

# The Systematic Text of the Book of Mormon

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In my initial work on the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, I was always excited to discover the occasional error that had crept into the text. But over time I have become more amazed about the nature of the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon.

One aspect of the text that has surprised me is the internal consistency of the original text. (For the meaning of the term *original text*, see the discussion on page 5.) Occasionally a mistake in transcription or printing has introduced a reading into the text that is inconsistent with all other usage in the Book of Mormon. Even some cases of editing have led to such inconsistency. These changes do not affect the message or doctrine of the Book of Mormon, but it has been marvelous to see just how consistent the original text was.

In this paper, I will provide evidence for 56 proposed textual changes in the Book of Mormon. The term *textual change* means an alteration in the words or phrases of a passage or a consistent change in the spelling of a name. Of these proposed changes, 38 are textually significant, but only in the sense that they would also show up when translating the text into other languages. On the other hand, 18 of the changes involve minor variation in the phraseology of the text. These changes do not involve any significant change in meaning. Nonetheless, these minor errors show how consistent the original text was, even in its phraseology. The language of the original text was very tightly controlled.

## *Consistency in Meaning*

I begin this paper by discussing a good number of textual changes that show that the semantically better (or more appropriate) reading is found in the earliest textual source—usually the original manuscript, but sometimes in the printer’s manuscript when the original manuscript is no longer extant. The symbol O will be used to stand for the original manuscript; and P will stand for the printer’s manuscript, the copy of O that the scribes prepared for the printer of the first edition (1830, Palmyra, New York). Editions are identified by the year in which they were published (from the 1830 edition to the 1981 LDS edition). Unless otherwise noted, Book of Mormon passages and names will be cited as they are found in the earliest textual sources.

° *The devil is the proprietor, not preparator, of hell.*

1 Nephi 15:35

and there is a place prepared yea even that awful hell of  
which I have spoken and the devil is the **proprietor** of it

**prepriator:** scribe 2’s original spelling of *proprietor* in O

**preparator:** Oliver Cowdery’s interpretation, in P; followed by 1830 and 1981

**father:** Joseph Smith’s first emendation, in P

**foundation:** Joseph Smith's second emendation, also in P; followed by 1837 and all subsequent editions except for 1981

In the original manuscript, scribe 2's *preparator* is quite unusual, especially his spelling of the first (unstressed) vowel as *e* rather than *o*. Oliver Cowdery misinterpreted the word as *preparator*, a virtually nonexistent word in English; according to the Oxford English Dictionary, a preparator is a preparer of medicines or specimens. Oliver was probably influenced by the earlier occurrence in this verse of the word *prepared*. The difficulty of the word *preparator* explains Joseph Smith's varying attempts to come up with a better reading for the 1837 edition (first, *father*, then *foundation*). The devil as proprietor (or owner and operator) of hell makes very good sense. (Renee Bangerter first suggested this reading as a conjectural emendation.)

° *The wicked are separated, not rejected, from the righteous and the tree of life.*

1 Nephi 15:36                    **wherefore the wicked are separated from the righteous  
and also from that tree of life**

**seperated:** scribe 2's spelling of *separated* in O

**rejected:** Oliver Cowdery's misreading, in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

Oliver Cowdery miscopied scribe 2's *seperated* as the visually similar *rejected*. Elsewhere in the Book of Mormon text, people can be separated as a result of sin and judgment. Note in particular the usage in nearby verse 28: "it was an awful gulf which separateth the wicked from the tree of life and also from the saints of God." We get the same meaning as in verse 36: the wicked are separated from the righteous saints of God and from the tree of life.

° *Alma did know about the persecutors of the church.*

Mosiah 26:9                    **and it came to pass that Alma did know concerning them  
for there were many witnesses against them**

**did know . . . for:** original reading in P, in scribe 2's hand; O not extant

**did not know . . . for:** Oliver Cowdery's later correction, also in P; followed by 1830 and most subsequent editions

**did not know . . . but:** 1920 emendation; followed by 1981

The unknown scribe 2 of the printer's manuscript originally wrote "Alma did know concerning them / for there were many witnesses against them," a reading which makes perfectly good sense. Oliver Cowdery later corrected the text here by inserting the word *not*, perhaps because of the unusualness of the paraphrastic *did* in the verb phrase "did know." This emendation resulted in a difficult reading, which was somewhat alleviated in the 1920 edition by substituting *but* for the conjunction *for*. The earliest reading (in scribe 2's hand in the printer's manuscript) is precisely correct.

° *The queen clapped, not clasped, her hands.*

Alma 19:30

and when she had said this she **clapped** her hands being filled with joy

**claped:** Oliver Cowdery's spelling in P for *clapped*; O not extant; recent RLDS editions have *clapped*

**clasped:** 1830 misreading; followed by most subsequent editions

The 1830 typesetter apparently interpreted Oliver Cowdery's spelling *claped* as missing an s, yet this spelling is simply the result of the scribes' tendency to not double consonants after a short vowel. Elsewhere, the text does refer to the more emotional clapping of hands ("they clapped their hands for joy," in Mosiah 18:11), but never to clasping hands. In this second example, Oliver Cowdery also spelled *clapped* with a single p.

