

Did Moses Write the Book of Genesis?

An Old Testament KnoWhy¹ for Gospel Doctrine Lesson 3B:
The Creation (Moses 1:27-42; 2-3) (JBOTLO3B)



Figure 1. Light and Color: The Morning After the Deluge (Goethe's Theory) — Moses Writing the Book of Genesis, 1843 Joseph Mallord William Turner, 1775-1851

Question: LDS teachings and scripture clearly imply that Moses learned of the Creation and the Fall in vision and was told to write what he saw. However, most modern scholars find evidence that the book of Genesis as we have it today was produced at a much later date than Moses could have lived. Can these views be reconciled?

Summary: Scholars have assembled impressive evidence that the first five books of the Bible were compiled in their current form at a relatively late date from multiple, overlapping sources of varying perspectives — and almost certainly with differing degrees of inspiration.² This idea should not trouble believing readers of the Book of Mormon, who know that inspired editors wove separate, overlapping records covering many hundreds of years into a single work of scripture. In addition, the idea that Moses may not have written all that is attributed to him firsthand is not incompatible with the belief that he, along with other major Old Testament figures, were actual historical persons. Many of the Bible's sources may go back to authentic traditions (whether oral or written) that are associated with figures such as Moses as *authorities*, even if they were not the direct *authors*. As a further witness of the reality of these prophets, we have accounts of his having seen many of them personally. Moreover, we have the same witness within Joseph Smith's Bible translation efforts, the Book of Mormon, the book of Abraham, and several revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. We are fortunate both to know that these lengthy additions to the record of the Old Testament are authentic reports of events originally experienced by ancient prophets and that they were also directly translated in our day by a modern prophet.

Know

What is the Documentary Hypothesis? Bible readers have long wondered why there are two creation narratives in Genesis — the first in Genesis 1 and the second beginning in Genesis 2. The two accounts differ in perspective, focus, vocabulary, style, and use of the divine name (i.e., God vs. Lord God). Repetitions and seeming contradictions are also apparent. These observations are long-recognized issues in biblical scholarship and can be seen as providing support for the idea that the book of Genesis was compiled from multiple, overlapping sources.³ Although scholars differ on the details of what is commonly called the Documentary Hypothesis,⁴ they are nearly all in agreement that the book of Genesis as we have it was put together at a much later time than Moses could have lived. Richard Friedman has been among the most successful authors to date in explaining these complex ideas to non-specialists.⁵

However, even those who find the Documentary Hypothesis compelling have good reason to admire the resulting literary product on its own terms. For example, in the case of the two Creation chapters, Friedman himself writes that in the scriptural version of Genesis we have a text “that is greater than the sum of its parts... [T]he combination of the from-the-sky-down and the from-the-earth-up accounts produces a much richer and much more whole conception of Creation than we would have if there were only one account. Also, placing the cosmic conception first creates the impression of the wide camera view narrowing in. This feeling of narrowing in ... continue[s] through the [later] stories, contributing to the rich-in-background feeling.”⁶

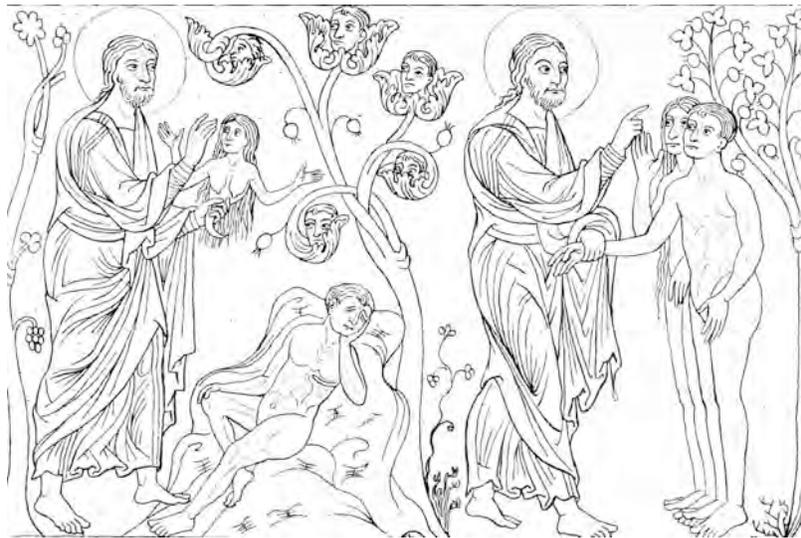


Figure 2. God Creating Eve, God Instructing Adam and Eve, Hortus Deliciarum, late twelfth century

The transition between Genesis 2 and 3: A clumsy stitch or a skillful shift? Identifying and teasing out multiple hypothetical sources in Genesis is only one aspect of the problem of understanding Genesis: not only do we need to sort out the sources,

we also need to know how to take in the texts — to better understand why the sources were put together in their current form.

For example, Richard Friedman’s observation that the transition from a top-down “wide camera view” of Creation to a “narrowing in” to a detailed story of the creation given from a more personal perspective is significant to those who believe that Genesis and Moses may contain echoes of an ancient temple text.⁷ Though sometimes the joining of these two separate Creation accounts is seen as little more than a clumsily exposed stitch in a narrative seam, there may be more editorial subtlety and skill shown in the way they were put together than what is immediately apparent.

