

“And It Came to Pass”

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The Book of Mormon. Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 1966, 374 pp. \$5.50, pb \$1.00; New York: Family Library, Pyramid Publications, 1973, 374 pp. pb \$1.75.

Most Latter-day Saints probably would be surprised to learn the Book of Mormon is available in modern English and has been for over a decade. More recently the 1966 RLDS “reader’s edition” has been republished in paperback by Pyramid Publications and is now turning up at local bookstores. This latest edition is not designed to be attractive to Mormons, for many will be put off by the Pyramid cover—purple and emblazoned with a golden, winged, bosomed angel which appears to be taken from the frontispiece of Pomeroy Tucker’s 1867 *Origins, Rise and Progress of Mormonism*. One can imagine with what narrowed eyes Moroni must view this depiction. (The angel is not on the Herald House paperback.) Equally disquieting is the prominence given by Pyramid to Marcus Bach, PhD, of the “Foundation for Spiritual Understanding” whose foreword invokes “paranormal research” and “divination through ‘stones and bows.’”

The reader who overcomes these initial obstacles will be pleasantly surprised at the quality of the RLDS work. The three editors—Chris B. Hartshorn, Audrey Stubbart, and Paul Wellington—have successfully and inconspicuously enhanced the readability of the narrative without doing violence to the original text or meaning.

The vast majority of editorial changes are straightforward and obvious. Previously, similar minor changes, on a more limited scale, have been introduced into both RLDS and LDS editions. Archaic forms have been eliminated (verbs lose “th” endings; “yeas,” “nays,” and “untos” disappear; “durst” changes to “dared,” “wroth” to “angry”; and “thee” and “thou” become “you” except when deity, angels, or royalty is addressed). Punctuation has been updated and standardized. Some lingering grammatical errors also have been corrected.

Most noticeable to readers familiar with the Book of Mormon is the deletion of over a thousand “it came to pass’s.” Only the twenty percent judged by the editors to refer to the actual passage of time were retained. Less readily apparent, but numerous, are clarifications (through deletions, rearrangements, and simple additions), frequently in an attempt to eliminate redundancy after

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parenthetical asides. An example, one of over forty similar cases, is the following:

LDS Alma 17:26-27

26. [And] after he had been in the service of the king three days, as he was with the Lamanitish servants going forth with their flocks to the place of water, which was called the water of Sebus, and all the Lamanites drive their flocks hither, that they may have water—

27. [Therefore, as Ammon and the servants of the king were driving forth their flocks to this place of water,] behold, a certain number of the Lamanites, who had been with their flocks to water, stood and . . .

RLDS Alma 12:38

38. After he had been in the service of the king three days, as he was with the Lamanitish servants going forth with their flocks to the place of water which was called the water of Sebus (and all the Lamanites drive their flocks hither, that they may have water), behold, a certain number of the Lamanites, who had been with their flocks to water, stood and. . . .

In at least one such case something may have been lost in the editing. Mormon's redundancy *and* his emphatic concern may have been deleted in the following revision from Alma:

LDS Alma 23:6

6. And as *sure* as the Lord *liveth*, so *sure* as many as believed, or as many as were brought to the knowledge of the truth, through the preaching of Ammon and his brethren, according to the spirit of revelation and of prophecy, and the power of God working miracles in them—[yea, I say unto you, as the Lord liveth, as many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and] were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away.

RLDS Alma 14:10

10. And as *surely* as the Lord *lives*, so *surely* as many as believed, or as many as were brought to the knowledge of the truth through the preaching of Ammon and his brethren, according to the spirit of revelation and of prophecy and the power of God working miracles in them, and were converted to the Lord never did fall away, for they became a righteous people.

Minor rearrangements of the text are common, and appear to have been made judiciously. For example:

LDS 1 Nephi 7:3

3. [And it came to pass that] I, Nephi, *did again, with my brethren, go forth* into the wilderness to go up to Jerusalem.

RLDS 1 Nephi 2:9

9. I, Nephi, *with my brethren, went forth* again into the wilderness to go up to Jerusalem.

Or, in another example:

Alma 43:19

19. And [when] the armies of the Lamanites saw that the people of Nephi, *or that Moroni, had prepared his* people with breast-plates and with arm-shields, [yea,] and also shields to defend their heads, and also they were dressed with thick clothing—

RLDS Alma 20:21

21. And the armies of the Lamanites saw that the people of Nephi, *had been prepared by Moroni* with breastplates, and with arm shields, and also shields to defend their heads; and also they were dressed with thick clothing.

At least once, as in the previous group of revisions, the editors have introduced a questionable change. Regardless of the proprieties of modern tact, one wonders at the wisdom of transforming "traditions of our wicked fathers" to "the wickedness of traditions of our fathers." The change was probably based on the precedent of Alma 23:3 (RLDS Alma 14:5). Occasionally the editors fail to correct rather obvious problems. LDS 1 Nephi 2:23-24 (RLDS 1 Nephi 1:57-58) still needs to be clarified—as has been done in the LDS German edition.