° *Repentance involves both acknowledging faults and repairing wrongs.*

Alma 39:12–13

therefore I command you my son in the fear of God . . .  
that ye lead away the hearts of no more to do wickedly  
but rather return unto them and acknowledge your  
faults and **repair** that wrong which ye have done

*acknowledge your faults and **repair** that wrong:* reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; accidental ink drop on p of *repair*

*acknowledge your faults and **retain** that wrong:* Oliver Cowdery's misreading, in P; followed by 1830 and most subsequent editions

*acknowledge your faults and that wrong:* 1920 emendation; followed by 1981

The original manuscript reads *repair*, but sometime before the text was copied into the printer's manuscript, a number of ink drops fell on this page. One fell right on the p of *repair* and looks like a crossing on the ascender of the p. Since Oliver Cowdery's r's and n's frequently look alike, the resulting word looks like *retain*, which is how Oliver Cowdery copied the word. The use of *retain* in this passage doesn't make sense, thus in the 1920 edition the word was simply deleted. The original reading here ("repair that wrong") is consistent with other Book of Mormon passages that refer to repentance—as in Mosiah 27:35, where the sons of Mosiah were "zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church / confessing all their sins / and publishing all the things which they had seen." (Similar language is found in Alma 27:8 and Helaman 5:17.)

° *The Nephite dissenters almost outnumbered the Nephites.*

Alma 43:13–14

and thus the Nephites were compelled alone to withstand against the Lamanites which were a compound of Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael 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

**desenters:** Oliver Cowdery's spelling in O for *dissenters*

**desendants:** Oliver Cowdery's spelling in P for *descendants* (a misreading of O)

**descendants:** spelling in 1830 and all subsequent editions, following P

Oliver Cowdery miscopied *dissenters* (spelled *desenters*) as *descendants* (spelled *desendants*). The previous verse lists all the Nephite dissenters, ending up with "the descendants of the priests of Noah," yet quite clearly in a few generations the descendants of a couple dozen priests could never have increased to almost equal the population of the entire (non-dissenting) Nephite nation.

° *The Lamanites had only one second leader, not several.*

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

**the second leader:** reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand

**a second leader:** miscopied by Oliver Cowdery in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

Oliver Cowdery miscopied *the* as the indefinite article *a*. This error occurred because the definite article *the* was at the end of the line and was therefore easily misread. As explained later on in the story, there was only one second leader (thus Alma 47:17: "if their chief leader was killed / to appoint the second leader to be their chief leader").

° *Moroni asked Parhoron to heed, not read, his petition.*

Alma 51:15                   he sent a petition with the voice of the people unto the governor of the land desiring that he should **heed** it and give him Moroni power to compel those dissenters

**head:** Oliver Cowdery's spelling for *heed* in O, also his corrected spelling in P

**read:** 1830 printer's misinterpretation of *head*, marked in pencil in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

Oliver Cowdery frequently spells *heed* as *head* (for instance, in the original manuscript for Alma 49:30: "because of their head & diligence"). The 1830 typesetter was usually able to correctly interpret this particular misspelling. But in Alma 51:15 he could not understand "he should head it." He thought the word *head* was an error for *read*, and thus he overwrote (in pencil) the initial *h*

with an *r*. The use of *heed*, of course, makes perfectly good sense, but requesting Parhoron to read the petition does sound quite unnecessary.

### Systematic Phraseology

I now turn to examples where the phraseology of the original text is strongly supported by all other usage in the Book of Mormon. Each error described in this section has led to a “wrinkle” in the text. Nonetheless, these textual errors have not been found except by discovering the correct reading in the manuscripts.

° *Multitudes are always pressing, not feeling, their way forward.*

1 Nephi 8:31                    **and he also saw other multitudes *pressing* their way towards  
that great and spacious building**

***pr}sing***: scribe 3’s spelling in O of *pressing* (that is, without the *e*)

***feeling***: Oliver Cowdery’s misreading, in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

There are no scriptural uses of “feeling one’s way.” Here in the original manuscript scribe 3 wrote *pr}sing* (where } stands for an elongated *s*). Scribe 3’s initial *p* looks like an *f*, so when Oliver Cowdery copied the text into the printer’s manuscript, he misread *pressing* as *feeling*. Similar descriptions in Lehi’s dream also use *press* rather than *feel*:

1 Nephi 8:21                    **and I saw numberless concourses of people many of whom were  
*pressing* forward**

1 Nephi 8:24                    **I beheld others *pressing* forward . . . and they did *press* forward**

1 Nephi 8:30                    **he saw other multitudes *pressing* forward . . . and they did *press* their  
way forward**

There are other uses of “press forward” in 2 Nephi 31:20 and Ether 14:12. (Lyle Fletcher first discovered this change of *pressing* to *feeling*.)

° *The justice of God is a sword.*

1 Nephi 12:18                    **and a great and a terrible gulf divideth them yea even the  
*sword* of the justice of the eternal God**

***sword***: reading in O, in scribe 2’s hand

***word***: Oliver Cowdery’s miscopying of *sword* as *word* in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

In the original manuscript, scribe 2’s initial *s* looks like an undotted *i*, which led Oliver Cowdery to accidentally misread *sword* as *word* when he copied this passage into the printer’s manuscript.

There are no other examples of “the word of justice” in the Book of Mormon text, but there are seven other examples of “the sword of justice”:

Alma 26:19	the sword of his justice
Alma 60:29	the sword of justice
Helaman 13:5	the sword of justice (2 times)
3 Nephi 20:20	the sword of my justice
3 Nephi 29:4	the sword of his justice
Ether 8:23	the sword of the justice of the eternal God

The last example is precisely the same as the original reading in 1 Nephi 12:18.

### Minor Wrinkles in the Current Text

In this section, I list 12 different cases where the phraseology in the original text was perfectly consistent, but over the years occasional printing errors have led to exceptions in the phraseology. These errors do not lead to any substantive change in meaning. But these wrinkles do show just how consistent the original text was, even in cases of minor phraseology.

° *this time*, never *these times* when referring to present time

original text: 61 to 0

current text: 60 to 1

1 Nephi 10:19

as well in **this time** as in times of old and as well in times of old as in times to come >

**these times** (1830)

[Note the influence of the plural *times* for past and future.]