Hugh Nibley explained the apparent discontinuity between the two creation accounts as a purposive shift, seeing the interlude that separates the stories in verses 3-7 as stage directions composed to accompany a drama that was part of ancient temple ritual.⁸ As the curtain closes on the drama’s prologue outlining the seven days of Creation, the narrator pauses to explain that all things were created spiritually prior to their natural appearance on the earth.⁹ Following this interlude, the curtain reopens for a change of scene in the second part of the creation drama: we are now viewing the details of the story of the creation of man not from the vantage point of heaven, but instead as it is seen from the Garden.¹⁰

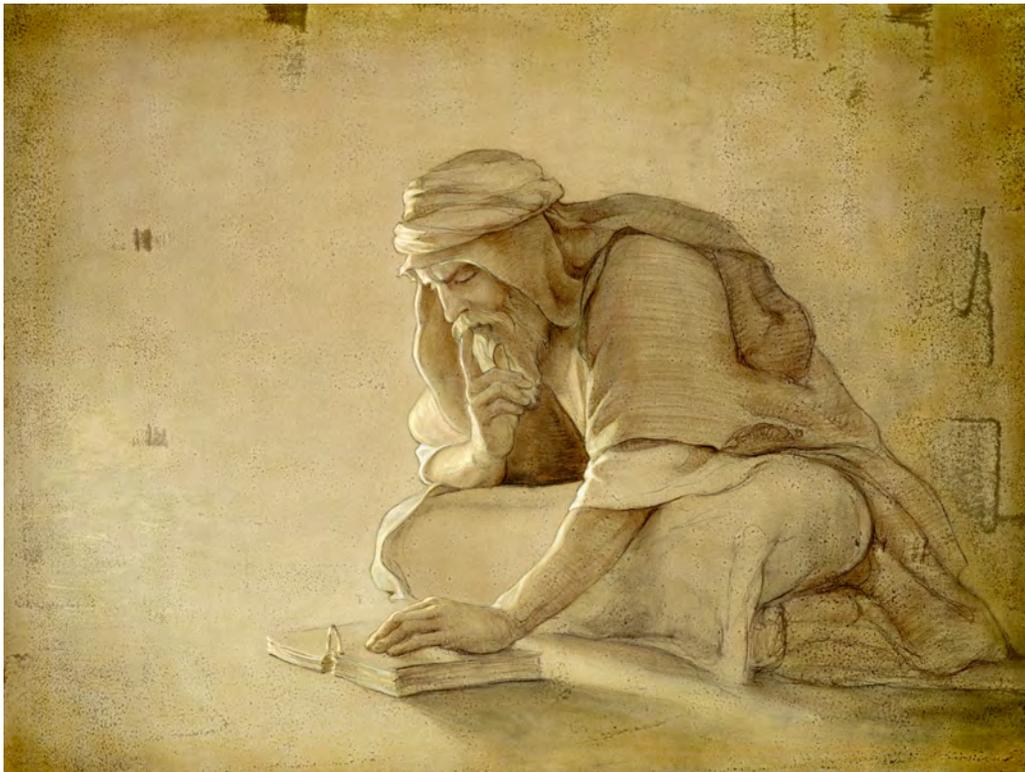


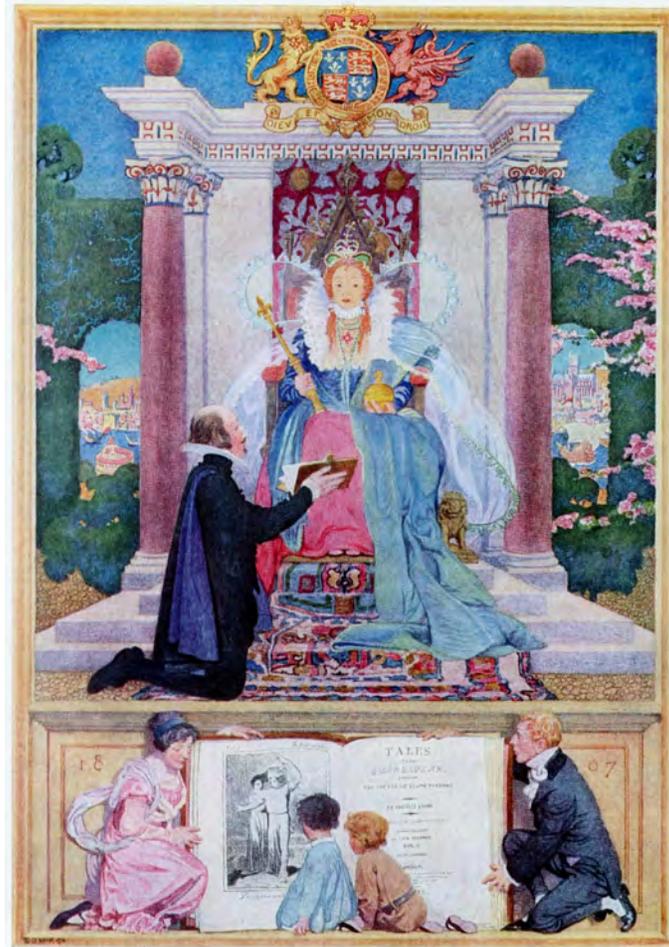
Figure 3. Joseph Brickey, 1973-: Lehi Studying the Brass Plates, 2005

