural *s* for a noun is more likely than the accidental replacement of the singular pronoun *he* with the plural *they*. In this case, the Yale edition agrees with the 1981 conjectured reading.

And finally, in one case Joseph Smith later rejected (in 1840) his own earlier emendation (in 1837) of *my* to *thy* in 1 Nephi 3:3:

earliest reading

for behold Laban hath the record of the Jews
and also a genealogy of **my** forefathers

1837 emendation by Joseph Smith

and also a genealogy of **thy** forefathers

1840 restoration of earliest reading

and also a genealogy of **my** forefathers

In each case, editors have sought to use the best reading, even if it means reversing earlier decisions.

All of the 30 changes discussed in this paper make a difference. Nearly all of them would show up when translating the text into a foreign language. Here I group the changes according to various types of change. In each case, I provide a brief summary of the evidence for the change and why it is significant for serious study of the text. The more complete arguments for the changes are found in *Analysis of Textual Variants*.

In the following list of changes, I use bolding to show what the change is. A caret ^ is used to show where text has been inserted. A phrasal or clausal break is indicated by a single slash /, while a sentence break is shown by a double slash //. The original manuscript is represented as O, the printer’s manuscript as P. An asterisk after O or P refers to the original reading in that manuscript (thus O* or P*), while a following small c refers to a corrected reading (thus Oc or Pc). A correction in P by John

Gilbert, the 1830 typesetter, is marked as Pjg. Significant LDS editions are listed by their date of publication.

1. I first list a number of cases where the original reading (often the reading of the original manuscript) provides not only the correct reading, but one that makes the text wholly consistent in usage.

1 Nephi 8:31

and he saw other multitudes **pressing** their way (O)
towards that great and spacious building

>

and he saw other multitudes **feeling** their way (P, 1830)

Are the multitudes pressing or feeling their way towards the great and spacious building? Everywhere else in Lehi's dream, people are pressing forward (5 times). One of these passages, in the preceding verse, uses virtually the same phraseology as here in verse 31: "and they did press their way forward" (1 Nephi 8:30). On the other hand, there are no instances anywhere in the scriptures of people feeling their way. Here in 1 Nephi 8:31, these people are determined to get into that great and spacious building. Oliver Cowdery, when he copied the text from O into P, misread scribe 3 of O's *pressing* as *feeling*. In O, the *p* had a high ascender, the first *s* was an elongated *s*, and the *e* vowel was missing, so it is not surprising that Oliver had difficulty reading the word here and replaced it with *feeling*.

1 Nephi 12:18

and a great and a terrible gulf divideth them
yea even the **sword** of the justice of the Eternal God (O)

>

yea even the **word** of the justice of the Eternal God (P, 1830)

Is the justice of the Eternal God his word or his sword? Here Oliver Cowdery misread scribe 2 of O's *sword* as *word*. One could argue that God's judgment will be declared by his word, which seems very likely true. But elsewhere the Book of Mormon text itself refers only to the sword of God's justice (7 times), including one in Ether 8:23 that precisely agrees with the original phraseology in 1 Nephi 12:18: "yea even the sword of the justice of the Eternal God shall fall upon you". The specific

phraseology in Ether 8:23 also demonstrates the consistency of the original text of the Book of Mormon.

Alma 17:1

behold to his astonishment he met ^ the sons of Mosiah (P)
a journeying towards the land of Zarahemla

>

behold to his astonishment he met **with** the sons of Mosiah (1830)

Here the additional *with*, added by the 1830 typesetter, suggests a kind of planned meeting between Alma and the sons of king Mosiah, when in fact the meeting was unplanned (note the phrase “to his astonishment”). Elsewhere in the Book of Mormon text there are no instances where “X meets with Y”, only examples of “X meets Y” (51 times). This includes two other examples (later in the book of Alma) that refer to this specific meeting in Alma 17:1, and both of these lack the *with*:

Alma 27:16

and it came to pass that as Ammon was going forth into the land
he and his brethren met Alma over in the place of which has been spoken

Alma 27:19

now the joy of Alma in **meeting his brethren** was truly great

2. One important aspect regarding the consistency of the original text is how closely it follows the phraseology of the King James Bible, including paraphrases and even allusions to biblical language. Various examples provide a clear indication that the Book of Mormon text is being closely controlled, word for word.