° *whatsoever*, never *whatever*

original text: 74 to 0

current text: 72 to 2

Jacob 1:11

let them be of **whatsoever** name they would > **whatever** (1830)

Helaman 3:5

in **whatsoever** parts it had not been rendered desolate > **whatever** (1830)

° *to do iniquity, never to do iniquities*

original text: 22 to 0

current text: 21 to 1

Jacob 2:35

ye have done greater **iniquity** than the Lamanites > **iniquities** (1830)

° *to have hope, never to have hoped*

original text: 18 to 0

current text: 17 to 1

Jacob 5:46

and these I **had hope** to preserve > **had hoped** (1837)

[Joseph Smith's editing in the printer's manuscript; in-press change in the 1837 edition]

° *if it so be that, never if it be so that*

original text: 38 to 0

current text: 36 to 2

Jacob 5:64

and if it **so be** that these last grafts shall grow > **be so** (1852)

Ether 2:20

and if it **so be** that the water come in upon thee > **be so** (1849)

° *the Nephites and the Lamanites, never the Nephites and Lamanites*

original text: 15 to 0

current text: 14 to 1

Enos 1:24

and I saw wars between the Nephites and **the** Lamanites > **NULL** (1830)

[NULL means that one or more words have been deleted.]

° *to observe to keep the commandments, never to observe the commandments*

original text: 11 to 0

current text: 10 to 1

Mosiah 4:30

and observe **to keep** the commandments of God > **NULL** (1837)

° *to set a mark upon someone, never to set a mark on someone*

original text: 9 to 0

current text: 8 to 1

Alma 3:14

and I will set a mark **upon** them > **on** (1837)

° *thus ended a period of time, never thus endeth a period of time (usually a year)*

original text: 47 to 0

current text: 43 to 4

Alma 3:27

and thus **ended** the fifth year > **endeth** (1830)

Alma 28:7

and thus **ended** the fifteenth year > **endeth** (1837)

Alma 51:37

and thus **ended** the twenty and fifth year > **endeth** (1849)

Alma 51:37

and thus **ended** the days of Amalickiah > **endeth** (1849)

° *to meet a person, never to meet with a person*

original text: 51 to 0

current text: 50 to 1

Alma 17:1

he met <sup>^</sup> the sons of Mosiah > **with** (1830)

° *conditions, never condition*

original text: 14 to 0

current text: 12 to 2

Alma 27:24

and we will guard them from their enemies by our armies on **conditions**

that they will give us a portion of their substance > **condition** (1920) [change marked in  
the 1920 committee copy (1911 Chicago edition)]

Helaman 14:18

yea and it bringeth to pass the **conditions** of repentance > **condition** (1830)

° *into one's hands, never unto one's hands*

original text: 56 to 0

current text: 55 to 1

Alma 57:12

therefore they yielded up the city **into** our hands > **unto** (1920)

[change not marked in the 1920 committee copy (1911 Chicago edition)]

### Increase in Parallelism

Frequently the original text shows a higher degree of parallelism between its linguistic elements. In the following example, the parallelism of the original text is assured by repeating a linguistic element (in this case, the preposition).

° *There was rejoicing among the relatives of Parhoron and also among the people of liberty.*

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**

**among the people:** reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand

**many the people:** Oliver Cowdery's miscopying of *among* as *many* in P

**many of the people:** John Gilbert's correction in P (*of* added in pencil); followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

The original text here shows parallelism by repeating the preposition *among* ("among X and also among Y"). Oliver Cowdery misread the second *among* as *many*. John Gilbert, the 1830 typesetter, realized that "many the people" was not acceptable, so he inserted the preposition *of*.

## Punctuation and Parallelism

As far as we can determine, the original text of the Book of Mormon had no punctuation. The original manuscript had some dashes in the summaries that are typically found at the beginning of books or sections of books, but elsewhere in the original manuscript the scribes provided no punctuation. For the printer's manuscript, Oliver Cowdery and scribe 2 added some punctuation as they copied the original manuscript. The 1830 typesetter, John Gilbert, ignored the scribes' suggested punctuation and provided his own as he set the type. In most instances, Gilbert's punctuation (or its equivalent) has been retained in the text. In some cases, later editors of the text have emended his punctuation. Even so, there are still a few cases where there is good reason to further emend the punctuation. In the following example, we see that the punctuation should probably be changed in order to maintain the parallel nature of the original text.

° *The life of the soul is eternal.*

Alma 42:16–17

now repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment — which also was as eternal as the life of the soul — should be affixed opposite to the plan of happiness which was as eternal also as the life of the soul / now how could a man repent except he should sin . . .

The 1830 typesetter incorrectly placed the punctuation after "should be" (although in the printer's manuscript he correctly marked the punctuation as coming before "should be"). All subsequent editions have followed his final decision to make the break right before the word *affixed*. But the resulting parenthetical clause claims that there must be a punishment that is as eternal "as the life of the soul should be"—which really doesn't make much sense. The life of the soul "is eternal," not "should be eternal." Alma is saying that "a punishment . . . should be affixed opposite to the plan of happiness"—a plan which should correspondingly be "as eternal also as the life of the soul." Notice that at the end of the verse the punctuation must occur at the end of the phrase "the life of the soul."

The Book of Mormon sometimes quotes from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. In many cases a change has taken the text away from its original reading, which happens to be the same as the reading in the KJV.

° *The Lord will break the Assyrians in the land of Israel.*

2 Nephi 24:25           ... that I will **break** the Assyrian in my land and upon my  
                                  mountains tread him under foot

**break:** reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; same reading in KJV

**bring:** Oliver Cowdery's miscopying of *break* as *bring* in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

The KJV for Isaiah 14:25 reads *break* ("I will break the Assyrian in my land"), as does the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. The word *break* was hyphenated at the end of a line, so that the final *k* was placed at the beginning of the next line. In his copy work, Oliver Cowdery misread the *brea* at the end of the line as the beginning of the word *bring*. The change to *bring* obscures the original semantic parallelism in this verse (where both clauses refer to the destruction of the Assyrian army within the borders of Israel).

