



7-31-1997

The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project

Journal of Book of Mormon Studies

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BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Studies, Journal of Book of Mormon (1997) "The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol7/iss1/5>

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Title The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project

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Reference *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 30.

ISSN 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

Abstract This sidebar defines *critical text* and delineates two purposes for a critical text of the Book of Mormon.

way forward, but never feeling their way, as in Lehi's dream of the tree of life:

- 1 Nephi 8:21
and I saw numberless concourses of people many of whom were *pressing* forward that they might obtain the path
- 1 Nephi 8:24 (2 times)
and it came to pass that I beheld others *pressing* forward...and they did *press* forward through the mists of darkness
- 1 Nephi 8:30 (2 times)
behold he saw other multitudes *pressing* forward... and they did *press* their way forward

Yet in one case Oliver Cowdery accidentally miscopied the correct *pressing* as *feeling*:

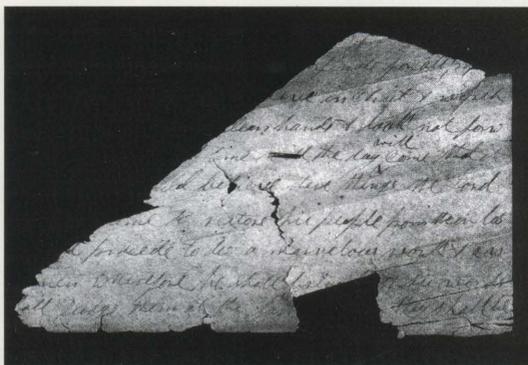
- 1 Nephi 8:31
ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT:
and he also saw other multitudes *pressing* their way towards that great and spacious building
- PRINTER'S MANUSCRIPT:
and he also saw other multitudes *feeling* their way towards that great and spacious building

Other examples of “pressing forward” are found in 2 Nephi 31:20 (2 times) and Ether 14:12. But there are no scriptural uses of the modern expression “feeling one’s way”, in either the Book of Mormon or anywhere else (including the King James Bible)—except by accident here in 1 Nephi 8:31.

THE BOOK OF MORMON CRITICAL TEXT PROJECT

Since 1988 Royal Skousen has been working on producing a critical text of the Book of Mormon. Critical texts have previously been prepared for other famous historical and literary documents, but until recently, not for the Book of Mormon. A critical text shows all the substantive changes that a document has undergone, from its original version to its present editions. The word *critical* is derived from the Greek word *krites*, meaning ‘judge’. When referring to a critical text, the term means that notes accompany the text so that the reader can see how the document has changed over time and thus judge between alternative readings of it.

There are two main purposes for a critical text of the Book of Mormon. The first is to lay out the original English-language text of the book—that is, the text that Joseph Smith received by means of the interpreters (the Urim and Thummim as well as the seer stone). The second purpose is to establish and display the history of the wording of the text, including both accidental errors and editorial changes that the document has undergone as it has been transmitted down through



time in its many editions.

A critical text will serve several important functions for Book of Mormon researchers. It can help them discover (1) what the original phrasing of the Book of Mormon was as it was dictated by Joseph Smith (including its Hebrew-like expressions), (2) the process

by which Joseph translated, and (3) how editors and printers have modified the wording to make it conform to the expectations of modern English readers.

The first critical text of the Book of Mormon was published by FARMS in 1984–86. That first version, although preliminary, helped to establish important criteria for the work currently being done, including the need for direct access to the original and printer’s manuscripts as well as the clearest photographs of those manuscripts. Current work also involves making computerized facsimile transcripts of the two manuscripts and comparing those with computerized versions of 20 significant editions of the Book of Mormon, from the first edition (1830) to the current LDS and RLDS editions.