Does the Documentary Hypothesis rule out Moses’ involvement in producing Genesis? In my view, the idea that scriptural figures may sometimes be more accurately regarded as the *authorities* rather than the direct *authors* or scribes for

biblical books associated with their names is not inconsistent with LDS acceptance of the Bible as scripture “as far as it is translated [and transmitted] correctly.”¹¹ In addition, though I have no quarrel with the idea that the Old Testament, as we have it today, might have been compiled at a relatively late date from multiple sources, I accept that its major figures were historical and that many Bible accounts had their origins in authentic traditions (whether oral or written) associated with figures such as Moses as authorities. John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy express their views on the concept of authority as follows:¹²

Authority is not dependent on an original autograph or on an author writing a book. Recognition of authority is identifiable in the beliefs of a community of faith (of whom we are heirs) that God’s communications through authoritative figures and traditions have been captured and preserved through a long process of transmission and composition in the literature that has come to be accepted as canonical. That authority can be well represented in translation, though it can be undermined to the extent that interpretation (necessary for a translation to take place) misrepresents the authority. ...

Documents used in the compilation of Genesis are likely identified in the text itself (in eleven occurrences of “This is the account of ... ”). No identification of the source of the traditions represented in the individual documents is offered, and this is not unusual. Documents such as those found in the first part of the book (Genesis 1-11) as well as those in the second part (Genesis 12-50) would correspond well, if only generally, to the sort that would be familiar in the ancient world. Likewise no indication is given in the book itself of the time or circumstances under which these documents were compiled into the book as we know it. Earliest tradition associated the work with Moses and, given the stature of Moses, that is not unreasonable, but we need not decide the matter. As discussed above, his role is best understood as tradent [i.e., transmitter of traditions], not likely that of actually generating the traditions (though he may have generated some of them— we particularly think of the creation accounts in this regard). ... Compilation of those documents into the complex literary work we call Genesis may not have happened for many centuries, though the traditions would have been well known.



Elizabeth Shippen Green Elliott, 1871-1954: Frontispiece for Tales from Shakespeare, 1922. Top: Shakespeare presenting plays to Elizabeth I. Bottom: Charles and Mary Lamb presenting tales to children in 1807.

As a very simple illustration of how an author differs from an authority, consider the 1807 *Tales of Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb, an adaptation of many of Shakespeare's plays for young readers.¹³ To make Shakespeare suitable for children, some plays were left out, having been deemed inappropriate for immature readers or problematic for other reasons;¹⁴ the plays' events were shortened and made less complex; and the language of their characters was simplified (though, happily, some of Shakespeare's original dialogue was included). Importantly, the work unconsciously reflects in ways, both large and small, the personalities and interests of the Lambs, and the sensibilities and language of the time and setting in which they lived — two hundred years after Shakespeare. Yet, despite the fingerprints of the Lambs as authors throughout the book, it is appropriately entitled *Tales of Shakespeare* and, though decidedly inferior to the original for adult readers, retains something of the authority and genius of Shakespeare within its pages.

In a discussion on Bible authorship, it is appropriate to introduce another class of ancient writings, known today as pseudepigrapha. The word "pseudepigrapha" is commonly used to refer to "spurious or pseudonymous writings, especially Jewish

writings ascribed to various biblical patriarchs and prophets.”¹⁵ Importantly, however, the tenor of these definitions would seem to exclude situations such as the following:¹⁶

For example, if the sixth-century Daniel was the authority figure¹⁷ who gave oracles that were duly recorded in documents that were saved until the second century, when someone compiled them into the book we have now and perhaps even included some updated or more specific information (provided by recognized authority figures in that time), that would not constitute pseudepigraphy or false attribution.¹⁸ If that sort of process was an accepted norm, the attribution claims are not as specific and comprehensive as we may have thought when we were using more modern models of literary production. Authority is not jeopardized as long as we affirm the claims that the text is actually making using models of understanding that reflect the ancient world.

Modern scripture affirms not only the historical nature of many important events in the Bible, but also the reality of the figures who participated in or wrote about them. Joseph Smith has left accounts of personal visions and manifestations that include many prominent characters of the Book of Mormon¹⁹ and the Bible.²⁰