## Name Changes

In this section, I discuss two interesting cases where the manuscript evidence supports a change in the spelling of a Book of Mormon name. In both of these cases, the original spelling reveals an interesting aspect regarding the history of the peoples in the Book of Mormon.

° *Muloch*, not *Mulek*

Here the earliest manuscript spelling for the surviving son of king Zedekiah reads *Muloch* (in Mosiah 25:2 of the printer's manuscript). On the other hand, this name is spelled *Mulek* in Helaman 6–8 of the printer's manuscript. This alternative spelling is probably due to the nearby influence of 13 occurrences of the name of the city *Mulek* (consistently spelled as such in both manuscripts, from Alma 51 through Helaman 5). Note that the spelling *Muloch* suggests an ominous connection with the god *Molech* / *Moloch* (to which children in Israel were sacrificed prior to the Babylonian captivity—see 1 Kings 11:7–8, 2 Kings 23:10 and Acts 7:43).

° *Amlicites*, not *Amalekites*

There is only one group of dissenters that Amlici founded—namely, the Amlicites, first described in Alma 2–3. This same dissident group is later referred to (in the current text) as the Amalekites (Alma 21–27, 43). But the earliest extant manuscript spelling (in Alma 24:1) spells the name of this "other" group as *Amelicites*, with only the one vowel difference between *Amlicites* and *Amelicites*. The incorrect later spelling *Amalekites* may have been influenced by the competing name *Amaleki*, which in the Book of Mormon refers to the record keeper first mentioned in Omni

1:12 or one of the men of Ammon listed in Mosiah 7:6. Another possible source for the secondary spelling is the Amalekites, a prominent people in the land of Canaan and frequently mentioned in the Old Testament.

## Original Lack of Redundancy

We sometimes find that errors have created unnecessary redundancies, as in the following example.

° *You would behold quickly.*

Alma 33:21

if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that  
ye might **behold** would ye not behold quickly

**behold:** reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; the o is no longer extant

**be healed:** Oliver Cowdery's misreading, in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

Oliver Cowdery wrote *beh* at the end of the line in the original manuscript, then *-old* at the beginning of the next line (although the line-initial hyphen and the o are no longer extant). When copying into the printer's manuscript, Oliver Cowdery accidentally misread the hyphenated word as *be healed*. The emphasis in this passage is on beholding quickly. There is no need to repeat the already stated condition of being healed, as the text now redundantly reads "if ye could *be healed* by merely casting about your eyes that ye might *be healed*".

## Variation in the Text

When emending the text, it is important to keep in mind that not every case of variation in the text should be made consistent. There will exist legitimate possibilities of choice involving alternative phraseology or semantically similar words.

° *Moroni was appointed chief commander.*

Alma 43:17

and he was only twenty and five years old when he was  
appointed **chief commander** over the armies of the Nephites

**chief commander:** reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; 1830 follows O rather than P

**chief captain:** Oliver Cowdery's substitution, in P; followed by 1837 and all subsequent editions

For gathering 22 of the 1830 edition (pages 337–352, covering Alma 41:8–46:30), page proofing was done against the original manuscript. Thus Oliver Cowdery's mistake in copying *commander* as *captain* into the printer's manuscript was corrected. However, the 1837 edition restored the

reading of the printer’s manuscript. Both “chief commander” and “chief captain” are found elsewhere in the text. Usually Moroni is referred to as “chief captain” (4 times), but in one place he is referred to as the “chief commander of the armies of the Nephites” (Alma 46:11), nearly the same language as originally in Alma 43:17.

## The Existence of Single Readings

Since variation does occur in the text, the correct reading may very well be unique—that is, a particular phrase or word may occur only once in the entire Book of Mormon. Statistically, of course, we expect such cases of singularity, and we should not therefore be overzealous about eliminating exceptional readings.

° *The Nephites only sought to defend their lives.*

Alma 54:13                    **ye have sought to murder us and we have only sought to defend  
our lives**

**our lives:** reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery’s hand

**ourselves:** Oliver Cowdery’s misreading, in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

Here the original manuscript reads *our lives*. This usage is unique in the text, so it is not surprising that Oliver Cowdery miscopied the phrase as *ourselves*. The use of “we have only sought to defend our lives” makes a clear contrast with the preceding “ye have sought to murder us” and therefore seems more appropriate than the more prosaic expression “we have only sought to defend ourselves.” (The phrase “to defend one’s self” occurs 12 times in the text.)

## Conjectural Emendation

In studying the Book of Mormon text, we come across cases of possible emendation for which there is no direct manuscript evidence. Nonetheless, it is important to set restrictions on such conjectural emendations. The first requirement for an acceptable conjectural emendation is that there be something inappropriate about the earliest extant readings of the passage (whether printed or in the manuscripts). Evidence regarding the unacceptability of a reading is sometimes referred to as internal evidence since it is based on a conceptual analysis of the language usage within the text. Of course, it may be rather easy to discover something wrong with a particular reading, so we add a second requirement to the first one—namely, there must be some evidence to suggest why the transmitter of the text (whether scribe or typesetter) might have made the error that is presupposed by the conjectural emendation. This second requirement means that we must analyze the errors that the scribes and typesetters typically made as they transmitted the text. This kind of evidence is sometimes referred to as external evidence in that it physically exists in real manuscripts and in actual copies of books. Both these requirements (of internal and external evidence) are necessary in order to prevent conjectural emendation from being excessively applied.