In a few instances words have been added to the text, generally only to identify more clearly a pronoun of ambiguous or distant antecedent. "They" of Mosiah 19:19 becomes "those who had fled with the king" (RLDS Mosiah 9:95); and "him" of Ether 14:10 becomes "him (the high priest)." A particularly intriguing addition is found in 2 Nephi 8:15 (an excerpt from Isaiah), in which the editors have added "that divided the sea" to make the verse agree with the King James and Inspired Version of the Bible. The verse now reads:

"But I am the Lord thy God, *that divided the sea*, whose waves roared; the Lord of hosts is my name."

Some of the changes most startling to LDS readers did not originate with the reader's edition. In preparing the earlier 1908 edition of the RLDS Book of Mormon, the original Printer's manuscript was rechecked, and errors noted in the previous printed editions. As a result, a verse inadvertently omitted from Alma 32 was restored to the 1908 edition, and many single word changes were made: the more logical "joy" in place of "foes" in Alma 57:25, "beheld" for "blessed" (3 Nephi 19:25), and a number of others—including some mentioned by Stan Larson elsewhere in this issue as missing from LDS editions [see Stan Larson, "Textual Variants in Book of Mormon Manuscripts"].

Rarely, other word changes—apparently differing from both previous editions and the original manuscripts—have been made. Helaman 1:22, which formerly read, "were slain, *and* were taken, and were cast into prison . . ." has become ". . . were slain *or* were taken and cast into prison . . .", probably on the assumption—as noted by RLDS Church Historian Richard Howard—"that those slain would not also have been later imprisoned" (personal correspondence). One is inclined to agree. Also that Nephi was "resigned" (rather than "consigned") that these are my days . . ." (Helaman 7:9, RLDS Helman 3:9). In most cases an ambiguous word has been replaced by a more specific term—"reach" or "achieve" in place of "obtain," and "retract" for "recall" (the latter, in Alma 44:11, being a notable improvement). Discarded was the controversial but acceptable "adieu" of Jacob 7:27; it now reads, "farewell."

Perhaps the most daring word change is found in Alma 51:26 (RLDS Alma 23:32), in which the city of *Nephihah* becomes the city of *Moroni*. While one would prefer that such a major reinterpretation had been footnoted (it wasn't), the context supports this correction. Mormon had just completed a description of the battle for the city of Moroni, while the battle for the city of Nephihah is not dealt with until several chapters later. Reynolds, in his Book of Mormon *Concordance*, tried to reconcile the confusion over these names by postulating two cities of the same name; more recently J. Nile Washburn, in

his *Book of Mormon Lands and Times* also proposes an alternative but very convoluted reconciliation. Neither Reynolds' nor Washburn's explanation is very satisfactory in the context of Mormon's narrative. A "slip of the stylus," if such this be, might account also for Moroni's use of "Shiblon" in Ether 1:11-12 rather than "Shiblom" whose story is being told. (This also was corrected in the reader's edition.)

The clearest example of ancient "scribal errors" are the twenty or so instances in which a Book of Mormon writer corrects himself in mid-sentence: ". . . and thus we see that they buried their *weapons of peace*, or they buried the *weapons of war*, for peace" (Alma 24:19). Surprisingly, the reader's edition "corrects" only four such cases, and not the foregoing example. Also missed: ". . . being shielded from the *more vital parts of the body*, or the *more vital parts of the body being shielded* from the strokes of the Lamanites, by their breast plates . . ." (Alma 43:38).

While few if any significant criticisms can be directed at the RLDS editorial skill and judgment evident in their modernization of the Book of Mormon text, several minor lapses still need to be corrected. Beyond those suggested above:

- While repairing previous "typographical" errors, the reader's edition predictably introduced a couple of its own. (RLDS 2 Nephi 7:12, Helaman 2:23).

- The changes in punctuation, though generally beneficial, are sometimes more confusing than earlier versions. For instance, quotation marks are not used in a consistent manner, and occasionally are incorrect. One wonders why the editors did not eliminate double column text and simply inset the major quotations. Unscrambling the quotations in the Book of Mormon is not a simple task, of course, but when the 1966 RLDS edition moves into triple sets of quotation marks, the book ceases to be a "reader's" version.

- The dating in the footnotes applied to Ammon's search party is in error, as it is also in the LDS editions. Whoever originated these dates failed to take into account the episode was B.C., for the dates indicate the search party returned the year *prior* to its departure (cf. Mosiah 7:2, 21:22, 22:13, and 24:25).

- The RLDS index has not been updated to agree with the reader's edition. The introductory study plan has been revised to fit the new text, but contains errors (e.g., the statement that Christ's first and last appearances in ancient America were immediately after resurrection, without reference, for example, to his prior visit to Emer of the Jaredites, or his later visits to Mormon and Moroni).

- A statement in the preface by the RLDS First Presidency (p. xxii) incorrectly attributes to Mormon a quotation by Moroni.

Despite its shortcomings, the 1966 RLDS reader's edition of the Book of Mormon is an excellent work and a welcome addition. The editors, while devoting great care to the preservation of the literal meaning of the original text, have successfully enhanced the readability of this sacred writ. One hopes the modern English edition will help more Book of Mormon readers to a fuller understanding of its Gospel, and that the LDS Church will not be too long in bringing out its own reader's version, with chapter and verse divisions familiar to LDS members.