

TEXTUAL VARIANTS IN BOOK OF MORMON MANUSCRIPTS

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Only 146 pages or part-pages of the Original Manuscript (MS) of the Book of Mormon are known to be extant—144 at the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,² and two half-pages at the University of Utah.³ Joseph Smith, III, President of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, once received from Lewis Bidamon pages of the Original MS for the Book of Jacob, but after being handled “the pages crumbled to pieces.”⁴

The handcopied 464-page Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon is complete except for some fifty-six words worn away from the bottom of the first sheet of text. For the greatest portion of the Book of Mormon, it constitutes the only manuscript in existence. The Printer’s MS is in the possession of the RLDS Church in Independence, Missouri.⁵

A great value of these early manuscripts is that for the most part they substantiate the correctness of the present Book of Mormon text—fully 99.9% of the text is published correctly. In textual criticism, however, evidence should be weighed, not counted, since a unique reading in a reliable source may be better than any number of readings in less reliable sources. There are some 200 places where these manuscripts have readings that seem appreciably better than those of the printed editions.

Hugh Nibley has said that differences in the Book of Mormon text over the years have been brought about by (a) mistakes in the first edition that were later corrected, (b) changes made to clarify the English meaning, and even (c) conscious “ ‘corrections’ that were better left unmade.”⁶ The present study adds to this list a fourth category—(d) mistakes made while the text was in its manuscript state.

The fifty textual variants which follow have been selected because they represent the most significant differences from our current printed edition.

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While similar errors have been corrected in later editions of the Book of Mormon, this group has previously gone unnoticed. They are presented under three general headings:

Part I—Corrections recorded on the manuscripts themselves, apparently by Oliver Cowdery or Joseph Smith. Although not necessarily resulting in “errors” in the published text, a few of these changes will be seen to be of questionable value.

Part II—Differences between the Original and Printer’s Manuscripts, apparently representing transcription errors.

Part III—Differences between the manuscript version and the printed editions, apparently typesetting and proofreading errors.

These illustrations will show that valuable readings have been lost through scribal and typesetting errors. Because the authentic readings went unnoticed in the revision work for the 1837 and 1840 editions, they have not yet been restored to our text of the Book of Mormon. It is just as Moroni anticipated: “If there are faults, they are the mistakes of men.”⁷

Several points should be made about the examples cited. Whenever a passage is presented, the preferred text (which is usually the oldest version of the text)⁸ is placed on the left side. Due to the fragmentary nature and poor preservation of the Original MS, words or portions of words have occasionally been supplied based on their presence in other forms of the text; these are set off in brackets. Punctuation was sometimes added to the Printer’s MS by the original typesetter, but since neither the Original nor the Printer’s MS had any marks of punctuation these have been ignored when the manuscript text is quoted below. Whenever possible the Original MS is cited; if it is not cited, the relevant portion is not extant. Finally, in order to distinguish more easily between the different stages of the manuscript, the following abbreviations have been used:

“Original MS” refers to the original transcription as first dictated by Joseph Smith.

“Original MS^c” refers to the corrected Original MS.

“Printer’s MS” refers to the transcription of the original manuscript made for the printer, *as first written*.

“Printer’s MS^c” refers to the corrected Printer’s MS.

PART I—Corrections Within the Manuscripts Themselves

The Original MS is a remarkably “clean” document: there are no major deletions, additions, or revisions of the text. Only a few minor corrections appear upon its pages. Usually when the Original MS has a correction, this Original MS^c is copied by the Printer’s MS and followed by the editions. Scribal corrections in the manuscripts reveal efforts by Joseph Smith at the time of the original translation to clarify or restate a thought, indicating his intimate involvement in the process (variants 1–5). Additionally one finds revisions by Oliver Cowdery of the work of other scribes (variants 6–7), revisions made in preparation for the 1830 edition (variants 8–9), and revisions made for the 1837 edition (variants 10–11).

Variant 1—Alma 39:4

In the Original MS, Alma 39:4 first read “the Harlot Isabel yea she did *lead* away the hearts of many” to sexual immorality. Joseph Smith has changed

this in the Original MS^c to the more descriptive, “the Harlot Isabel yea she did *steal* away the hearts of many.”

Variant 2—Alma 36:4

In Alma 36:4 the Original MS^c indicates not only that a thought was re-phrased, but that it was done at the time of the original transcription of the Original MS. The stages in this revision were:

- (a) & I would not that ye think [that] I Know of myself not of the
Carnal mind but of the spiritual
- (b) & I would not that ye think [that] I Know of myself not of the
tempral but of the spiritual
~~*Carnal mind but of the spiritual*~~
- (c) & I would not that ye think [that] I Know of myself not of the
~~*tempral but of the spiritual*~~
Carnal mind but of the spiritual tempral but [of] the spiritual
- (d) & I would not that ye think [that] I Know of myself not of the
~~*tempral but of the spiritual*~~
~~*Carnal mind but of the spiritual*~~ *tempral but [of] the spiritual not*
of the Carnal mind but of God

(a) First the statement was written; then (b) the last six words were deleted and a revision written above; (c) this above-the-line revision was crossed out and re-written on the running line of the text (indicating that it was done at the time of the original transcription); and finally (d) there was further amplification of the thought in the “carnal mind” phrase which follows in the original transcription. The Printer’s MS and the printed editions follow the final revision of the Original MS^c.

Variant 3—Alma 25:12

Another instance in which Joseph Smith appears to have deliberated over how to express an idea is Alma 25:12. The Original MS clause “their seed [should cause many] to *suffer* death” was changed in the Original MS^c to
be put to
“their seed [should cause many] to ~~*suffer*~~ death.”

Variant 4—Alma 56:41

Joseph Smith often translated a phrase out of usual English order, possibly because he was following the word order in the original. For example, the Original MS at Alma 56:41 has the phrase “we saw the Laman[ites upon us]” written and crossed out; and then the same phrase re-appears in the next line.

Variant 5—1 Nephi 20:11

Joseph Smith apparently used the King James Version in translating the plates that contained quotations from the Bible. The only Biblical passages in

the surviving parts of the Original MS are chapters twenty and twenty-one of 1 Nephi. At 1 Nephi 20:11 some of the wording of the King James Version is found in the Original MS: "how should I suffer my [na]me to be polluted."

The Original MS^c shows the Book of Mormon revision: "~~how should~~ ^{I will not} I suffer my [na]me to be polluted." After following the wording of the King James Version Joseph Smith apparently decided that it needed improvement.⁹

When Oliver Cowdery produced the Printer's MS he made a number of improvements in the spelling, capitalization, and grammar.¹⁰ In at least two additional cases Oliver Cowdery also changed Original MS passages written by another scribe.¹¹ The following revisions of the Original MS^c were probably inserted while Cowdery was making the Printer's MS for that passage.