1 Nephi 10:10

and after that he had baptized the Messiah with water
he should behold and bear record

that he had baptized the Lamb of God

which should take away the **sin** of the world (O, P*)

>

which should take away the **sins** of the world (Pc, 1830)

2 Nephi 31:4

wherefore I would that ye should remember
that I have spoken unto you concerning that prophet
which the Lord shewed unto me
that should baptize the Lamb of God
which should take away the **sin** of the world (P)

>

which should take away the **sins** of the world (1830)

In these two passages, the original Book of Mormon text refers to John the Baptist and how he baptized the Lamb of God. In 1 Nephi 10:10, the original text refers to Christ as the one “which should take away the **sin** of the world” – that is, *sin* rather than *sins*. And when we compare this language with the parallel Gospel account, in John 1:29, we find the same use of the singular: “the next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him and saith: behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the **sin** of the world”. The same reference to the words of John the Baptist is found later in the Book of Mormon, in 2 Nephi 31:4. Despite this identical use of the singular *sin* in these two accounts of Christ’s baptism, scribes and typesetters have expected the plural usage, “the **sins** of the world”. And thus they have changed the singular *sin* to *sins* in these two passages (Oliver Cowdery consciously corrected P in 1 Nephi 10:10 while the 1830 typesetter changed the grammatical number when he set 2 Nephi 31:4). The plural *sins* is what we get everywhere else in the Book of Mormon. Whenever John the Baptist is not mentioned, we consistently get references to Christ paying for “the **sins** of the world” – that is, in the plural. Three examples refer to Christ being slain for the sins of the world, three to him atoning for the sins of the world, three to him taking away the sins of the world, and two to him taking upon himself the sins of the world. In other words, the original text pays close attention to the singular *sin* when referring to John the Baptist’s own words, whereas the printed text has reduced everything to a uniform plural, the phraseology that we expect in modern English.

1 Nephi 20:1

hearken and hear this / O house of Jacob
which are called by the name of Israel
and are come forth out of the waters of Judah ^ (O, P, 1830)

>

(or out of the waters of baptism) (1840)

>

or out of the waters of baptism (1920)

In the 1840 edition, in a quote from Isaiah 48:1, Joseph Smith added in parentheses after “out of the waters of Judah” the extra words “or out of the waters of baptism”. The parentheses indicate that Joseph very likely considered this extra text as explanatory rather than as a restoration of the original reading of the Isaiah text. In the editing for the 1920 LDS edition, the extra words were added to the LDS standard text, but the parentheses were removed, so that now it looks like the original text read “out of the waters of Judah or out of the waters of baptism”. Since Isaiah 48:1 itself lacks the extra text, some LDS commentators have misinterpreted the situation here and assumed that this phrase was consciously stripped from the Hebrew text, perhaps by some Jewish scribe with an anti-Christian animus, with the result that the Old Testament ended up with no specific reference to the practice of baptism. The critical text of the Book of Mormon follows the original reading here, which follows the Isaiah original.

1 Nephi 22:8

wherefore it is likened unto the being **nursed** by the Gentiles (O)
and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders

>

wherefore it is likened unto the being **nourished** by the Gentiles (P, 1830)

Here Nephi is commenting on the biblical passage (from Isaiah 48-49) that he has just quoted in 1 Nephi 20-21. In that passage, Isaiah refers to the house of Israel as being nursed by the Gentile kings and queens: “and they shall bring thy sons in their arms and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders // and kings shall be thy **nursing** fathers and their queens thy **nursing** mothers” (1 Nephi 21:22-23 / Isaiah 49:22-23). In his commentary here in 1 Nephi 22:8, Nephi uses the word *nursed*. But when Oliver Cowdery copied the text from O into P, he accidentally misread *nursed* as *nourished*. Earlier, in verse 6 of this chapter, Oliver correctly copied the word *nursed*: “after that they have been **nursed** by the Gentiles”. The correct word, in both cases, is *nursed*.

