

The *Book of Mormon*

Part One

“I told the Brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”

— Joseph Smith¹

“We had all confidence in Brother Joseph, thinking that as God had given him so great a gift as to translate the Book of Mormon, that everything he would do must be right.”

— David Whitmer²

The Book of Mormon was Joseph Smith’s crowning achievement. With it he secured the loyalty of a growing body of believers which would hold him to be the greatest of all prophets. They firmly believed that no one but God could have empowered him to produce this book. The Book of Mormon, therefore gained him the stature and credibility among them to do all that would follow. For them, his future instructions would be “as if from God’s own mouth.”

Through the Book of Mormon Joseph Smith also wetted his followers’ appetite for the addictive quality of previously *hidden knowledge*, of which they were to be the exclusive beneficiaries. This hidden knowledge, which was supposed to have once been a part of the Bible, was now going to be restored to earth through the Book of Mormon. Merely three chapters into the Book of Mormon, around 600 b.c., we find the following claims.

“...a great and abominable church...[has] taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away...that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men.

“Wherefore...I will be merciful unto the Gentiles...I will bring forth unto them in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious...”

1. *Documentary History of the [Mormon] Church*, vol. 4, p. 461, as cited in Latayne Colvett Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p. 55

2. Whitmer, *Address to All Believers*, p. 34.

“...thy seed...shall write many things...which shall be plain and precious...behold, these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles by the gift and power of the Lamb; and in them shall be written my gospel” (1 Nephi 3:167–170, 182–186).

This passage would not only justify his production of the Book of Mormon itself but also would pave the way for his later revision of the King James Bible plus a myriad of other so-called “revelations” along the way, all in the name of restoring these “plain and precious” parts of the gospel.

Not only would the main body of the Book of Mormon contain important hidden knowledge, the book would also have a “sealed portion” whose knowledge would be even *more* hidden and *more* important. But this part of the book, the “greater things,” would not be revealed until its recipients had attained a sufficient level of righteousness and acceptance of its unsealed portion. “They shall not go forth unto the Gentiles until the day that they shall repent of their iniquity, and become clean before the Lord.... He that will contend against the word of the Lord, let him be accursed; and he that shall deny these things, let him be accursed; for unto them will I shew no greater things.” (Ether 1:100, 102).

This is a very destructive concept. Followers of Joseph Smith who carefully study his writings know this promise of one day receiving these “greater things,” and they live in hopeful expectation of that day. But they also know that it will only come when they are good enough and have sufficiently embraced the Book of Mormon. These “greater things,” then, become a barometer of their righteousness. As long as they don’t have them they know they are not yet righteous enough. This is an incredible guilt trip which many RLDS live with: their unrighteousness is preventing God from finishing his plan for the end of the age, as if mere humans could control the timing of the Almighty. How different this is from what the Lord told the prophet Daniel “Some of the wise will stumble so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until *the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time*” (Dan. 11:35). God has a very firm and precise calendar, which waits for no man.

There was another group of people who treasured secret or hidden knowledge. They were called Gnostics, from the Greek *gnosis*, which means knowledge. They grew up right alongside (most often among) the early Christian church and were reckoned as some of its worst enemies during its first two centuries. While selectively using Christian scriptures to adorn their own views, their real emphasis was on their secret, and therefore *exclusive* knowledge. While they, too, claimed to be Christians, their destructive teachings were at great variance from genuine Christian doctrine. Gnostic leaders also often claimed that their secret knowledge was given to them directly from the Lord. Later books of the New Testament, such as 1 John, contain denunciation of certain Gnostic heresies. In fact, the formation and closing of the New Testament canon itself was in large part a defensive measure to guard the Church against the claims of spurious Gnostic writings which were masquerading as legitimate Christian scripture.