Variant 6—1 Nephi 3:16

In 1 Nephi 3:16 of the Original MS—tentatively identified as in the handwriting of John Whitmer¹²—the phrase "of the Lord" at the end of the verse is added above the line by Oliver Cowdery. Evidently he felt a need to fill out the intended meaning.¹³

Variant 7—1 Nephi 7:17

Original MS

O lord according to my faith which is in *me*

*Original MS^c, Printer's MS,
All Printed Editions¹⁴*

O Lord, according to my faith which is in *thee*,

Nephi is addressing the Lord in prayer. The phrase in the Original MS (in the hand of an unidentified scribe) seems to mean "according to the faith that I have within myself."¹⁵ An extremely faint correction in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery substitutes the word *thee* over the deleted *me*. Perhaps Cowdery thought the intent was to emphasize the object of the faith. Though the change was clearly intentional, it is not known whether it was authorized by Joseph Smith.

In variants 8–9 the Printer's MS followed the Original MS correctly, but then was revised for the 1830 edition. The Printer's MS^c was the basis for that edition. Numerous minor revisions were made to the Printer's MS for the 1830 edition, but they are not included here.¹⁶

Variant 8—Alma 33:14

When the Printer's MS was corrected sometimes the same change was also added to the Original MS. In Alma 33:14 the Original MS has a single question: "I would ask if ye have read these scriptures how can ye disbel[ieve] on the son of God[?]" Oliver Cowdery, after having copied the Original MS, felt a need to divide the single question into two separate queries: "I would ask if ye have read these scriptures [?] ^{if ye have} ~~how can~~ how can ye disbelieve on the son of God [?]" The "if ye have" which starts the second question was then added to the Original MS.

Variant 9—Titles to 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi

The original titles to the books of 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi both seem to have been simply "The Book of Nephi". This is indicated by the addition of *second* to the title of 2 Nephi in both the Printer's MS^c and the Original MS^c. The text in the Original MS is very faint at this point, but the word *second* added above the line is clear and obviously was written later than the body of the text. Similarly, the title to 1 Nephi appears in the Printer's MS^c as "The first Book of Nephi". While the Original MS for this is not in existence, it probably resembled that of 2 Nephi, being added when the Printer's MS^c was made.

In variants 10–11 the Printer's MS has been corrected, but the change is not reflected in either the 1830 or the 1837 edition. Because of this there is no certain way to determine whether the change was made (a) to conform to the Original MS, or (b) in conjunction with the 1830 edition, or (c) at the time of the 1837 edition. The historical context indicates that 1837 is the most likely date for this type of correction in the Printer's MS.

Variant 10—Alma 18:7

<i>Printer's MS^c</i>	<i>Printer's MS, All Printed Editions</i>
now it was the practice of <i>the^{se}</i> Lamanites	Now it was the practice of <i>the</i> La- manites,

The Printer's MS^c *these* is more precise since it was the practice of only these particular Lamanites to scatter flocks at the waters of Sebus, rather than the practice of the Lamanites in general. This revision in the Printer's MS may have been overlooked.

Variant 11—Alma 16:5

<i>Printer's MS^c</i>	<i>Printer's MS, All Printed Editions</i>
desired of him to Know <i>whither</i> they the Lord would that they should go into the wilderness	desired of him to know <i>whether</i> the Lord would that they should go into the wilderness

An *i* has been written on top of the *e* of the Printer's MS *whether*. *Whither* better fits the context. (There is a parallel situation in Alma 43:23, in which Alma is asked to "inquire of the Lord *whither* the armies of the Nephites would go to defend themselves against the Lamanites). Notice that the reply does not answer the question of "whether" they should go, but "where" they should go (Alma 16:6). This correction in the Printer's MS probably went unnoticed.

PART II—Differences Between the Two Manuscripts

In variants 12–27 the Original MS is different from the Printer's MS. Though this difference *could* be due to intentional alteration, it seems to be due to the incorrect transcribing of the Original MS.

Oliver Cowdery had the task of making a complete manuscript copy to be used by the printer. The Printer's MS that he produced exhibits scribal errors common in any long transcription. Many times during the transcription process, words or phrases were accidentally omitted in the Printer's MS and then added above the line as a Printer's MS⁶. In fact, in at least ten places entire lines were skipped and then recovered as interlinear corrections. Other times words or lines were accidentally doubled in the Printer's MS, and then one of the two was deleted. The numerous cases in which the Printer's MS was corrected to correspond to the Original MS illustrate the effort that was made to faithfully reproduce the original. As previously noted, the improvements that Oliver Cowdery intentionally made in the Printer's MS generally consist of capitalization and spelling, as well as a number of minor grammatical or stylistic improvements.¹⁷ *Substantive differences between the Original MS and the Printer's MS seem to be unintentional*—a result of carelessness, not correction. Most of these variations result in little difference in meaning; but, significantly, whenever there is an appreciable difference, the better of the two is found in the Original MS. If the manuscript had been proofread more carefully, all of the unintentional differences between the Original MS and the Printer's MS would have been eliminated, and the textual variants illustrated in this part would have been corrected while the Book of Mormon was still in its manuscript state.

The following passages are due to misreading the Original MS when the Printer's MS was in preparation. In each case the printed editions follow the misread Printer's MS text. Therefore, none of the following sixteen readings from the Original MS has ever appeared in a printed edition of the Book of Mormon.¹⁸