° *Ishmael and also his whole household were persuaded to leave Jerusalem.*

1 Nephi 7:5

**the Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael and also his whole household**

**hole hole:** scribe 3 in O originally wrote *hole*, then inserted a second *hole* above the line

**household:** Oliver Cowdery's interpretation of *hole hole* as *household*, in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

**whole household:** emendation

All other Book of Mormon uses of *household* (11 times) include the universal quantifier (*all, whole*, or the equivalent of *none* in negative contexts). The use of "his hole hole" in the original manuscript suggests that the original text had the phrase "his whole household," which is also found in Alma 22:23 ("his whole household were converted unto the Lord"). When Joseph Smith read off the text for 1 Nephi 7:5, the final *d* of *household* may have been left unpronounced, so that scribe 3 ended up writing down "hole hole," but without the word *house*. (The first *hole* is, of course, a homophone for *whole*.) When copying into the printer's manuscript, Oliver Cowdery emended the impossible reading to "his household"—but without any universal quantifier.

° *The Bible originally contained the fullness of the gospel of the Lamb, not the gospel of the Land or the gospel of the Lord.*

1 Nephi 13:24

**and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the fullness of the gospel of the Lamb**

**the gospel of the Land:** dubious reading in O, in scribe 2's hand

**the gospel of the Lord:** Oliver Cowdery's interpretation, in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

**the gospel of the Lamb:** emendation

Scribe 2 of the original manuscript apparently misheard Joseph Smith's *lamb* as *land*, especially since the final *d* of *land* is often silent. When copying into the printer's manuscript, Oliver Cowdery interpreted *Land* as an error for *Lord*. Elsewhere the text only refers to "the gospel of the Lamb" (4 times, all in this same chapter), never "the gospel of the Lord." (This emendation was first proposed by three of my students, Zane Kerby, Merilee Knoll, and Rebecca S. Wilson.)

° *The gentiles shall not always remain in a state of awful wickedness, not woundedness or blindness.*

1 Nephi 13:32

**neither will the Lord God suffer that the gentiles shall forever remain in that state of awful wickedness which thou beholdest that they are in**

**woundednefs:** reading in O, in scribe 2's hand; copied as such into P by Oliver Cowdery; 1830 also follows this reading

**blindnefs:** Joseph Smith's emendation, in P; followed by 1837 and all subsequent editions

**wickedness:** emendation

Scribe 2 of the original manuscript wrote down *woundedness*, which is visually similar to *wickedness* (both begin with *w* and end with *edness*). But since the error is probably not an auditory one, it is quite possible that Joseph Smith himself misread the word to his scribe (instead of the scribe mishearing it). Elsewhere the Book of Mormon never refers to a "state of woundedness" (in fact, there are no other examples of the word *woundedness* in the text). On the other hand, there are references to a "state of wickedness" (4 times), and in each case the word *awful* occurs with the expression:

Helaman 4:25     **for they had fallen into a state of unbelief and awful wickedness**

Helaman 7:4     **and seeing the people in a state of such awful wickedness . . .**

3 Nephi 6:17     **and thus in the commencement of this the thirtieth year they were in a state of awful wickedness**

Ether 4:15       **behold when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness . . .**

Finally, we should note that here in 1 Nephi 13:32 the pronoun *that* ("in that state of awful . . .") refers the reader back to an already mentioned state of the gentiles—namely:

1 Nephi 13:29     **and because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb an exceeding great many do stumble yea insomuch that Satan hath great power over them**

The last line in verse 29 describes a state of wickedness. Although a metaphorical meaning of spiritual woundedness could be assigned in 1 Nephi 13:32, the word *woundedness* did not seem right to Joseph Smith when he did his editing for the 1837 edition. Thus he emended the word to *blindness*.

° *The Lord told Nephi that he would shake, not shock, Laman and Lemuel.*

1 Nephi 17:53     **stretch forth thine hand again unto thy brethren and they shall not wither before thee but I will **shake** them saith the Lord**

**shock:** reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; followed by P, 1830, and all subsequent editions

**shake:** emendation

The two following verses (1 Nephi 17:54–55) use the word *shake* to refer to what Nephi did to his rebellious brothers ("the Lord did shake them even according to the word which he had

spoken” and “it is the power of the Lord that hath shaken us”). Note, in particular, the added explanation in verse 54: “even according to the word which he had spoken.” Other Book of Mormon usage supports *shake*, as in 1 Nephi 2:14 (“my father did speak unto them in the valley of Lemuel with power / being filled with the spirit until their frames did shake before him”). In fact, the word *shock* occurs nowhere else in the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery, the scribe here for 1 Nephi 17:53 of the original manuscript, probably misheard Joseph Smith’s *shake* as *shock*.

° *Happiness is opposed to misery.*

2 Nephi 2:11                      **righteousness could not be brought to pass neither wickedness neither happiness nor misery neither good nor bad**

***neither holiness nor misery***: reading in P, in Oliver Cowdery’s hand; O not extant; reading followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

***neither happiness nor misery***: emendation

The original manuscript is not extant here, but it probably read *happiness* rather than the visually similar *holiness*. Elsewhere in the text, *misery* is consistently contrasted with *happiness* (9 times). For instance, later on in this same verse, the text again lays out a list of oppositions:

2 Nephi 2:11                      **wherefore if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead having no life neither death nor corruption nor incorruption happiness nor misery neither sense nor insensibility**

(This emendation replacing *holiness* with *happiness* was first suggested by Corbin T. Volluz.)