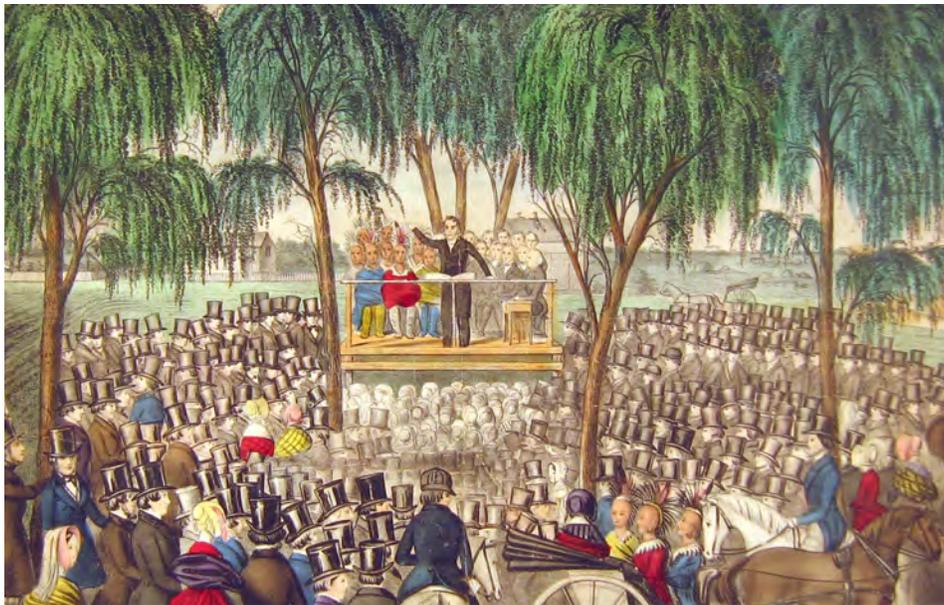


Figure 4. George Lloyd, 1817-??: Joseph Smith Preaches from the Stand at General Conference, April 6, 1844

A modern-day analogue. In trying to imagine more concretely how authority and authorship may have come together in the writing of prophetic teachings and revelations that may have originated partly in oral sources, we have modern-day analogues.²¹ Consider that Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo sermons were neither written out in advance nor taken down by listeners verbatim or in shorthand as they were delivered.²² Rather, they were copied as fragmentary notes and reconstructions of his prose (sometimes after-the-fact) by a small number of individuals, often, but not always,

including one or more official recorders.²³ Sometimes these notes were in turn shared and copied by others.²⁴

Of the estimated 450 discourses the Prophet may have given throughout his public ministry, available sources “identify only about 250 discourses, and his published history only gives reasonably adequate summaries of only about one-fifth of these.”²⁵ It was an almost impossible job for Joseph Smith to find qualified and reliable scribes, and to manage their frequent turnover: “More than two dozen persons are known to have assisted the Prophet in a secretarial capacity during the final fourteen years of his life. ... Of these scribes, nine left the Church and four others died while engaged in important writing assignments.”²⁶ The arduous culmination of the trial-and-error effort that eventually produced Joseph Smith’s *History of the Church* was successful only after eight previous attempts to write the history had been abandoned.²⁷

Later, as part of serialized versions of history that appeared in church publications, many (but not all) of the notes from such sermons were gathered,²⁸ expanded, amalgamated, and harmonized; prose was smoothed out; and punctuation and grammar were standardized.²⁹ Elaborations on the original notes were made not only to complete a thought but also to include additional material not now available in extant sources.³⁰ Sometimes the wording of related journal entries from scribes and others was changed to the first person and incorporated into the *History of the Church*³¹ in order to fill gaps in the record, an accepted practice at the time.³² Unfortunately, this approach masks the provenance of sources and the hands of multiple editors within the finished manuscript.

Over the years, various compilations have drawn directly from the *History of the Church*³³ while, more recently, transcriptions of contemporary notes (including sources that were unavailable to historians who produced the standard amalgamated versions) were also collected and published.³⁴ In addition, translations of these accounts into different languages have sometimes exposed new difficulties that required creative solutions.³⁵

The important point in all this is that while each of these published accounts of the Prophet’s Nauvoo sermons has been widely used to convey his teachings to Church members on his authority, it is likely that none of these accounts was written or reviewed by him personally.³⁶ Moreover, not quite two hundred years after these sermons were delivered, multiple variants in their content and wording — none of which completely reflect the actual words spoken — are in common circulation. In some cases, imperfect transcriptions of Joseph Smith’s words led to misunderstandings of doctrine by early Church members and, in consequence, have had to be corrected explicitly by later Church leaders. One need look no further than the March 2014 edition of the *Ensign* for a valuable apostolic correction of such a misconception.³⁷

What this example is intended to show is how significant divergences in the accounts of Joseph Smith’s teachings have happened, even in the best case where like-minded scribes recorded events more or less as they occurred, doing the best they could to preserve the original words of the Prophet.³⁸

In light of the challenges to record and preserve an accurate record of the life and teachings of Joseph Smith, who lived only two hundred years ago, it is a miracle that so many of the precious and unique histories, revelations, and teachings of ancient Israel are available to us thousands of years after they happened. A prophet like Nephi, who faced many challenges of keeping a record in his day himself, could feel the depth of the Lord's disappointment with the indifference with which many in our day treat the Bible: "And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them? Yea, what do the Gentiles mean? Do they remember the travails, and the labors, and the pains of the Jews, and their diligence unto me, in bringing forth salvation unto the Gentiles?"³⁹

Why

In a candid perspective on the Latter-day Saint view of the reliability and value of the Bible in light of scholarship, President Gordon B. Hinckley wrote:⁴⁰

The Christian world accepts the Bible as the word of God. Most have no idea of how it came to us. I have just completed reading a newly published book by a renowned scholar. It is apparent from information which he gives that the various books of the Bible were brought together in what appears to have been an unsystematic fashion. In some cases, the writings were not produced until long after the events they describe. One is led to ask, "Is the Bible true? Is it really the word of God?" We reply that it is, insofar as it is translated correctly. The hand of the Lord was in its making.