Variant 12—1 Nephi 12:5

Original MS

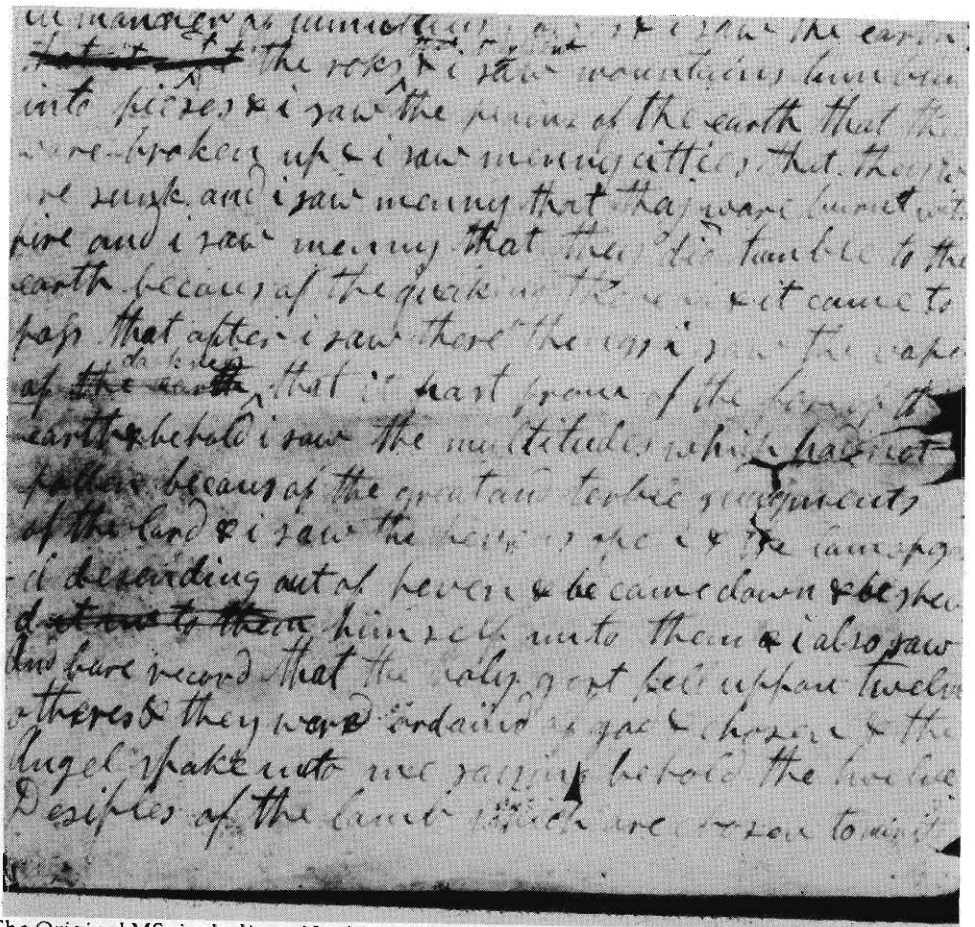
i saw the multitudes which had *not* fallen becaus of the great and terble judgments of the lord

Printer's MS

All Printer Editions

I saw multitudes which had fallen, because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord.

According to the Printer's MS and all printed editions, after Nephi saw the lightning, heard the earthquakes, and saw the cities destroyed, he saw in vision wicked multitudes who had fallen dead because of divine judgments at the time Jesus Christ died in Palestine. The difficulty is that 1 Ne. 12:6 relates the Lord's descent from heaven and his appearance unto "them." What is the antecedent of "them"? If one knew no better, one would be forced to the conclusion that he appeared to the dead bodies of the wicked! The context of the Printer's MS and the printed editions implies this impossible situation. However, quite a different picture of Nephi's prophetic vision is offered by the significant reading of the Original MS. Notice that following the disappearance of the "vapor of darkness" and the subsequent clearing of his vision, Nephi sees specific multitudes as indicated by the definite article *the*—earlier in 1 Nephi 12:1–2 he merely saw general multitudes of his descendants. The words as originally translated by the Prophet Joseph



The Original MS, including 1 Nephi 12:4 (see Variant 12). Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Smith refer to "the multitudes which had *not*"¹⁹ eliminates the difficulty and gives a more accurate picture of Nephi's vision. As his vision cleared in this verse, he saw those who (because they were more righteous) had *not* fallen. At this time the heavens opened and the resurrected Christ descended and showed himself unto "them," that is, to the righteous who had been spared. This rendition of the Original MS is perfectly consistent and clear and is fulfilled by the visitation of Christ related in 3 Nephi 11–28.²⁰

Original MS

Variant 13—1 Nephi 13:4

the formation of a great Church

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

the foundation of a great church.

Variant 14—1 Nephi 13:5

behold the formation of a Church which is most abominable

Behold the foundation of a church, which is most abominable

Variant 15—1 Nephi 13:26

the *formation* of that great &
abominable church

the *foundation* of a great and abomi-
nable church,

A difference in handwriting style seems to have caused problems at times. The handwriting—probably one of the Whitmers—differs in the formation of the letter *r* from Oliver Cowdery's handwriting.²¹ In the above three passages Oliver Cowdery misread the word *formation*²² in the Original MS as *foundation*. However, when reference is made in 1 Nephi 13:32 to these very statements about the church's formation, he correctly copied the *formation* from the Original MS.

Variant 16—1 Nephi 13:24

Original MS

the *fulness* of the Gospel of the Lord

Printer's MS,

All Printed Editions

the *plainness* of the Gospel of the
Lord,

In this passage the phrase "*fulness* of the gospel" found in the Original MS was incorrectly transcribed into the Printer's MS as "*plainness* of the gospel." The phrase "*plainness* of the gospel" occurs nowhere else, while "*fulness* of the gospel" appears seven other times in the Book of Mormon.

Variant 17—1 Nephi 15:12

Original MS

by the spirit of the Lord which was
in our *father*

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

by the spirit of the Lord which was
in our *fathers*;

Nephi was answering the questions of Laman and Lemuel about their father Lehi's vision, and throughout this chapter references to their *father* occur ten times. An eleventh reference to their *father* is found in the Original MS at this verse which was incorrectly copied into the Printer's MS as *fathers* and thus the plural form found its way into the printed editions.

Variant 18—1 Nephi 19:2

Original MS

eng[raven] upon those *first* plates of
which I have spoken

Printer's MS,

All Printed Editions

engraven upon those plates of
which I have spoken;

Sometimes the omission of a word leaves a passage less precise. The Original MS of this verse mentions "those *first* plates of which I have spoken," specifying the large plates of Nephi and their prior construction.

Variant 19—1 Nephi 19:23

Original MS

& I did read many things unto th[em whi]ch were in the *Books* of Moses

According to 1 Nephi 5:11 the brass plates of Laban contained the “five books of Moses.” There are a number of other places where such singular-plural variations occur. While one may seem no better than the other, unless there is some compelling evidence to the contrary it should be assumed that the earliest rendition is more reliable.

Variant 20—2 Nephi 1:1

Original MS

our father Lehi also spake many things unto them & *rehearsed unto them* [how great things the] Lord had done for them

Here the double occurrence of the phrase “unto them” facilitated the accidental omission of the Original MS phrase & *rehearsed unto them*. The present edition attempts to bridge the hiatus by the omission of these four words, and accordingly has punctuated with a dash at the point where the deletion occurred. The Original MS eliminates the need for special punctuation.

Variant 21—Alma 30:5

Original MS

[& it came to pass in th]e *commencement of the* seventeenth year of the [reign of the judges]

The accidental omission of this phrase, *the commencement of*, from Alma 30:5 in the Printer’s MS and thus all printed editions results in the apparent implication that there was continual peace throughout the seventeenth year.²³ This, however, conflicts with the events during that year, which include the heresy of Korihor, the Zoramite apostasy, the humble ones of Antionum being cast out and then joining the Ammonites of Jershon, the Zoramites stirring up the Lamanites against the Ammonites, and their preparations for war (see Alma 30:5–35:12).

The Original MS resolves this conflict by stating that the peace which had begun in the “sixteenth year of the reign of the judges” (Alma 30:2) continued only as far as “the *commencement of the* seventeenth year,” and that in the “latter end” of the same year (Alma 30:6) the disturbances and conflicts started to happen.²⁴ The Original MS preserves the consistent original translation.