Alma 42:2

after the Lord God sent our first parents forth from the garden of Eden
to till the ground from whence he was taken
yea he **drove** out the man (O)

>

yea he **drew** out the man (P, 1830)

Indeed, God drove out the man, as it says in Genesis 3:23-24: “the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken // so he **drove** out the man”. O correctly has *drove*, but Oliver Cowdery accidentally misread *drove* as *drew* when he copied the text from O into P. Perhaps some interpreters may prefer the less violent image of the word *drew*, but the original text insists upon the biblical reading.

3. Frequently, a transmission error will introduce an odd or unexpected reading that was not at all present in the original text.

1 Nephi 15:16

yea they shall be **numbered** again among the house of Israel (O)

>

yea they shall be **remembered** again among the house of Israel (P, 1830)

In the original Book of Mormon text, people are referred to as being numbered among or with some other people. Whether they are remembered or not is textually irrelevant, so the use of *remembered* in this passage seems a little odd. In this instance, the past participle *numbered* was misread as *remembered* when the text was copied from O into P.

1 Nephi 15:36

wherefore the wicked are **separated** from the righteous (O)

and also from that tree of life

>

wherefore the wicked are **rejected** from the righteous (P, 1830)

Can people be rejected from the tree of life as well as from the righteous? The tree of life is freely available to all who come to it. It is the wicked themselves who reject the tree of life. Here Oliver Cowdery misread the word *separated*, written by scribe 2 of O near the end of the last line on the manuscript page, as *rejected*. Verse 28 earlier in the chapter supports the use of the verb *separate* in referring to the righteous and the tree of life: “it was an awful gulf which **separateth** the wicked from the tree of life and also from the saints of God”.

1 Nephi 19:4

wherefore I Nephi did make a record upon the other plates
 which gives an account or which gives a greater account
 of the wars and contentions and destructions of my people
 and now this have I done and commanded my people
that they should do (O, P, 1830)

>

what they should do (1837)

Here Nephi's commandment is specific, namely, his people are commanded to keep a larger secular record on other plates, as he has done, according to what he has just explained. He is not giving a general commandment about "what they should do". The change of *that* to *what* in the 1837 edition may simply be a typo since it was not marked in P by Joseph Smith in his editing for the 1837 edition.

2 Nephi 28:23

yea they are grasped **with death and hell //**
and death and hell and the devil and all that have been seized therewith
 must stand before the throne of God and be judged (P, 1830)

>

yea they are grasped **with death and hell and the devil //**
 and all that have been seized therewith
 must stand before the throne of God and be judged (conjectured)

Here we have a case of dittography, the accidental repetition of "death and hell and". This mistake very likely occurred when Oliver Cowdery copied the text from O into P (O is not extant here). In order to deal with the resulting repetition, the 1830 typesetter placed a semicolon between the two statements so that the standard text reads "and death and hell and the devil and all that have been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God and be judged according to their works". There is no scriptural support for the idea that the devil himself will be judged by God on the day of judgment. That judgment already occurred when Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven. But going further, it is obvious that death and hell, even as personified beings, will not stand before God to be judged of their works. Such a scene seems quite impossible, especially for the literally minded writers of the Book of Mormon. The correct reading here in 2 Nephi 28:23 simply states that those who have been seized with death and hell and the devil will stand before God and be judged.