With remarkable balance, President Hinckley recognized that any uncertainties about the Bible's compilation, transmission, and translation did not negate its inestimable value as a book that came forth by the hand of God and whose worth is reaffirmed repeatedly in modern scripture.⁴¹

Indeed, the Lord, knowing the value of that ancient record, made the Prophet's new translation of the Bible one of his highest priorities soon after the organization of the Church. Thanks to Joseph Smith's "travails, ... labors, and ... pains"⁴² we have convenient access to many new and authentic reports of events originally experienced by ancient prophets that were, in addition, translated firsthand by a modern prophet. In particular, significant additions and clarifications to the record of Genesis were made by Joseph Smith as part of his Bible translation efforts (which is the origin of the book of Moses), the Book of Mormon, the book of Abraham, and several revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants.

That said, we should not rely on the Joseph Smith Translation as a means for uncovering a "complete and pure" text of Genesis as it existed in its earliest form. Even if some revelatory passages in the book of Moses were found to be direct translations of ancient documents — as was, apparently, D&C 7 — it would be impossible to establish now whether or not they once existed as an actual part of some sort of "original" manuscript of Genesis.

Members of the Church understand that the primary intent of modern revelation is to give divine guidance to latter-day readers, not to provide precise matches to texts from other times. Because this is so, we would actually expect to find deliberate deviations from the content and wording of ancient manuscripts in Joseph Smith's translations in the interest of relevance to modern readers.⁴³ Strictly speaking, a prophet acting under inspiration, like an angel sent from heaven, "does not quote the Scriptures, but *gives* Scripture."⁴⁴

To build out needed doctrinal and historical context in Genesis, Joseph Smith drew unapologetically on his gifts as a seer to insert "long revealed additions that have little or no biblical parallel, such as the visions of Moses and Enoch." To increase the intelligibility of the sacred book, he made frequent "common-sense" changes, interpretive additions, "grammatical improvements, technical clarifications, and modernization of terms."⁴⁵ Moreover, it appears that he followed the counsel of his own revelations, sometimes adopting suggestions from a study of the "best books."⁴⁶ Seeking and receiving divine guidance, he modified or added to sacred scripture in whatever way would advance his God-given assignment to provide a "plainer translation."⁴⁷

Further Study

For more detailed analysis of the book of Moses as a temple text, see J. M. Bradshaw, LDS Book of Enoch. See also J. M. Bradshaw, *Moses Temple Themes (2014)*, pp. 203-216. The book is available for purchase in print at Amazon.com and both the book and the article are available as free pdf downloads at www.TempleThemes.net.

For a verse-by-verse commentary on the Creation chapters in the book of Moses, see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 82-212. The book is available for purchase in print at Amazon.com and as a free pdf download at www.TempleThemes.net.

For extensive discussions of the opportunities and challenges that lie before us as we try to reach a better understanding of the prophetic corpus that has come to us from Joseph Smith, see J. M. Bradshaw, *Now That We Have the Words*. For a discussion of Joseph Smith as a translator and interpreter, see J. M. Bradshaw, *Foreword*. The articles are available as free pdf downloads at www.TempleThemes.net.

For a scripture roundtable video from The Interpreter Foundation on the subject of Gospel Doctrine lesson 3, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNw-RLAtokY>.

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Endnotes

1 Used with permission of Book of Mormon Central. See <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/reference-knowhy>.

2 On 15 October 1843, Willard Richards recorded Joseph Smith as saying: "I believe the Bible, as it ought to be, as it came from the pen of the original writers" (J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 15 October 1843, p. 256). Later, Elder Richards filled out his rough notes of the Prophet's discourse from memory to read: "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors." (J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 15 October 1843, p. 327). Cf. 1 Nephi 13:24-28.

Of course, there are similar difficulties that have come into play in the textual, editing, and publishing history of the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants (e.g., Section 27), a fact that should help us better understand the idea of a textual history described by source criticism for the Old Testament. As Ben McGuire explains (B. L. McGuire, 17 March 2014):

Within the short history of our scripture we see numerous such changes (even with the existence of printing technology) that help us to understand that these changes

occur quite naturally — and are not necessarily the results of translational issues or corrupt priests. We can, of course, completely identify the history of some of these changes, we can detail corruptions in the Book of Mormon that have occurred from the original manuscript. We can speculate about the existence of these errors where the original manuscript does not exist, and so on. And the fact that we can talk about [D&C] 27 as a composite work is itself another symptom of the process by which our texts come into existence in a way that doesn't reflect a single author with a single pen, providing us with the perfect word of God.

3 John Sailhamer aptly summarizes the situation when he writes (J. H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, p. 5):

Genesis is characterized by both an easily discernible unity and a noticeable lack of uniformity. ... The unity of the Book of Genesis... should be seen in its compositional strategy as a whole rather than in an absolutely smooth and uniform narrative. ... The picture of the narratives of Genesis that emerges ... is that of a carefully wrought account of Israel's history fashioned from the narratives and genealogical tables of Israel's own ancestral archives.

Such an idea should not be foreign to readers of the Book of Mormon, where inspired editors have explicitly revealed their weaving of separate overlapping records into the finished scriptural narrative (K. P. Jackson, *Genesis*, pp 58-61). In contrast to the carefully controlled prophetic redaction of the Book of Mormon, however, we do not know how much of the subsequent editing of the Old Testament may have taken place “with less inspiration and authority” (ibid., p. 63).

For a summary of Jewish sources documenting the idea that Moses used previously extant records in composing Genesis, see A. J. Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, pp. 650-653.

