

The Book of Mormon: An 1829 Christian Writing

by Joseph Smith Jr.

**First published in English at
Palmyra, New York (USA) in 1830**

The first draft for this book, 116 manuscript pages, was written in 1828. Joseph Smith usually dictated the wording to his scribes. These pages were subsequently lost and not recovered. The dictation continued and was finished in June 1829. After obtaining a publisher the Book of Mormon was printed and available for sale in March 1830 just previous to the establishment of the new Church of Christ the next month.

The scribes for the book and the location of dictation are in the following chart.

Lost Manuscript in Harmony, PA	Original Manuscript in Harmony, PA	Original Manuscript in Fayette, NY	Printer's Manuscript in Manchester, NY
Reuben Hale	Emma Hale Smith	Oliver Cowdery	Oliver Cowdery
Emma Hale Smith	Samuel H. Smith	Unknown Scribe 2*	Unknown Scribe 2
Martin Harris	Oliver Cowdery	Unknown Scribe 3* John Whitmer	Hyrum Smith

* It is possible that one or both of these scribes could be Christian Whitmer or Jacob Whitmer who lived in Fayette.

Joseph Smith (1805-1844) wrote the Book of Mormon under what he considered to be the inspiration of God. Whether there were gold plates, whether Smith used them at all, and whether any of the witnesses saw the physical plates in vision or in person does not matter. This is because the question of plates is a religious matter and not as important as the book itself and what it represents.

The Book of Mormon represents Joseph Smith as a religious prophet, seer, and revelator. His book became a vehicle that launched him into the religious circle. The book's original composition was dictated to a number of scribes by Joseph Smith during the period of 1828-1829. Its purpose was to convince Jews that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and Gentiles that Christ is the Eternal God (see title page).

Since Joseph Smith told his story of gold plates and the angel revealing where they were buried, he has always had a following. Since Smith is the author of this religious work those who have accepted it have looked to him as a prophet who speaks for God. Therefore his story about the gold plates is accepted as reliable and accurate. To the believer, the witnesses had to view the actual gold plates. They may not accept the story as an allegory.

Like any author Smith crafted the Book of Mormon to reflect his views at the time of its production and composition. The plot line of the book, mainly about the native population of the Americas, the record of the doctrines taught, and the wars fought, places the book among the most interesting in the life of American literature. The best example of how Joseph Smith wrote the book is when he projected Jesus visiting the believers after his crucifixion.

Using as a current printing of the King James Bible Smith modified the text of the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Those modifications of Matthew 5 show a revised text which is crafted to fit into what Jesus would say to the people in America. By producing a text that has some similarities to the teachings of Jesus in Palestine but with emphasis for a new world audience, Joseph Smith as author gives his personal touch in producing what he believed Jesus would have taught.

The Book of Mormon is Joseph Smith's best known and least understood writing. The work presents itself as an ancient record kept by historians and prophets who lived on the American continent. It quotes from the Bible and becomes a prophetic voice for its believers. The origin of this book comes from the experiences of Joseph Smith Jr. It was written in a period of religious excitement, explorations regarding the Native Americans, and political ideals in New York and northern Pennsylvania. It is out of this background we can understand the work of Smith.

The Book of Mormon was written at a time of speculation on the origin of the ancient inhabitants of America. It responds to the idea that God does not speak and proposes that God spoke to the ancestors of the tribes who were being replaced who essentially white settlers. The book contains teachings regarding the fall of man (Adam) in the beginning of civilization. Its doctrinal position is in response to various doctrinal controversies taking place in America. The book projects a basic Protestant focus following New Testament teachings regarding salvation in what is represented to be an ancient book.

The disappearance and reported murder of William Morgan in September 1826 (who was preparing to print an expose of Masonry) is reflected the Book of Mormon's denouncement of secret combinations. Morgan's work was published afterward as *Illustrations of Masonry by One of the Fraternity who has devoted Thirty Years to the Subject* (Batavia, New York: Printed for the Author, 1826).

America was foreseen in the context of political debate. Concerning John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) the following is a summary regarding the election of 1824:

Within the one and only party--the Republican--sectionalism and factionalism were developing, and each section put up its own candidate for the Presidency. Adams, the candidate of the North, fell behind Gen. Andrew Jackson in both popular and electoral votes, but received more than William H. Crawford and Henry Clay. Since no candidate had a majority of electoral votes, the election was decided among the top three by the House of Representatives. Clay, who favored a program similar to that of Adams, threw his crucial support in the House to the New Englander. Upon becoming President, Adams appointed Clay as Secretary of State. Jackson and his angry followers charged that a "corrupt bargain" had taken place and immediately began their campaign to wrest the Presidency from Adams in 1828.¹

Adams served four years from 1825 to 1829. The election in 1828 and then the inauguration on March 4, 1829 of Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) was an important event as Jackson became the seventh President of the United States. Jackson was a Mason who was looked upon by some citizens as an embodiment of evil.

In those troubling times Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon.

¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/johnquincyadams/>