Printer’s MS,
All Printed Editions

And I did read many things unto them, which were written in the *Book of Moses*;

Printer’s MS,
All Printed Editions

our father, Lehi, also spake many things unto them: how great things the Lord had done for them,

Printer’s MS
All Printed Editions

And it came to pass in the seventeenth year of the reign of the Judges,

Variant 22—Alma 30:52

Original MS

& I always Knew that there was a
God

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

and I also knew that there was a
God.

In the thirtieth chapter of Alma is related a dramatic encounter between the prophet Alma and the anti-Christ Korihor. After asking for a sign, Korihor is struck dumb. He writes that the devil told him that there was no God and taught him the things he should preach. Korihor claims he eventually convinced himself into believing them. The question could properly be asked whether Korihor knew all along the falsity of his teachings.

Truman G. Madsen has said the following concerning this crucial verse:

Now he acknowledges that in the very midst of his campaign of disparagement, "I also knew that there was a God." A typographical error diminishes the scope of his knowing, for the original [manuscript] has him say, "I *always* knew that there was a God." (Alma 30:52.) Always? Even when, as he says, he "verily believed" that his denials were true? Yes. But isn't that a contradiction? Yes. A more than logical self-contradiction into which all of us frequently fall.²⁵

The explicit statement found in the Original MS clarifies this incident and shows that deep-down Korihor was aware of his deception, underscoring his perfidy.

Variant 23—Alma 31:30

Original MS

O Lord God how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness & *infidelity* shall be among this People

Printer's MS,
All Printed Editions

O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and *iniquity* shall be among this people?

Oliver Cowdery seems here to have misread the Original MS *infidelity* as *iniquity*. In Alma's fervent prayer after witnessing the apostate practices of the Zoramites, he uses the word *infidelity* to describe their condition of holding apostate doctrines. The meaning of *infidelity* in this verse is not marital unfaithfulness, but rather a lack or "want of faith or belief."²⁶ Joseph Smith elsewhere used *infidelity* to mean unbelief.²⁷

Variant 24—Alma 37:18

Original MS

for he promised unto them that he would *preserve* these things

Printer's MS,
All Printed Editions

For he promised unto them that he would *reserve* these things

The omission of the initial letter was occasioned by Oliver Cowdery's method of dividing the word *preserve*: the *p* was placed at the end of one line and the rest of the word at the beginning of the next. In this chapter *preserve(d)* occurs six other places, but *reserve* is not found anywhere in

Alma. This verse is essentially a restatement of a message in a previous verse which used *preserve* (Alma 37:14).

Variant 25—Alma 37:36

Original MS

let *all* [thy thoughts b]e directed
[un]to the Lord

Printer's MS,
All Printed Editions

let thy thoughts be directed unto
the Lord;

In Alma's discourse to his son Helaman as found in the Original MS, he repeats the word *all* three times. The last *all* (which had been written at the end of a line) was left out of the Printer's MS, and thus it is missing from the printed editions. A loss of emphasis results.

Variant 26—Alma 42:2

Original MS

yea he *drove* out the man

Printer's MS,
All Printed Editions

yea, he *drew* out the man,

Though it is very faint in the Original MS, careful analysis of each occurrence of both *drew* and *drove* in the Oliver Cowdery portions of both manuscripts shows that the Original MS reading here is indeed *drove*. This passage refers back to the account in Genesis 3:24 where the Hebrew has *gāraš*, which means "drive out, drive away, cast out."²⁸ The reading *drew*, however, would place the Lord outside the garden, pulling Adam out! For further support of *drove*, compare the statement earlier in this verse that "the Lord God sent our first parents forth" and also the passages at 2 Nephi 2:19 and Moses 4:31.

Variant 27—Alma 52:36

Original MS

& the [re]mainder of them being
much confused Knew not *whither* to
go or to strike

All Printed Editions

and the remainder of them, being
much confused, knew not *whether*
to go or to strike.

In this passage the *whither* of the Original MS was at first written as *where* in the Printer's MS. Perhaps in an attempt to more accurately represent the *whither* of the Original MS, the *re* of *where* was crossed out and *ther* written above it, resulting in the Printer's MS^c *whether*. The reading *whether* implies that to the Lamanites there was a real question as to whether they should run away or stay and fight. Originally, however, they did not know *where* to go or strike.

PART III—Differences Between the Manuscripts and Printed Editions

In variants 28–50 the Printer's MS (and the Original MS, when it is extant) is different from the printed editions. Though this difference between the manuscript(s) and the editions *could* be due to intentional alteration, it seems

to be an unintentional printer's error caused by misreading or misprinting the Printer's MS.

Meticulous proof-reading of the 1830 edition against the Printer's MS would have eliminated the errors in this part.²⁹ Another measure of its inadequacy is the more than one hundred obvious typographical errors that went undetected. The errors enumerated below could only have been discovered by a careful comparison of the text against the Printer's MS. For the first printed edition of the Book of Mormon the typesetter added punctuation and made conscious improvements in the spelling, capitalization, and grammar. Such improvements are not included in the discrepancies to be noted below. There is no evidence that the typesetter made deliberate, substantive alterations of the text.

Because much of the Original MS has been lost, it is often impossible to verify the original reading of the following passages. Nonetheless, a noted textual critic has pointed out, "the odds favor that form found in the state of the text that lies nearest to the [original] manuscript."³⁰ The following passages are misreadings of the Printer's MS that were first misprinted in 1830. None were corrected in the second or later editions, and all are present in our current edition of the Book of Mormon.³¹

Variant 28—2 Nephi 2:27

Printer's MS

& they are free to chose liberty & eternal life through the great *mediator* of all men

All Printed Editions

And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great *mediation* of all men,

Evidently the typesetter misread Oliver Cowdery's final *r*. In further support of this view is the fact that *mediator* occurs nowhere else in the Book of Mormon except the very next verse (2 Nephi 2:28).³² By following the Printer's MS phrase "the great *mediator* of all men" it becomes clear that one must choose between two real individuals: either Christ the mediator or Satan the adversary.