° *Abinadi will suffer even unto death, not until death*

Mosiah 17:10                      **yea and I will suffer even unto death**

***until death***: reading in P, in Oliver Cowdery’s hand; O not extant; reading followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

***unto death***: emendation

The original manuscript is not extant here. Oliver Cowdery probably miscopied *unto* as *until* (which is visually similar). Elsewhere, whenever someone’s death is described, we get only “unto death” (6 times), never “until death.” For instance, later in verse 13, the text refers to Abinadi’s death by means of the phrase “yea even unto death.” Later, king Noah’s death, also by fire, is referred to in the same way:

Mosiah 19:20                      **and they were angry with the king and caused that he should suffer even unto death by fire**

In Mosiah 17:10, the problematic phrase “suffer until death” would mean that Abinadi’s suffering will extend from that time until the moment of death, which is not what Abinadi intended to say.

Rather he was prophesying that he would suffer death for his testimony.

° *Abinadi's skin was scorched by the burning fagots.*

Mosiah 17:13

and it came to pass that they took him and bound him and  
**scorched his skin with fagots yea even unto death**

**scourged:** reading in P, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; O not extant; reading followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

**scorched:** emendation

The original manuscript is not extant here, but Oliver Cowdery probably miscopied the original *scorched* with the visually similar *scourged*. The verb *scourge* "to whip" does not make sense here, especially with fagots (bundles of sticks for burning). The word *scorch* here means "to burn the surface of," in distinction to totally burning up or consuming by fire (a distinction which can be inferred from the definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary). The correct verb *scorch* is used in the following verse:

Mosiah 17:14

and now when the flames began to **scorch** him he cried unto them  
saying . . .

° *The city of Mulek was in the land of the Nephites.*

Alma 53:6

Moroni had thus gained a victory over one of the greatest of the  
armies of the Lamanites and had obtained possession of the city  
Mulek which was one of the strongest holds of the Lamanites in  
**the land of the Nephites**

**the land of Nephi:** reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; followed by P, 1830, and all subsequent editions

**the land of the Nephites:** emendation

The city of Mulek was in Nephite territory. The land of Nephi was originally settled by Nephi, but was later abandoned to the Lamanites. Elsewhere the Book of Mormon text always uses the phrase "the land of Nephi" to refer to this Lamanite territory (55 times). But in this passage, the text refers to Nephite cities that the Lamanites had captured. There is scribal evidence in the manuscripts that Oliver Cowdery sometimes mixed up his writing of "the people of Nephi" with the "the people of the Nephites," so that the mix-up of "the land of Nephi" with "the land of the Nephites" is quite plausible. (This emendation was first suggested by Dale Caswell.)

° *Shiz slew both men women and children.*

Ether 14:17

and it came to pass that Shiz pursued after Coriantumr and he  
did overthrow many cities and he did slay **both men women and  
children** and he did burn the cities thereof

**both women and children:** reading in P, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; O not extant; reading followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

**both men women and children:** emendation

Usage elsewhere in the text consistently favors the expression "both men women and children":

2 Nephi 9:21	for behold he suffereth the pains of all men yea the pains of every living creature <i>both men women and children</i>
Helaman 1:27	... slaying the people with a great slaughter <i>both men women and children</i>
Ether 14:22	but they did march forth from the shedding of blood to the shedding of blood leaving the bodies of <i>both men women and children</i> strewed upon the face of the land
Ether 15:15	when they were all gathered together – everyone to the army which he would – with their wives and their children <i>both men women and children</i> being armed with weapons of war ...

On the other hand, there are no other examples in the original text of "both women and children." (The only example in the current text—in Mormon 4:14—originally read "of women and of children." The 1837 edition changed this conjunctive phrase to "both women and children," thus creating a unique but problematic reading.) The original manuscript is not extant for Ether 14:17, but probably included *men*. The eye of the scribe (Oliver Cowdery) may have simply skipped over the word *men* to the *-men* at the end of the next word, *women*.

## Numbering People

We now consider a number of textual changes involving the numbering of people, including one conjectural emendation.

° *The Lamanites will be numbered among the house of Israel.*

1 Nephi 15:16	behold I say unto you yea / they shall be <b>numbered</b> again among the house of Israel
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**numbered:** reading in O, in scribe 2's hand

**remembered:** Oliver Cowdery's misreading, in P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

Scribe 2 of the original manuscript wrote *numbered*, but Oliver Cowdery accidentally copied it as *remembered*. The words are visually similar. As we shall see, usage elsewhere in the Book of Mormon clearly favors *numbered* in this context.

° *The people of Ammon were numbered among the Nephites.*

Alma 27:27

and they were **numbered** among the people of Nephi and also numbered among 1  
people which were of the church of God

*they were **numbered** among the people of Nephi:* apparent reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand;  
only last part of word is extant (namely, *ered*)

*they were among the people of Nephi:* Oliver Cowdery's misreading, in P; followed by 1830 and all  
subsequent editions

Oliver Cowdery accidentally dropped out *numbered* when he copied the text into the printer's  
manuscript. (The last part of the word is extant in the original manuscript.) The people of Ammon  
were not actually distributed among the people of Nephi, but lived apart (in the land of Jershon).  
But they were counted as Nephites (not Lamanites) and also as members of the church. It should  
also be noted that the use of the phrase "also numbered" in the second clause does not make  
much sense unless the word *numbered* occurs in the first clause.