Mosiah 17:13

they took him and bound him
and **scourged** his skin with fagots (P, 1830)
yea even unto death

>

and **scorched** his skin with fagots (conjectured)

It was very unlikely that Abinadi was whipped with fagots (bundles of sticks) prior to burning him at the stake with those fagots. The following verse refers to scorching Abinadi, not scourging him: “and now when the flames began to scorch him” (Mosiah 17:14). Moreover, the entire Book of Mormon text consistently refers to Abinadi as having died from burning, not whipping (there are, for instance, seven references to Abinadi’s “death by fire”). Language from Early Modern English supports the use of the verb *scorch* to refer to burning people at the stake, as in John Hooker’s 1586 account of how Europeans had treated American natives: “they subdued a naked and a yielding people ... and most tyrannically and against the course of all human nature did **scorch** and roast them to death”. Moreover, the frequent manuscript spelling of *scourge* as *scorge* in O and P argues that Joseph Smith pronounced the word with an *or* sound rather than with *er*, thus readily leading to the mishearing of *scorched* as *scourged* when Joseph dictated the text here to Oliver Cowdery. O is not extant here, but probably read incorrectly as P does.

Alma 19:30

and when she had said this
she **clapped** her hands (P)
being filled with joy
speaking many words which were not understood

>

she **clasped** her hands (1830)

Did the queen clap or clasp her hands? The printer’s manuscript here reads *claped*, which the 1830 typesetter misread as *clasped*. Earlier, in Mosiah 18:11 he correctly interpreted the *claped* in P as an instance of *clapped*: “and now when the people had heard these words / they **clapped** their hands for joy”. Here in Alma 19:30, the correct *clapped* represents the more emotional, even pentecostal, expression of the queen rather than the rather anemic *clasped* that occurs in the current text.

Alma 27:27

and they were **numbered** among the people of Nephi (O)
and also numbered among the people which were of the church of God

>

and they were among the people of Nephi (P, 1830)

In Alma 27:27, the past participle *numbered* was accidentally omitted in the copywork, so that the text ended up having the rather vacuous statement that the people of Ammon “were among the people of Nephi”. This reading is also strange because these former Lamanites lived separately from the Nephites (see Alma 27:20-26). The original reading with *numbered* simply means that the people of Ammon were now considered Nephites, no longer as Lamanites.

Alma 39:13

but rather return unto them
and acknowledge your faults and **repair** that wrong which ye have done (O)

>

and acknowledge your faults and **retain** that wrong which ye have done (P, 1830)

>

and acknowledge your faults and that wrong which ye have done (1920)

Here the original manuscript has Alma telling his son Corianton to return to the Zoramites to acknowledge his failures as a missionary and to repair the wrong he had done. After writing the text on this page of O, Oliver Cowdery accidentally spilled quite a few ink drops on the page. One dropped on the ascender of the letter *p* in the word *repair*, which led Oliver to misread the word as the nonsensical *retain* when he copied the text from O into P. The editors for the 1920 LDS edition removed the word *retain* here since it didn’t make much sense, but now the text reads as if all Corianton had to do was say he was sorry for his mistakes. In repentance, there is a need for restitution as well as admitting you’re at fault, as can be found at Mosiah 27:35 and Helaman 5:17. Note especially the same phraseology in the second of these passages: “to endeavor to repair unto them the wrongs which they had done”.

Alma 43:13-14

and thus the Nephites were compelled alone
to withstand against the Lamanites ...

and all those which had dissented from the Nephites
 which were Amlicites and Zoramites
 and the descendants of the priests of Noah
 now those **dissenters** were as numerous nearly as were the Nephites (O)
 >
 now those **descendants** were as numerous nearly as were the Nephites (P, 1830)

Here in Alma 43:14, when Oliver Cowdery copied from O into P, he misread *dissenters* (spelled as *desenters* in O) as *descendants* (which he spelled as *desendants* in P). He was undoubtedly influenced by the *descendants* (also spelled as *desendants*) in the immediately preceding text (“the descendants of the priests of Noah”). Thus the standard text nonsensically ends up stating that within a few generations the offspring of the priests of king Noah had multiplied so rapidly that now there were almost as many of them as Nephites. An incredible population explosion! Of course, what the original text says here is much more reasonable, that there were now almost as many Nephite dissenters among the Lamanites as there were Nephites proper – a very ominous situation.