Variant 29—2 Nephi 4:26

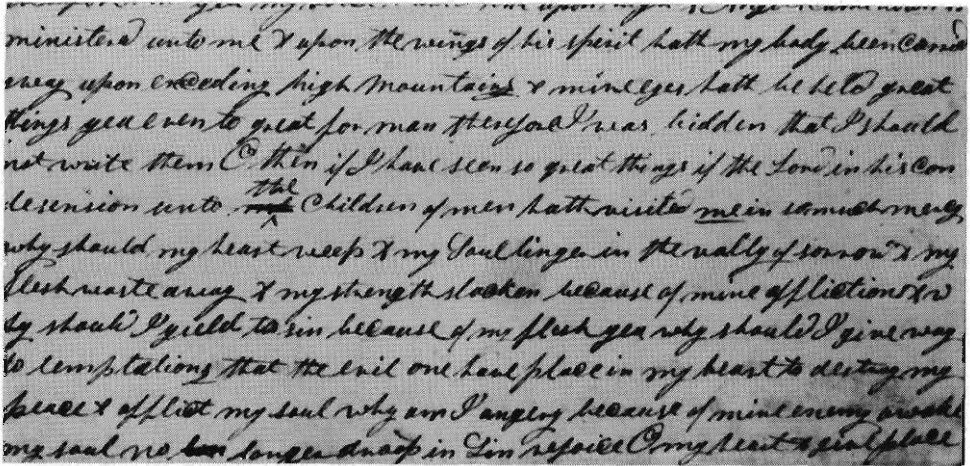
Printer's MS

if the Lord in his condescension
the
unto ~~me~~ children of men hath visited
me in so much mercy

All Printed Editions

if the Lord in his condescension
unto the children of men, hath visited
men in so much mercy,

The Printer's MS has a somewhat more forceful rendition of Nephi's psalm. Nephi had seen such great things, and the Lord in his condescension had visited *him* with so much mercy. Why, Nephi then asks himself, do I act the way I do?



The Printer's MS, including 2 Nephi 4:26 (see Variant 29). Courtesy of the Library Archives, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri.

Variant 30—2 Nephi 33:4

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

the things which I have written in weakness will *he make* strong unto them

the things which I have written in weakness, will *be made* strong unto them:

The active *he make* is more forceful than the passive *be made* of the printed editions. In support of the active construction here compare the statement by the Lord in 2 Nephi 3:21.

Variant 31—Jacob 3:5

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

for they have not forgotten the *commandments* of the Lord which was given unto our *father*

for they have not forgotten the *commandment* of the Lord, which was given unto our *fathers*,

As the text stands in the printed editions, Jacob seems to refer to a commandment given to his *fathers*, presumably such forefathers as Abraham and Jacob. The difficulty is that the reference is to a prohibition of polygamy. Jacob's forefathers were *not* prohibited from practicing polygamy. Therefore, the printed reference seems both perplexing and illogical. The explication of the problem seems to be in the reading of the Printer's MS. In this earliest available rendition, Jacob is speaking of certain commandments given by the Lord to his father Lehi to the effect that his people should not practice polygamy. In Jacob 2:34 a similar statement appears: "these commandments were given unto our father Lehi." The appearance of the plural *fathers* in the

first edition can be understood after an examination of the handwriting in the Printer's MS. The final *r* of *father* is very close to a semi-colon added by the typesetter, and could have resulted in a misreading of the word as *fathers*.

Variant 32—Jacob 7:25

Printer's MS

fortify against them with
their *arms* & with all their might

All Printed Editions

fortify against them with
their *armies*, and with all their
might,

The Printer's MS correctly has *arms* (in the sense of "weapons"), but the printed editions have an anachronistic reference to *armies* too early in the history of the little Nephite colony. The earliest authentic occurrence of *army* or *armies* in the Book of Mormon (excluding the passage in question) occurs much later in the Words of Mormon 1:13, after which it properly appears often in the text.³³

Variant 33—Mosiah 27:28

Printer's MS

nevertheless after *wadeing* through
much tribulation

All Printed Editions

Nevertheless, after *wandering*
through much tribulation,

The phrase "wading through much tribulation" in the Printer's MS pictures the diligence of one in the process of repentance. But the typesetter, possibly aided by the faulty spelling *wadeing*, misprinted it as *wandering*. Other parallel occurrences of the phrase "wade through" support the Printer's MS in the image brought to mind of resolutely trudging to a goal (albeit through tribulation) rather than wandering aimlessly.³⁴

Variant 34—Alma 1:32

Printer's MS

persecuting lying thieving robing
committing whoredoms & murder-
ing

All Printed Editions

lying, thieving, robbing,
committing whoredoms, and mur-
dering,

In this list of wrongs committed by those not members of the Nephite church, the Printer's MS also has *persecuting*, but this was accidentally left out of the 1830 and later editions.

Variant 35—Alma 2:30

Printer's MS

to save and *protect* this people

All Printed Editions

to save and *preserve* this people.

In context *protect* seems more suited to the immediate desire of Alma, rather than the long-range implications of the *preserve*, as in the printed editions.

Variant 36—Alma 5:1

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

declair the word of God unto the People

deliver the word of God unto the people,

Perhaps aided by the imperfect spelling *declair*, the word and meaning has been changed from *declare* to *deliver*.³⁵

Variant 37—Alma 7:9

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

Repent ye *repent ye* and prepare the way of the Lord

Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord,

In this case the emphatic double command *repent ye repent ye*, has been lost. The same error, of omitting a "repent ye", also occurred at Alma 9:25.³⁶

Variant 38—Alma 10:5

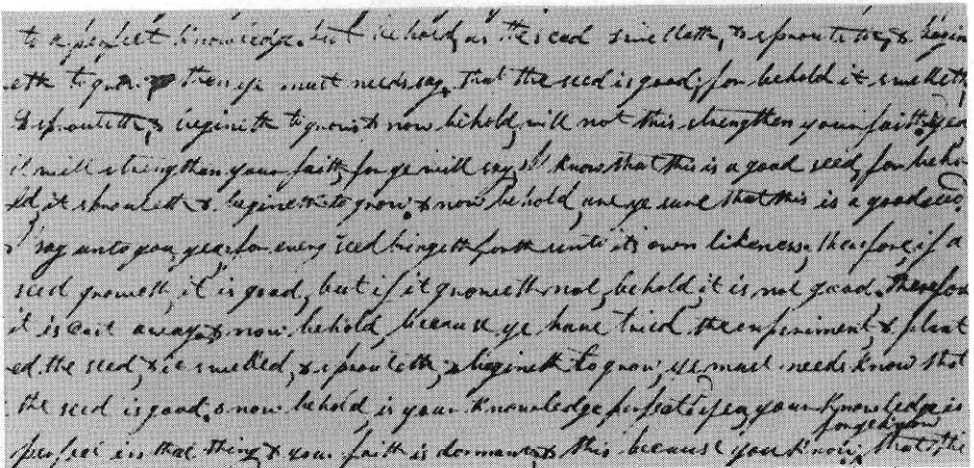
Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

his mysteries and his *myraculous* power

his mysteries and his *marvellous* power;

The usage of the phrase *mysteries and marvelous powers* earlier in the verse may have been the factor that led to the printed rendition.



The Printer's MS, including Alma 32:30–31 (see Variant 39). Courtesy of the Library Archives, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri.