° *Nonbelievers were no longer numbered among the people of God.*

Alma 1:24

and their names were blotted out that they were **numbered** no  
more among the people of God

**remembered:** reading in P, in scribe 2's hand; O not extant; reading followed by 1830 and all  
subsequent editions

**numbered:** emendation

The original manuscript is no longer extant here. Consistent with all other Book of Mormon  
usage (38 examples, counting the two changes listed just above), the verb should be *numbered*. As  
we have just seen (in 1 Nephi 15:16), there is specific scribal evidence for misreading *numbered* as  
*remembered*. Furthermore, the word *remembered* does not make sense here in Alma 1:24; even  
though peoples' names may be blotted out, the people themselves are remembered. Moreover,  
all other passages connect church membership with numbering and not remembering:

Mosiah 26:36

and them that would not confess their sins and repent of their  
iniquity the same were not *numbered* among the people of the  
church and their names were blotted out

Alma 5:57

and behold their names shall be blotted out that the names of the  
wicked shall not be *numbered* among the names of the righteous

Alma 6:3

the same were rejected and their names were blotted out that  
their names were not *numbered* among those of the righteous

Moroni 6:7

and if they repented not and confessed not their names were  
blotted out and they were not *numbered* among the people of  
Christ

This last conjectural emendation thus makes the entire Book of Mormon systematic in its use of  
numbering people rather than remembering them.

## Yea as an Indicator of Further Explication

There are hundreds of examples of the connective adverb *yea* in the Book of Mormon text. Interestingly, virtually every example represents an attempt to modify, amplify, or explain the meaning of the previous clause. Yet, in a few cases, the connective *yea* seems to be used incorrectly. It turns out that these cases involve errors. In fact, in two cases the *yea* should actually be the word *year*.

° *In the latter end of the nineteenth year . . .*

**Alma 48:21**                    **in the latter end of the nineteenth year —notwithstanding their peace amongst themselves— they were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren**

*the nineteenth year / notwithstanding:* reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand

*the nineteenth / yea notwithstanding:* Oliver Cowdery's scribal error, in P; followed by 1830 and other early editions, plus all RLDS editions

*the nineteenth year / yea notwithstanding:* Orson Pratt's emendation, in 1849; followed by all subsequent LDS editions

In both manuscripts Oliver Cowdery frequently dropped off the final *r* when he wrote the word *year*. In his editing for the 1849 edition, Orson Pratt realized the need for the word *year* in this passage, but he did not recognize that the *yea* was an error for *year*. The purpose of the connective *yea* in the Book of Mormon is to comment or expand on a just-mentioned clause. In Alma 48:21 the *yea* does not serve that function.

° *And it came to pass in the forty and sixth year . . .*

**Helaman 3:3**                    **and it came to pass in the forty and sixth year / there were much contentions and many dissensions**

*the forty and sixth / yea there were:* reading in O, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; copied as such by Oliver Cowdery into P; followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

*the forty and sixth year / there were:* emendation

The original manuscript has only *yea*, but we have many examples of Oliver Cowdery dropping the final *r* of *year* (as in the previous example in Alma 48:21). This passage definitely needs the word *year*, while the use of *yea* here does not provide any comment or expansion on the previous clause.

## Eliminating Dittographies

When copying from the original manuscript into the printer's manuscript, the scribe would frequently repeat a portion of the text, usually a small phrase. Such dittographies (or repetitions) were usually caught by the scribe himself or by the 1830 typesetter. For instance, when Oliver Cowdery copied 1 Nephi 1:17 into the printer's manuscript, he first wrote "wherefore after that I have abridged the record of my father of my father." In this instance the dittography is blatantly obvious and Oliver crossed out the repeated "of my father." In this section I propose one example of a possible dittography. In this case the original manuscript is not extant, so we have a case of conjecture. This dittography has also been difficult to notice since it begins with the conjunction *and*. Yet the repeated portion is completely unnecessary and is in fact distracting.

° *They will be grasped with death and hell and the devil.*

2 Nephi 28:23                    **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 according to their works**

*with death and hell / **and death and hell** and the devil:* reading in P; O not extant; reading followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

*with death and hell and the devil:* emendation

Elsewhere the Book of Mormon text has nine examples of the phrase "death and hell," and in each instance there is no repetition. Here are two of these examples, both in 2 Nephi, which conjoin the phrase "death and hell" with "the devil":

2 Nephi 9:19                    **for he delivereth his saints from that awful monster *the devil and death and hell* and that lake of fire and brimstone which is endless torment**  
2 Nephi 9:26                    **they are delivered from that awful monster *death and hell and the devil* and the lake of fire and brimstone which is endless torment**

These last two examples also argue that the clausal break for 2 Nephi 28:23 should come at the end of the complete prepositional phrase "with death and hell and the devil." (This dittography in 2 Nephi 28:23 was first suggested by Nathaniel Skousen.)

### Emendation Supported by Chiasmus

Sometimes a conjecture is further supported by the poetic structures found in the Book of Mormon. Here is an example that chiasmus supports.

° *God is perfectly just and merciful.*

Alma 42:15                    **... that God might be a perfectly just God and a merciful God also**

***a perfect just God:*** reading in P, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; O not extant; reading followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

### **a perfectly just God:** emendation

In the original manuscript, the lacuna (or gap) for this passage has room for a couple more letters, which suggests the emendation *perfectly*. Another possible emendation is “a perfect and just God” (that is, there was an ampersand between *perfect* and *just*). The overall passage refers to the justice and mercy of God, but not God’s perfection. Moreover, the chiasmic structure of the larger passage supports the emendation “perfectly just”:

A	to bring about the plan of <i>mercy</i>	B	to appease the demands of <i>justice</i>
B	that God might be a perfectly <i>just</i> God	A	and a merciful God

### *Revising the Text*

In certain instances of emendation, we need to distinguish between revision and restoring the original text. In cases of revision, we recognize that the suggested change is probably not what the original text read, but seems necessary for modern readers of the text. One way to avoid such emendations is, of course, to place the revision in a footnote, thus providing an explanation of what the original text either meant or should read. In the following I discuss several possible revisions to the text.