Alma 43:38

there was now and then a man fell among the Nephites
 by their **wounds** and the loss of blood (O)
 >
 by their **swords** and the loss of blood (P, 1830)

The Nephites fell because of their wounds in battle rather than by their own swords. If *swords* were correct, the pronominal determiner *their* would have to refer to their opponents, the Lamanites, yet the nearest reference to the Lamanites is some distance earlier, in verse 37. Here Oliver Cowdery misread his own handwritten *wounds* as *swords* when he copied the text from O into P.

Alma 47:13

and that he would deliver them up into Lehonti’s hands
 if he would make him Amalickiah
the second leader over the whole army (O)
 >
a second leader over the whole army (P, 1830)

There is only one second leader over the whole army, not more than one. Note the language later in verse 17: “now it was the custom among the Lamanites if their chief leader was killed to appoint **the** second leader to be their chief leader.” Such a rule allowed for automatic succession in the army, especially helpful in time of war and absolutely necessary in battle. In verse 13, the definite article *the* occurred at the end of a manuscript line in O, a place where Oliver Cowdery frequently misread the text as his eye skipped too quickly to the beginning of the next line. Here Oliver mistakenly replaced the definite article *the* with the indefinite article *a* when he copied the text into P.

Alma 51:7

and Parhoron retained the judgment seat
 which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Parhoron
 and also **among** the people of liberty (O)
 >
 and also **many** the people of liberty (Pc)
 >
 and also **many of** the people of liberty (Pjg, 1830)

Here Oliver Cowdery accidentally misread *among* as *many* when he copied the text from O into P. Clearly, all the people of liberty supported Parhoron, not just some of them. Political divisions between peoples seem to have been rather sharp in the Book of Mormon text.

Alma 51:15

he sent a petition with the voice of the people unto the governor of the land
 desiring that he should **head** it (O, Pc)
 >
 desiring that he should **read** it (Pjg, 1830)
 >
 desiring that he should **heed** it (conjectured)

Did Moroni first request the governor to read his petition or simply to heed it? The difficulty here arose because Oliver Cowdery misspelled the word *heed* in both O and P as *head*. Although Oliver frequently used this misspelling in O, this is the only place where he permanently ended up copying *heed* as *head* into P. Unfortunately, the 1830 typesetter was unable to recognize from the context that the misspelling *head* was an error for *heed*. Since the statement that the governor should

“head” the petition seemed impossible, the typesetter ended up correcting *head* to *read* in P (he overwrote the initial *h* with an *r*) and then set *read* in the 1830 edition.

Ether 1:41

go to and gather together ... thy **family** (P)

and also Jared thy brother and his family

and also thy friends and their families

and the friends of Jared and their families

>

go to and gather together ... thy **families** (1830)

In Ether 1:41, the 1830 typesetter accidentally set *thy families* rather than the correct singular, *thy family*, thus making it appear that the brother of Jared was a polygamist. The typesetter was probably influenced by the two instances of *their families* that occur later in the passage. Correcting the text here removes a tendentious reading that was earlier used by some church polemicists to defend the practice of polygamy.

4. There are numerous examples of Early Modern English lexical usage in the original text of the Book of Mormon. In fact, there appears to be no examples of word usage in the Book of Mormon that entered the English language after 1700. The Book of Mormon is indeed archaic linguistically. Such a finding is highly significant, and definitely needs to be retained in a scholarly text of the Book of Mormon.