Variant 39—Alma 32:30–31

Original MS, Printer's MS

for behold it swelleth & sprouteth
& begineth to grow & *now behold
will not this strengthen your faith yea
it will strengthen your faith for ye
will say I know that this is a good
seed for behold it sprouteth & begineth
to grow* and now behold are ye sure
that this is a good seed

All Printed Editions

for behold it swelleth, and sprouteth,
and beginneth to grow.

And now behold, are ye sure that
this is a good seed?

This passage represents the most extensive omission made anywhere in the text of the Book of Mormon. For the reader to appreciate the value of this missing section, the entire discourse should be carefully re-read.³⁷ The strengthening of faith as described in this "lost" section is a significant step in Alma's explanation of how faith grows and develops. The idea of "strengthening of faith" (rather than *increasing* faith) is found elsewhere only in Alma 25:16, where it is associated with the strengthening of one's faith in Christ. The fact that the typesetter's punctuation had been applied and that the missing section coincided with identical words just two lines apart suggest that the omission was accidental.

Variant 40—Alma 57:25

Original MS, Printer's MS

& to our great astonishment & also
the *joy* of our whole army

All Printed Editions

and to our great astonishment, and
also the *foes* of our whole army,

The printed text contains a puzzling reference to the *foes* of Helaman's army being astonished that none of his 2060 young warriors was slain during a battle. It seems to imply that after the battle Helaman's men went over to their defeated enemies to ask them what they thought of their own marvelous preservation! The word *foes* is a misreading of Oliver Cowdery's handwritten *joy*.³⁸ The meaning of the Original and Printer's MSS is more plausible. It is also consistent with the statements that "their preservation was astonishing to our whole army" (Alma 57:26), and "I was filled with exceeding joy, because of the goodness of God in preserving us" (Alma 57:36).

Variant 41—Alma 62:27

Printer's MS

as many of the Lamanites that were
prisoners were desirous to join the
people of Ammon

All Printed Editions

many of the Lamanites that were
prisoners, were desirous to join the
people of Ammon,

An inconsistency in all printed editions exists here because it states: (a) that "many" of the Lamanite prisoners were desirous to become free Ammonites; and then in verses 28 and 29, (b) that those who were desirous received according to their desires, and (c) that "therefore *all* the prisoners of the Lamanites did join the people of Ammon." The passage is unclear as to

whether "all" or only "many" of these prisoners joined the Ammonites. However, the Printer's MS resolves this by making it plain that *all* the prisoners were involved in the decision.

Variant 42—Helaman 13:20

Printer's MS

& because they have set their hearts upon their riches & will hide up their treasures

All Printed Editions

and because they have set their hearts upon their riches, *I* will hide up their treasures

The editions state that the Lord himself will hide up the treasures of the wicked. This statement was caused by the typesetter's mistaking the & (ampersand) of the Printer's MS for a capital *I*. The original meaning of the passage in the Printer's MS is much more consistent with our understanding of the way the Lord does things. The meaning of this verse is further clarified with the following punctuation:

And the day shall come that they shall hide up their treasures because they have set their hearts upon riches; and because they have set their hearts upon their riches *and* will hide up their treasures when they shall flee before their enemies—because they will not hide them up unto me, cursed be they and also their treasures; and in that day shall they be smitten, saith the Lord.

Variant 43—Helaman 16:7

Printer's MS

hands
& did flee out of their *hands*

All Printed Editions

and did flee out of their *lands*,

Samuel the Lamanite's dramatic escape in the Printer's MS from the *hands* of his enemies after they had just gone forth to "lay their hands on him" was misread by the typesetter. The word *lands* is also inconsistent with Samuel leaving the "land [not *lands*] of Zarahemla" (Helaman 13:2).

Variant 44—3 Nephi 4:18–19

Printer's MS

because of their much provision which they had laid up in store & because of the scantiness of provisions among the robbers

All Printed Editions

because of their much provision which they had laid up in store because of the scantiness of provisions among the robbers;

The omission by the typesetter of an & (ampersand) between two clauses has resulted in a confusing and incomplete statement. The 1830 edition states that the Gadianton robbers could not successfully besiege the Nephites "because of their [the Nephites] much provision which they had laid up in store because of the scantiness of provisions among the robbers." It is unclear why the scanty provisions of the robbers somehow caused the abundance of provisions of the Nephites. The present edition has sensed this problem, and punctuated the text into separate verses, but the result is that now 3 Nephi 4:19 is a dangling fragment. This difficulty is eliminated by

the reading of the Printer's MS, which connects the two "because" clauses by an *and*. Thus, the robbers' siege was impossible (a) because of the Nephites' much provision, and (b) because of the robbers' scanty provisions.

Variant 45—3 Nephi 6:3

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

a covenant to keep the peace of the
land

a covenant to keep the peace, of the
band

Because of misreading *land* as *band*, the punctuation also has been incorrectly affixed. Following the Printer's MS the statement reads "a covenant to keep the peace of the *land*," which is parallel to the conclusion of the verse which says that "thus they did establish peace in all the land."

Variant 46—3 Nephi 19:25

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

Jesus *beheld* them as they did pray
unto him

Jesus *blessed* them, as they did pray
unto him,

Even though there is an intuitive desire to favor the reading of the printed editions because of the apparent significance of the Lord's action, it must be realized that the simple statement that "Jesus *beheld* them" is paralleled by the statement later in the verse that "his countenance did smile upon them and the light of his countenance did shine upon them."

Variant 47—Mormon 8:10

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

& *whither* they be upon the face of
the land no man knoweth

and *whether* they be upon the face
of the land, no man knoweth.

According to the Printer's MS no one knew *whither* ("where") the three Nephites were. Moroni hastens to add that he and his father have seen and been ministered to by them (Mormon 8:11). Compare the similar phraseology in 1 Nephi 22:4.

Variant 48—Mormon 9:30

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

for I know that ye shall *have* my
words

for I know that ye shall *hear* my
words.

In this case *have* means "possess" and indicates that a record with his words will be available to the people in the latter days.