4 Scholarly conversation on the Documentary Hypothesis and other important issues in Higher Criticism is, of course, ongoing. Although broad agreement persists on many issues, the state of research on the composition of the Pentateuch continues to evolve in important ways. In 2012, Konrad Schmid gave the following assessment (K. Schmid, *Genesis*, pp. 28-29):

Pentateuchal scholarship has changed dramatically in the last three decades, at least when seen in a global perspective. The confidence of earlier assumptions about the formation of the Pentateuch no longer exists, a situation that might be lamented but that also opens up new and—at least in the view of some scholars— potentially more adequate paths to understand its composition. One of the main results of the new situation is that neither traditional nor newer theories can be taken as the accepted starting point of analysis; rather, they are, at most, possible ends.

That said, there is little doubt that the basic ideas of source criticism behind the Documentary Hypothesis are here to stay. Cf. D. M. Carr, *Formation*, pp. 102–125.

5 R. E. Friedman, *Who*; R. E. Friedman, *Hidden*; R. E. Friedman, *Sources*.

6 R. E. Friedman, *Commentary*, p. 16; cf. T. L. Brodie, *Dialogue*, pp. 123-132. Apart from source considerations, arguments from literary analysis have been made to explain the seeming duplication and reversal of Creation events in Moses 3. For example, James Faulconer concludes (J. E. Faulconer, *Adam and Eve*, p. 3):

There may be contradictions within the text, but the more obvious those contradictions are, the less likely it is that they are contradictions that undo the text. It is too much to assume that the redaction of Genesis was a product of blindness. A considerable amount of “cut and paste” work was surely involved in the creation of the Genesis story, but unless we can come to no other reasonable conclusion, we should assume that the text is cut and pasted in this way rather than some other for a reason. Thus, it would be a mistake to think that the elements of the narrative merely contradict each other. The story we have before us is one text that calls to be read as such.

For more detailed analyses of literary arguments for the unity of the final form of the records that make up the book of Genesis, see U. Cassuto, *Documentary*; U. Cassuto, *Adam to Noah*, pp. 84-94; I. M. Kikawada et al., *Before Abraham*.

7 For an extensive discussion of the book of Moses as a temple text, see J. M. Bradshaw, *LDS Book of Enoch*.

8 H. W. Nibley, *Myths*, p. 42; cf. H. W. Nibley, *Drama*, p. 36.

9 Genesis 2:4-5; Moses 3:4-5.

10 H. W. Nibley, *Message* (2005), p. 284; H. W. Nibley, *Before Adam*, p. 72. Bible scholar Nahum Sarna comments (N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 16): “This change in perspective is signaled by the inversion [in Genesis and Abraham (though not in Moses)] of the regular sequence “heaven and earth” in the opening sentence. The almost unique expression ‘earth and heaven’ suggests pride of place [in the account that follows] for terrestrial affairs.”

11 Articles of Faith 1:8.

12 J. H. Walton et al., *Lost World of Scripture*, pp. 68, 69. With respect to Genesis in particular, “it is fairly obvious that the book of Genesis serves as a kind of introduction or prologue to what follows in Exodus through Deuteronomy” (*ibid.*, p. 29).

“Nevertheless,” continues Schmid in his highlighting of one prominent theme in the most recent thinking on the topic (K. Schmid, *Genesis*, pp. 30, 32, 45):

the function of Genesis to the Pentateuch is apparently not exhausted by describing it as an introduction to the Moses story. ... Genesis ... shows ... clear signs of having existed as a stand-alone literary unit for some portion of its literary growth. Genesis is a special book within the Pentateuch: it is the most self-sufficient one. ... In current scholarship, it is no longer possible to explain the composition of the book of Genesis from the outset within the framework of the Documentary Hypothesis.

13 C. Lamb *et al.*, *Tales from Shakespeare*.

14 The Lord apparently adapts the contents and availability of the revelations of scripture to different peoples in the same fashion (e.g., Ether 3:17ff., 4:7-16; D&C 93:18-19; Moses 1:35, 41-42). Concurring with the idea that suiting the contents of scripture to the needs and capacities of the people was more important than strict conformity to fixed source text, on more than one occasion Brigham Young asserted that the Bible and the Book of Mormon would “materially differ” if they were to be re-translated (B. Young, 13 July 1862, p. 311; J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Council of Fifty Minutes*, p. 119; G. Q. Cannon,

Life (1907), p. 129n.). The usual explanation for why important stories and teachings were deliberately abridged or left out of the scriptural records as we now have them is that readers are not yet spiritually ready to receive them because of their especially sacred nature. See J. M. Bradshaw, Foreword, pp. *xxi-xxiv*.

15 American Heritage Dictionary, American Heritage Dictionary. The definition adds: “but composed within approximately 200 years of the birth of Jesus Christ.” This is a typical criterion for inclusion in modern collections of pseudepigrapha.

16 J. H. Walton et al., *Lost World of Scripture*, p. 305.

17 It should be noted that many scholars see Daniel as a fictional character.

18 In a footnote, Walton refers to Craig Blomberg’s term: “benign pseudonymity.”

19 These included Lehi, Nephi, Moroni, and apparently others. See T. G. Hatch, *Visions*, pp. 129–131.

20 These included, among others, the Old Testament figures of Adam, Noah, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Elias, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Elijah. New Testament figures included John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Paul, Stephen, Philip, Matthew, James the Lesser, Matthias, Andrew, Mark, Jude, Bartholomew, Thomas, Luke, Simon, Barnabas, and others of the Apostles — and, of course, Jesus Christ Himself. See *ibid.*, 135–155. For additional accounts of divine manifestations to the Prophet, see J. W. Welch et al., *Opening*.