Mosiah 3:19

for the natural man is an enemy to God

and has been from the fall of Adam and will be forever and ever

but if he yieldeth to the enticings of the Holy Spirit (P, 1830)

>

unless he yieldeth to the enticings of the Holy Spirit (1920)

The archaic conjunctive *but if* meant ‘unless’ and was used with this meaning in English up to the late 1500s, as in the following example from Philip Sidney (1580): “He did not like that maids should once stir out of their fathers’ houses but if it were to milk a cow.” Here in Mosiah 3:19, the editors for the 1920 LDS edition replaced *but if* with *unless*, which is what it means in this passage.

Alma 37:37

counsel ^ the Lord in all thy doings (O, P, 1830)
and he will direct thee for good

>

counsel **with** the Lord (1920)

Alma 39:10

and I command you to take it upon you
to counsel ^ your elder brothers in your undertakings (O, P, 1830)

>

to counsel **with** your elder brothers (1920)

In these two passages, editors for the 1920 LDS edition added the expected *with*. Yet the lack of the *with* in the earliest text in these two examples appears to be intentional. In earlier English the *with* was not necessary, as in this 1547 example from John Hooper: “Moses ... counseled the Lord and thereupon advised his subjects what was to be done.” In today’s English, we would say that Moses “counseled **with** the Lord”.

Helaman 8:11

have ye not read that God gave power unto one man / even Moses
to smite upon the waters of the Red Sea
and they **departed** hither and thither (P)

>

and they **parted** hither and thither (1830)

The 1830 typesetter apparently assumed that *departed*, the reading in P, was an error for *parted*, so he set *parted*. By 1600 the meaning ‘to part, separate’ for the verb depart had become archaic in Early Modern English. Such usage was systematically eliminated, for instance, from the 1611 King James Bible. But previous English translations used the word *depart* with this earlier meaning, as in the Geneva Bible’s 1557 translation of John 19:24: “they departed my raiment among them”. There the King James Bible reads “they parted my raiment among them”. Similarly, the Book of Common Prayer originally had in the ceremony of matrimony the phraseology “till death us depart” (1549 and 1559), but this had become archaic by the 1600s and was altered in 1662 to “till death us do part”.

5. There are over a dozen changes in various Book of Mormon names. Some of these have a significant effect on how we interpret the historical record.

Mosiah 25:2

now there were not so many of the children of Nephi
or so many of those which were descendants of Nephi
as there were of the people of Zarahemla
which was a descendant of **Muloch** (P)
and those which came with him into the wilderness

>

which was a descendant of **Mulok** (1830)

>

which was a descendant of **Mulek** (1879)

Here in the book of Mosiah, the name of the youngest son of king Zedekiah is given as *Muloch*, not *Mulek*. This is the earliest extant form of his name. The name *Mulek* was substituted for *Muloch* later in the text (in Helaman 6:10 and Helaman 8:21), probably because *Muloch* and *Mulek* were both pronounced identically by Joseph Smith. However, close to these two passages in Helaman, Joseph dictated 13 instances of the city *Mulek* to his scribe Oliver Cowdery (12 times in Alma 51-53 and one time close by, in Helaman 5:15), thus leading Oliver to misspell the two later instances of *Muloch* as *Mulek*. It is interesting to consider the implications of Zedekiah giving his last son the name of the pagan god *Molech* or *Moloch*.

Alma 24:1

the **Amelicites** and the Amulonites (O)
and the Lamanites which were in the land of Amulon and also in the land of Helam ...

>

the **Amalekites** and the Amulonites (P, 1830)

>

the **Amlicites** and the Amulonites (conjectured)

In the Book of Mormon, there are no Amalekites, only Amlicites. In Alma 2-3, the text refers to the Amlicites, but in Alma 21-24 and later on (in Alma 27 and 43) the current text refers to Amalekites. Yet for this latter part of the text, extant portions of the original manuscript actually read *Amelicites* (in Alma 24:1, 24:28, and Alma 27:2), which is one vowel letter off from the correct Amlicites. In the

printer's manuscript for these examples from Alma 21 on, Oliver Cowdery misinterpreted *Amelicites* as the biblical name *Amalekites*. Thus the text ends up with two distinct apostate groups, the Amlicites (in Alma 2-3) and the Amalekites (from Alma 21 on). The Amalekites are definitely not a previously unidentified ethnic group that have somehow joined the Lamanites. Rather, the name is an error due to Oliver Cowdery's expectation of the biblical name.