Variant 49—Ether 1:41

Printer's MS

All Printed Editions

& thy *family* & also Jared thy brother
& his family

and thy *families*; and also Jared thy
brother and his family;

There has been some conjecture in the past whether the brother of Jared was polygamous because of the printed reference to his *families*. For example, in the 1879 edition (and continuing until the 1920 edition) Orson Pratt commented as follows in the footnote to this passage: "From this verse it is seen that the brother of Jared had a plurality of families." No support is found in the Printer's MS which has the singular *family*.³⁹

Variant 50—Ether 3:14

Printer's MS

in me shall all mankind have *life* &
that eternally even they which shall
believe on my name

All Printed Editions

In me shall all mankind have *light*,
and that eternally, even they which
shall believe on my name;

The truly faithful are promised eternal *life*, rather than the less meaningful eternal light misprinted in the published editions.⁴⁰

Believest thou the words which I shall speak, & he answered, Yea, Lord, I know
that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, & canst not lie, & when
he had said these words, he hold the Lord shewed himself unto him & said,
because thou knowest these things, ye are redeemed from the fall, therefore ye are
brought back into my presence, therefore I shew myself unto you, he hold I
am he which was prepared from the foundation of the world, to redeem my peo-
ple, he hold I am Jesus Christ, I am the Father & the Son, in me shall all man-
-nd have life, & that eternally, even they which shall believe on my name, & they
shall become my sons & my daughters, & never shall I shew myself unto
whom I have created, for never had man believed in me as thou hast, secret
than that ye are created after mine own image, yea, even all men were cre-
ated, in the beginning, after mine own image, he hold, this body, which ye now
behold, is the body of my Spirit, no man have created after the body of my Spi-
-rit, & even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit, will I appear unto my people.

From the Printer's MS, including a portion of Ether 3:14 (see Variant 50). Courtesy of the Library-Archives, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri.

This glimpse into the early textual history of the Book of Mormon has shown that even though the Original MS is demonstrably inferior in such non-essentials as spelling, capitalization, and grammar, it appears to be superior to the other texts whenever there is a substantive difference between it and the Printer's MS or the early editions. That the rendition in the Original MS is preferable supports Joseph Smith's claim as an inspired translator. In June of 1829 the Lord declared to the three witnesses that Joseph Smith had "translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true" (D&C 17:6). Strictly speaking, this statement refers *only* to the translation of the Book of Mormon as contained in the Original MS, since at that time neither a

Printer's MS nor any printed edition existed. Careful study has verified the judgment that in essentials the Original MS is the most correct text. The types of mistakes found in this manuscript—mere scribal and grammatical errors—underscores its essential integrity.

Nonetheless a number of misprints in the 1830 text were not (and have not yet been) corrected to agree with what seem to be the intended meanings found in the manuscript. The investigation of the scribal and printing variants of a particular document is especially important when such information helps clarify or even restore the concepts originally intended. Such has been the case with the study of Book of Mormon variants. Some of these variants demonstrate a certain lack of precision in the transcription process, and show that the Book of Mormon, as it passed from its manuscript state into print, has been subject to the same kind of textual difficulties found in other transmitted texts. The manuscripts have not revealed any suggestion of individuals busily altering a text to cover up blunders before publication, but rather a less than perfect effort to guard the textual integrity of a new scripture.

Our text of the Book of Mormon should be the very best possible. A careful comparison with the early manuscripts could in many instances improve our published text, bringing it back to the way Joseph Smith presumably intended it to be. It would not be a matter of making a poor thing better: it is a matter of making a work of inestimable value more accurate.

Post Script

As a basis for comparison with the variations that have occurred in the early Book of Mormon text, an independent investigation was made into the frequency and nature of alterations that are likely to occur during an oral recitation of the complete Book of Mormon. This involved listening to the *Listener's Digest: the Book of Mormon on Cassettes* (as read by Lael Woodbury) and noting those places where it differs from the Book of Mormon text. The variations, or errors, which were found arose from the following three causes:

(a) Misreading a word as one of similar appearance. For example, the tape recording has *enemies* instead of *armies* (1 Nephi 17:27); *trust* instead of *visit* (Enos 10); *Israel* instead of *Ishmael* (Alma 17:21); *resurrection* instead of *restoration* (Alma 41:10); *forfeited* instead of *fortified* (Alma 62:42); *appointed* instead of *anointed* (Ether 9:15); and *caused* instead of *ceased* (Moroni 8:28).

(b) Misreading a word as another word found in the immediate context, either before or after the misread word. For example, saying *word* instead of *world* (Jacob 4:9); *commandments* instead of *judgments* (Mosiah 6:6); *words* instead of *plates* (Jarom 15); *voice* instead of *head* (Alma 8:15); *toiled* instead of *fought* (Alma 56:16); *fallen* instead of *fled* (Moroni 9:17); and *dust* instead of *dead* (Moroni 10:27).

(c) Misreading a word or phrase by adding or deleting letters or words. Several times variations occurred between singulars and plurals. The most drastic alteration in the recorded version due to addition or deletion of an entire word was 2 Ne. 28:20 where the addition of a *not* reversed the original meaning.

Such variations as these are the type of error one would expect from an oral reading; they occurred even though a conscientious effort was made to read the text exactly as it was printed. Woodbury has said:

At no time did we make any intentional change or substitution of any of the book's content. We had a director listen while we recorded, and the errors you describe are there only because they escaped his attention.⁴¹

Some of the errors radically distort the meaning, while others actually make quite good sense and speak truths just as much as the correct readings. But *all* must be rejected as variants with absolutely no authority. It is remarkable to see how similar were the types of accidental variation that occurred when the Original MS was read in preparation of the Printer's MS, and when the Printer's MS was read to make the 1830 edition.

NOTES

¹Most of the textual variants discussed in this article are derived from the compilation in the writer's thesis, "A Study of Some Textual Variations in the Book of Mormon Comparing the Original and the Printer's Manuscripts and the 1830, the 1837, and the 1840 Editions," unpublished Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974.

²Dean C. Jessee, "The Original Book of Mormon Manuscript," *BYU Studies*, X (Spring 1970), 273, presents a complete listing of the extant Original MS pages located in Church archives.

³Everett Cooley, "The Frederick Kesler Collection," *BYU Studies*, XIII (Winter 1973), 223-24.

⁴*The Saints' Herald*, XLVI (1899), 650. Cf. also *The Saini's Herald*, XXXI (1884), 538.

⁵See Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, Missouri: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1969), p. 28, for the account of how the RLDS Church came into possession of the Printer's MS. The LDS Church archives has a microfilm copy of the Printer's MS. See *Deseret News*, Nov. 23, 1974, p. 4A, and *Deseret News*, "Church Section," Nov. 30, 1974, p. 3.

⁶Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1967), pp. 4-7.

⁷Title page of the Book of Mormon. Emphasis added. It should be noted that the original statement was: "If there be fault, it be the mistake of men." It was revised to the present form in 1837.

⁸The only two exceptions to this are examples 10 and 11 in which a Printer's MS^c is preferred over the earlier Printer's MS.

⁹Also in support of the view that the King James Version was utilized is the tendency for Book of Mormon revisions of Biblical material to cluster around words that are printed in italics by the King James translators. For evidence that the early brethren were aware of the significance of the italics, see the editorial by W. W. Phelps in *The Evening and the Morning Star*, I (January 1833), 58.

¹⁰Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 52, points out that the Original MS was in "need of refinement and grammatical and language improvement."