### **Archaic Word Meanings**

Sometimes the word used in the original text has an archaic meaning. It may be quite difficult to understand such archaic uses of a word. In the following example, the scribe apparently replaced such an archaic word by one that seemed, at the moment, more reasonable.

° *After they had ended the sermon . . .*

Mosiah 19:24                      **and it came to pass that after they had ended the sermon that they returned to the land of Nephi**

**the ceremony:** reading in P, in Oliver Cowdery’s hand (spelled as *cerimony*); O not extant; reading followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

**the sermon:** emendation

**speaking:** possible revision

The word *ceremony* does not make sense here, nor is there any older meaning of the word that might work. Earlier in the English language the word *sermon* had the more general meaning “talk or discourse” rather than the more specific modern meaning of “preacher’s discourse.” The original manuscript is not extant here, but if the scribe for that manuscript had misspelled the word *sermon* as *cermon*, then the word could have been very easily misread as *ceremony*. Since *sermon* seems odd here, just as *ceremony* does, we might consider revising the text by selecting a

word more appropriate to the style of the Book of Mormon. However, none of the synonymous words that I can think of (for instance, *discussion* and *conversation*) ever occur in the Book of Mormon. Moreover, nouns like *speech*, *talk*, and *discourse* have historically changed so that now they often refer to a specific verbal presentation by one person. One possible revision for *sermon* could be to use a nominalized verbal such as *speaking* (“after they had ended speaking”), especially since there are nominalized uses of *speaking* elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. Another possibility would be to use *sermon*, but to explain its earlier meaning in a footnote. (Renee Bangerter came up first with this emendation.)

## Unacceptable Hebraisms

The original text of the Book of Mormon has a number of Hebraistic expressions that are difficult to understand. These non-English expressions have generally been edited out of the text. In some cases, alternative revisions are possible, as in the following example.

° *Lehi knows that Jerusalem must be destroyed.*

1 Nephi 3:16–18	<b>and all this he hath done because of the commandment for he knoweth that Jerusalem must be destroyed because of the wickedness of the people for behold they have rejected the words of the prophets</b>
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**knowing:** reading in O; followed by P, 1830, and other early editions, plus recent RLDS editions

**knew:** emendation, probably by Joseph Smith, in 1840; followed by later LDS editions

**knoweth** or **knows:** possible revision

The Hebraistic use of the participial form *knowing* could be interpreted in either the present or the past tense—literally, as either “he is knowing” or “he was knowing.” English, of course, does not use the stative verb *know* in the progressive. For the 1840 edition, Joseph Smith edited the participial *knowing* to the simple past tense *knew*. However, at the time Nephi spoke these words to his brothers, the city of Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed. The surrounding use of the present tense in this passage suggests therefore that the grammatical revision should have been to the simple present tense, as either *knoweth* or *knows* rather than *knew*. Usage elsewhere in the Book of Mormon favors *knoweth* over *knows*.

## Correcting a Primitive Error

Sometimes there are errors which may have occurred on the original plates.

° *The Lamanites preached the gospel to the less wicked, not the more wicked, of the Gaddianton robbers.*

Helaman 6:37

the Lamanites did hunt the band of robbers of Gaddianton and they did preach the word of God among **the less wicked part** of them insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites

**the more wicked part:** reading in P, in Oliver Cowdery's hand; O not extant; reading followed by 1830 and all subsequent editions

**the less wicked part:** possible revision

It is difficult to know when the error entered into the text here. It is possible that it might have actually occurred in Mormon's original record (that is, on the plates). It is clear that Mormon intended to say that the Lamanites eliminated the band of Gaddianton robbers (1) by hunting down the more wicked part of them and (2) by preaching to the less wicked part. It is unreasonable to think that the opposite was the case. The resulting confusion in the text seems to be a conflation of these two opposing ideas.

### Supplying an Ellipsis

Occasionally the text has a passage where there is considerable ellipsis (or skipping of a phrase). Some of these ellipses may have occurred in the original plates.

° *Leaders of churches and teachers shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts.*

Mormon 8:2

yea it shall come in a day when the power of God shall be denied and churches become defiled and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts yea even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers **shall be lifted up** in the pride of their hearts

*leaders of churches and teachers in the pride of their hearts:* reading in both P and 1830; followed by subsequent editions except for recent LDS ones

*leaders of churches and teachers **shall rise** in the pride of their hearts:* third printing of 1905 LDS edition; followed by all subsequent LDS editions

*leaders of churches and teachers **shall be lifted up** in the pride of their hearts:* possible revision

Here both the printer's manuscript and 1830 edition were copied from the original manuscript. Both are missing a finite verb phrase before the second "in the pride of their hearts," which means that the original manuscript probably read the same. It is possible that the original text actually read this way—that is, the text here may represent a case of intended ellipsis. For his 1907 revision of the 1905 Chicago missionary edition, German Ellsworth revised the text by supplying "shall rise" as the ellipted finite verb phrase. However, a more plausible revision would be "shall be lifted up," based on the preceding "and churches become defiled and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts."

## *Conclusions*

Ultimately we must realize that the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon is not fully recoverable by human effort. Textual errors are generally not found except by discovering the correct reading in the manuscripts. Unfortunately, only 28 percent of the original manuscript is extant. Conjecture based on internal analysis of the Book of Mormon text has largely been unsuccessful in recovering the correct reading. Still, some conjectures are probably correct. Another important point to keep in mind is that even if we had the entire original manuscript, there would still be errors in the text, mainly because the original manuscript itself has some errors.

The systematic nature of the original text supports the theory that the text was revealed to Joseph Smith word for word. On the other hand, all subsequent transmissions of the text appear to have been subject to human error. Errors have crept into the text, but no error significantly interferes with either the message of the book or its doctrine. These textual errors have never prevented readers of the book from receiving their own personal witness of its truth.