Alma 33:15

but **Zenock** also spake of these things (O*)

>

but **Zenoch** also spake of these things (Oc)

>

but **Zenock** also spake of these things (P, 1830)

Oliver Cowdery initially wrote *Zenock* for *Zenoch* in O, in Alma 33:15, the place where he met the name for the first time. Immediately after writing *Zenock*, he crossed out that spelling and wrote inline the correct *Zenoch*, undoubtedly prompted by Joseph Smith's spelling out of the name, letter by letter. The name *Zenoch* parallels the spelling of the biblical name *Enoch*. But when he copied the text into P, Oliver Cowdery replaced *Zenoch* with *Zenock*, and the current text has systematically ended up with the incorrect spelling. Biblical names can end in *-c*, *-k*, and *-ch*, but never *-ck* (an English-language spelling). Thus the original Book of Mormon name *Zenoch* is clearly Hebraistic in spelling.

6. Sometimes a very strange original reading is actually correct. We may think that the original reading is an obvious error, yet that difficult reading actually helps to interpret the larger text.

3 Nephi 16:17-18

and **when** the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled (P, 1830)

which saith : thy watchmen shall lift up the voice ...

>

and **then** the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled (1920)

Here begins Jesus's first quotation from the writings of Isaiah to the Nephites at Bountiful. After quoting three verses (from Isaiah 52:8-10), Jesus cuts off in the middle of his discourse when he sees that the crowd's attention is waning. The original use of *when* here is supported by the same use of *when* on the following day, when once more Jesus brings up this Isaiah passage:

3 Nephi 20:11

ye remember that I spake unto you
and said that **when** the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled –
behold they are written
ye have them before you
therefore search them

This time, however, Jesus declines to quote from the Isaiah passage a second time. In fact, he tells the people to go read the passage themselves. All of this part of 3 Nephi, from chapters 15 through 28, shows Jesus interacting personally with the Nephite people, including several cases where he changes his mind.

IN CONCLUSION:

Some have argued that revision of the Book of Mormon text can only be made by “the Church’s inspired leader and prophet” and that such changes are made through inspiration and not by reference to scholarly “recovery work”.⁴ Although one can assume this position in evaluating the editing of the Church’s own authorized text, there is little, if any, historical evidence to support the idea that the Book of Mormon has been edited by revelation. Joseph Smith’s later editing of the text was clearly human editing. He referred to earlier textual sources in making non-grammatical corrections in the text – namely, the printer’s manuscript (for the 1837 edition) and the original manuscript (for only the first part of the 1840 edition). Nor did he ever claim any revelatory source for his editing of those two later editions. In fact, he missed the vast majority of errors that the scribes and the 1830 typesetter had earlier introduced into the text.

Since Joseph Smith’s time, LDS editors of the text have been mostly church apostles, but not the president of the Church. Most importantly, virtually all of their changes, excluding those dealing with grammatical issues, recover earlier readings in the text – by reference either to the manuscripts or to the earliest editions (especially the 1830 and 1840 editions). Nor has the Church ever publicly claimed any revelatory source for emendations to the text. To be sure, everyone has tried to do their best, but all the work appears to be the result of human effort. There is simply no independent evidence that any of these changes were directly revealed (although, to be sure, they may have been spiritually confirmed).

References

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3. Brant A. Gardner, *The Journal of Mormon History*, 37/2 (2011): 215-220.
4. Paul C. Gutjahr, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 146-148, 196-198.