Of course, when determining whether the “people and events portrayed in narrative about the real past are fictional or literary constructs,” our decisions “must be driven by our best assessments of what the biblical narrator intended. ... We may still find reason to discuss whether the author of Job intends every part of the book to represent real events in a real past or whether it is literature built around a historical core. The point is that any conclusion that seeks to maintain authority will conform to the demonstrable intentions of the narrator” (J. H. Walton et al., *Lost World of Scripture*, p. 304).

21 For a more extensive discussion of issues in preserving and understanding the history of Joseph Smith, see J. M. Bradshaw, *Now That We Have the Words*.

Sometimes difficulties in source attributions and dating trouble LDS historians as they do Bible scholars. For example, the attribution of Joseph Smith’s “Happiness” letter to Nancy Rigdon is settled for some (G. Dirkmaat, Search for ‘happiness’: Joseph Smith’s alleged authorship of the 1842 letter to Nancy Rigdon) but not all scholars (B. C. Hales, May 24 2017). With tongue in cheek, S. T. Whitlock, January 7 2018 wonders whether an unskillful future historian lacking documentary evidence might be inclined to mistakenly attribute D&C 87 to a Second Joseph living after the Civil War or wonder whether the poetic version of D&C 76 (J. Smith, Jr., A Vision) should be attributed to an “E” (Eliza R. Snow), J (Joseph Smith), or P (William W. Phelps) source (For a (serious) discussion of authorship of the poetic version, see R. N. Holzapfel, Eternity Sketch’d.)

As a different sort of example of the challenges that face us in obtaining a suitable reading of Joseph Smith and his revelations, no one is completely sure how to render the phrase written as “wrent upon the earth” in the original manuscripts (OT1 and OT2) of Moses 1:19 (S. H. Faulring et al., *Original Manuscripts*, pp. 84, 593). Uncertainty has

led to varied conjectural emendations: “ranted upon” (1981 LDS edition), “went upon” (RLDS D&C 22:12), and “rent upon” (here conceived as “a regional spelling of ‘rent,’ the past tense of ‘rend,’ ‘to tear.’” [K. P. Jackson, *Book of Moses*, p. 50]). As much as the term “ranted” (i.e., to speak in a violent, loud, extravagant, and vehement manner for maximal rhetorical effect) has a certain appeal, I concur with Kent Jackson’s view that “rent” (i.e., “tore upon the earth” [for a discussion of the appropriateness of this reading from an exegetical perspective, see J. M. Bradshaw, *God’s Image 1*, 1:21-a, p. 57]) is probably what was originally intended.

22 It is noteworthy “that almost all of what we have of Joseph Smith’s sayings and writings comes to us not through his own pen, but via scribes and recorders who could not possibly have been 100% accurate when they attempted to write down the Prophet’s words” (J. C. Alleman, *Problems in translating the language of Joseph Smith*, p. 22). See G. Dirkmaat et al., *Prophets Have Spoken* for a well-crafted exposition of the process and results of George D. Watt’s efforts to record the sermons of Church leaders from 1851 onwards in shorthand and subsequently to create the sometimes highly amended published versions that appeared in the *Deseret News* and the *Journal of Discourses*. Of course, those who recorded the sermons of Joseph Smith faced even greater challenges, as they had no skills in shorthand and were often challenged by delays of years before the notes from the sermon could be filled out into finished prose. Another blow was the untimely death of Elder Willard Richards, who had been a primary scribe for his Nauvoo sermons. He passed away on 11 March 1854, having been able to complete a draft of the *History* only to the date of 1 March 1843. After Elder Richards’ death, the direction of this work fell to Elder George A. Smith who, by 1856, had overseen its completion up through the June 1844 death of the Prophet. For a more complete account of the writing of Joseph Smith’s *History*, see D. C. Jessee, *JS History*; J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Histories, 1832-1844*, pp. *xiii–xxxiii*.

23 Ehat and Cook in J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, *xvii–xviii*.

24 Ehat and Cook in *ibid.*, *xvii*.

25 D. C. Jessee, *Priceless Words*, p. 23.

26 D. C. Jessee, *Reliability*, p. 29.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

28 See, e.g., J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History*, 16 November 1845, 7:526.

29 D. C. Jessee, *Priceless Words*, pp. 28–31.

30 See, e.g., the passage in one of Joseph Smith’s sermons about the rounds of Jacob’s ladder added by later church historians and discussed in J. M. Bradshaw, *Now That We Have the Words*.

31 J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History*.

32 D. C. Jessee, *JS History*, pp. 439-73. D. C. Jessee, *Reliability*, p. 47 explains:

To further complicate the question of authorship, since Joseph Smith’s diary did not provide an unbroken narrative of his life, gaps were bridged by using other sources, changing indirect discourse to direct as if Joseph had done the writing himself. Not uncommon according to the editorial practices of the day, this method of supplying

missing detail had the effect of providing a smooth-flowing, connected narrative of events.

For examples of these difficulties, see *ibid.*, pp. 37–41.