¹¹The matching of a specific scribe to one of the differing handwritings in the Original MS is difficult. Sections recorded by Oliver Cowdery and perhaps John Whitmer have been identified. At least seven individuals were scribes during at least some part of the translation of the Book of Mormon: Martin Harris, Emma Smith, Reuben Hale, Samuel Smith, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, and Christian Whitmer. The Printer's MS is almost entirely in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery, but some parts were written by other (as yet unidentified) individuals.

¹²Jessee, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-78.

¹³Another instance in which Cowdery filled out the thought is found in Alma 59:9. After copying the Original MS into the Printer's MS, he answered the implied question ("Easier than what?") by adding to the Printer's MS^c and then the Original MS^c the clause "than to retake it from them."

¹⁴The phrase "All Printed Editions" refers to editions of the Book of Mormon published by the LDS Church. The passages mentioned in this article which RLDS editions have already corrected are listed in footnote 31. Also, since LDS editions vary slightly in punctuation and capitalization, for standardization, the exact text of the 1830 edition has been used in the right-hand column.

¹⁵A parallel instance is: "We will go speedily against those dissenters, in the strength of God according to the faith which is in us." (Alma 61:17).

¹⁶Even more revisions, and of greater significance, were made to the Printer's MS during the winter of 1836–37 in preparation for the second edition of the Book of Mormon. See Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹⁷Howard, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–35.

¹⁸This statement applies only to the variants in Part II. For the situation with respect to the variants of Part III, see footnote 31.

¹⁹Evidently this reading of the Original MS was first noticed by Rev. Wesley P. Walters several years ago when "reading a few pages from photographs of the original MS while Mr. [A. William] Lund read out loud from the first edition." After discussing whether or not the "not" should be in the text, they concluded that it made "more sense than to have it omitted." (Wesley P. Walters, letter to the writer, dated March 30, 1973). Thus, avowed critics of the Book of Mormon have been aware of such significant differences in the Original MS, but have not published concerning them, presumably because they illustrate the superiority of the original rendition.

²⁰When Oliver Cowdery transcribed the account of its fulfillment in 3 Nephi 8:20, he wrote in the Printer's MS "the inhabitants thereof which had fallen," but the Printer's MS^c corrected it to read "which had *not* fallen."

Another case of temporary omission of "not" is the Printer's MS of Mormon 9:29 which exhorts its readers to "see that ye partake of the sacrament unworthily," but again the Printer's MS^c corrected it to "partake *not* of the sacrament of Christ unworthily."

²¹Jesse, *op. cit.*, pp. 273, 277, identifies the handwriting of the two sections of the Original MS which correspond to 1 Nephi 3:7–4:14 and 12:8–16:1, as possibly being that of John Whitmer, or at least one of the Whitmer family.

²²The correct reading of variants 15 and 16 are seen in a reproduction of a page of the Original MS in Jessee, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

²³Both the likelihood of skipping words, and the care to correct such errors are illustrated in the temporary loss and then restoration of this same "the commencement of" phrase in the Printer's MS^c both at Alma 4:20, which was immediately corrected, and at Alma 51:1 which was later added above the line.

However, this same "commencement" phrase in the Original MS at Alma 54:1 was also missed but never corrected in the Printers MS and printed editions. Its restoration would make the text more accurate, but the loss does not cause internal inconsistencies like the omission from Alma 30:5.

²⁴The historian Mormon is careful about distinctions between the "commencement" and the "latter end" of a certain year; for example, see Alma 52: 18–19.

²⁵Truman G. Madsen, "Conscience and Consciousness," in the *Commissioner's Lecture Series*, Brigham Young University, 1973, p. 8. Italics in the original. Strictly speaking the mistake referred to is not a "typographical error" since it did not originate with improper typesetting. It could more precisely be described as a "transcriptional error".

²⁶Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, 1828), s. v. *infidelity*.

²⁷John C. Alleman, "Problems in Translating the Language of Joseph Smith," in *Conference on the Language of the Mormons*, May 31, 1973, Brigham Young University, p. 29.

²⁸Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1907), p. 176.

²⁹For a partial listing of the differences between the Printer's MS and the 1830 edition, see William Kelley, Alexander Smith, and Thomas Smith, "The Book of Mormon Committee Report," *The Saint's Herald*, XXXI (August 23, 1884), 546–48, which is reprinted in Paul R. Cheesman, *The Keystone of Mormonism: Little Known Truths about the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1973), pp. 69–75.

³⁰Fredson Bowers, "Established Texts and Definitive Editions." *Philological Quarterly*, XLI (January 1962), 9.

³¹The reference to "our edition" applies to that published by the LDS Church; since the RLDS Church has had possession of the Printer's MS, they have utilized it to correct their text of the Book of Mormon for the passages numbered here as 29–30, 33–35, 37–40, 42, 44–46, 48–50.

³²Altogether *mediator* occurs eight other times in the Standard Works, but *mediation* not even once.

³³This excludes the two references to "the armies of Pharaoh" at 1 Nephi 4:2; 17:27.

³⁴This phrase, always coupled with tribulation, affliction, or sorrow, occurs five other times in the Book of Mormon: 1 Nephi 17:1; Alma 7:5; 8:14; 53:15; and Helaman 3:34. *Wander* never occurs elsewhere in association with *through*.

³⁵This same change from *declare* to *deliver* has occurred in the text of Abraham 3:21, for in the Book of Abraham MS#4 written by Willard Richards in about 1841, the reading is *declare* which makes much better sense in the context, especially in light of Abraham 3:11.

³⁶In the Printer's MS, the double phrase of "repent ye repent ye" occurs at 2 Nephi 31:11; Alma 10:20; Helaman 5:24, 32; 7:17; and 14:19; the 1830 edition printed all these correctly.

³⁷Though parts of the Original MS page at this point are missing, providentially every word under consideration is preserved in the extant portion. See the missing segment of Alma 32 in

the reproductions of the Original MS and the Printer's MS pages for this passage in Stan Larson, "Changes in Early Texts of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, VI (Sept. 1976), 77-78. Evidently the first to notice this lost section was an RLDS committee that compared the Printer's MS with the 1830 edition at the home of David Whitmer in 1884. See Kelley, Smith, and Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 547.

³⁸See the reproduction of the Printer's MS for this passage in Stan Larson, "Early Book of Mormon Texts: Some of the Textual Changes to the Book of Mormon in 1837 and 1840," *Sunstone*, I (Fall 1976), 44.

³⁹See *family* on the fourth line from the bottom in a reproduction of a page of the Printer's MS in Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), I, 160. Compare Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 58, and Walter W. Smith, "Another Defense Gone," *The Saints' Herald*, LVI (Oct. 6, 1909), 943.

⁴⁰While it is true that Christ is both "the light and life of the world" (Mosiah 16:9), for the context of Ether 3:14 it seems more appropriate and significant to have the promise of eternal "life" given to the obedient believer.

⁴¹Lael Woodbury, letter to the writer, March 28, 1973.