33 E.g., J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*; J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings* 1997.

34 E.g., J. Smith, Jr., *Words*; J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1841-1843*; J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1843-1844*; J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1832-1839*.

35 E.g., J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 643–644, 750; J. C. Alleman, Problems in translating the language of Joseph Smith.

36 According to D. C. Jessee, *JS History*, p. 441, Joseph Smith and his scribes had only progressed to the date August 5, 1838, in the history by the time of the Prophet's death.

37 D. A. Bednar, *Faithful Parents*.

38 This phenomenon also helps explain the great lengths that Joseph Smith went to, in compliance with the commandments of the Lord, in order to preserve an accurate written record of the doings of his day:

[D]espite the long list of impediments in history writing, Joseph Smith showed sustained interest in documenting the church's rise and progress, and his repeated efforts to do so bore fruit. ... Near the end of his life, Joseph Smith gave high priority to his history, and he was finally able to devote the resources to make it a substantial production. In May 1843, he told William W. Phelps of a message that came to him in a dream: 'The history must go ahead before any thing' [J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1843-1844*, 19 May 1843, pp. 18–19]. ... Under Richards' direction, the enterprise made substantial progress. Addressing the Saints in Nauvoo a month before he was killed, Joseph Smith noted with satisfaction that during the past three years his 'acts and proceedings' had been recorded by 'efficient Clerks in constant employ,' who had accompanied him everywhere and 'carefully kept my history, and they have written down what I have done, where I have been & what I have said' [see J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 26 May 1844, pp. 374, 406 n. 1. Cited in *ibid.*, p. xxxi n. 47 as "Sermon of Joseph the Proph[et],' 26 May 1844, p. 2, JS Collection, CHL"] (*ibid.*, pp. xiv, xxxi).

39 2 Nephi 29:4.

40 G. B. Hinckley, *Great Things*, p. 81.

41 E.g., 2 Nephi 29; D&C 42:12.

42 2 Nephi 29:4. For a description of the unimaginable difficulties that Joseph Smith underwent during the period leading up to his translation of the first chapter of the book of Moses, see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 33–36.

43 For example, New Testament names and titles such as "Jesus Christ" are used in Joseph Smith's chapters on Enoch when other names and titles would be more in line with ancient Enoch texts. On the other hand, the repeated use of the term "Only Begotten" in the book of Moses, which might seem out of place, "is not problematic [since] Philo applies it to the logos, who is embodied as Moses and other figures. It thus strikes [one] as pre-Christian ... Only-begotten and first-begotten are equivalent; thus

when Philo calls the logos the first-born, this is virtually the same as only-begotten. Only-begotten in Greek also can mean ‘beloved’” (S. Zinner, January 9 2018).

As a broader example of a pragmatic objective that seems to have trumped the typical criteria of fidelity to source texts and clear linguistic expression for intended readers of translations, consider the abundant use of King James English in Joseph Smith’s scripture and revelations. When the Prophet uses this familiar but more challenging style in modern scripture, it is a direct signal to readers about interconnections with the Bible that otherwise might have been difficult to detect, fulfilling the Book of Mormon prediction that old and new revelations would “grow together” as one (2 Nephi 3:12).

More generally, King James phrasing may have been a deliberate part of what McGuire calls “the rhetorical strategy of the text in translation” (B. L. McGuire, *Book of Mormon as a Communicative Act*. See also B. A. Gardner, *Gift and Power*, Kindle Location 1521-1647, 1900-2481). This refers, among other things, to the idea that the use of archaic phrasing familiar to Joseph Smith’s Bible-reading contemporaries, perhaps a wholly unconscious part of the translation process (*ibid.*, Kindle Location 4349), might not only have helped readers to *connect* new scripture to old, but also may have facilitated the *acceptance* of modern revelation as the authentic word of God on a par with the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, one is led to wonder whether without a rhetorical strategy in translation to help bridge some of the cultural and language differences between Old World and New World disciples, a more literal translation of the text would seem as incomprehensibly foreign to Bible readers as Mesoamerican pre-classic temple murals of San Bartolo seem to modern temple-goers (see M. A. Wright, *Axes Mundi*).

44 H. M. Smith et al., *Commentary*, p. 350, emphasis added. Although Joseph Smith’s history says that Moroni “quoted” previous prophets, he of course expressed their words with “a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles” (Joseph Smith—History 1:36. See also the verses that follow). Later, Moroni’s version of these prophetic passages was itself separately canonized in the Pearl of Great Price.

45 P. L. Barlow, *Bible* (2013), pp. 55-57.

46 With respect to Joseph Smith’s use of the “best books,” not only did he incorporate concepts and wording from his own revelations and his Book of Mormon translation into his Bible revision, but also, in an estimated 200–300 cases, he seems to have adopted suggestions from a copy of Adam Clarke’s Bible commentary that he had received as a gift from his brother-in-law Nathaniel Lewis. See T. A. Wayment, *Joseph Smith’s Use*.

Significantly, none of the parallels with Clarke’s commentary occur in his translation of Genesis 1–24. These chapters, which were written out in full rather than as notations within the printed Bible that was used for translation purposes, contain the highest proportion of long, revealed additions to the Bible. See J. M. Bradshaw, *Moses Temple Themes* (2014), pp. 13–14.

47 D&C 128:18.