Outline of Our Approach

In chapter 2 we saw how the Book of Mormon was actually generated, as opposed to Joseph Smith’s official story of the process. In this chapter and the next two we will take a closer look at the book to see if it can hold up under scrutiny. In this chapter we will present an overview *What*

is the Book of Mormon? and then look at the book's claim of having been written in *Reformed Egyptian*. We will then examine *Martin Harris' Encounter with Professor Anthon* and the related subject *Does the Bible Prophecy of the Book of Mormon?* In chapter 6 we will examine some of the *Origins of the Book of Mormon* based on a variety of internal evidence that it parallels the work of other authors. And in chapter 7 we will look at Joseph Smith's *Plagiarism of the King James Version of the Bible*, *Book of Mormon Anachronisms* and *Book of Mormon Archeology and Anthropology*.

What Is the Book of Mormon?

The Book of Mormon purports to be a history of three migrations of people who were led by the Lord from the Old World to the New. These migrations were led by *Jared*, *Mulek* and *Lehi*.

The Jaredite Migration. This first migration was led by a man named Jared. He led a group of people from the Tower of Babel who had managed to escape the otherwise universal confusion of the world's language. The Lord had purposely confused this world language as a means of scattering its inhabitants throughout the entire earth (Gen. 11:1–9). Now here is an interesting irony: the only people to escape this confusion, these Jaredites, were those who ended up being scattered the farthest. Their story is found in just one short book in the Book of Mormon, the book of Ether.

This group of perhaps fifty to eighty people made their trans-oceanic voyage in eight small barges which had been constructed under the Lord's direction (Ether 1:43–68). When their construction was complete Jared complained to the Lord because these barges were completely dark and airtight; how would they see or breathe? The Lord corrects His first oversight by having Jared poke holes in both the top and bottom of each barge in order to let air in, but only when "thou shalt suffer for air." This was an interesting design, because every time they let in air, they would also let in water. Realizing this design flaw the Lord told them to plug these holes back up if they got too wet. The problem of darkness was more problematic. The Lord runs out of ideas by explaining that they could have neither windows nor fires and finally asks Jared what He should do. This time Jared solves the problem by asking the Lord to touch some stones so they would glow in the dark for them. Issue resolved. But it is hard to understand these design problems. It seems that the Lord would have already learned a lot through His previous experience with Noah's ark.

Jared tells us approximately how big these barges were, "the length thereof was the length of a tree" (Ether 1:46). In addition to the humans in their party they also loaded onto these eight barges all of their flocks, herds, fowl, fish and bees and a food supply for them all. This was a truly miraculous voyage. The Lord created a "furious wind" to drive them to their destination. Despite a rough ride, all eight barges arrived at the same place at the same time. And it only took them 344 days!

After they landed they began to develop both the land and their society. They eventually divided into righteous and unrighteous factions with wars developing between the two. Through this warfare they annihilate each other with the exception of a sole surviving warrior by the name of Coriantumr. Another possible survivor is Ether himself, but the story hints that he might also have been "translated," or taken to heaven. In any event, Ether faithfully kept a record of all these things and hid it just as their story ends.

The Lehite Migration. The second migration, but by far the most significant one, occurred during the reign of Judah's King Zedekiah. This party was led by Lehi, a descendant of Joseph, the son of Jacob (Israel) who had been sold into slavery into Egypt. He and his family left Jerusalem around 600 b.c. Once having removed to the wilderness Lehi's son, Nephi, returned twice to Jerusalem. The first time he secured some ancient Hebrew scriptures and a man by the name of Zoram who had been their custodian. Although these were the ancient scriptures of Israel, they had already been translated into Egyptian and inscribed onto plates of brass.³ On his second trip back to Jerusalem Nephi convinced a man by the name of Ishmael and his family to accompany them on their trip as a source of wives for he and his brothers, according to the instruction of the Lord to their father, Lehi.

This combined party traveled in the wilderness for eight years before coming to the sea. Their journey was guided by a mysterious compass, or director called the *liahona*. After a short respite at this sea the Lord instructs Nephi to build a single ship in preparation for crossing it to the "promised land." Nephi completes the ship and the whole party crosses the sea to the Americas.

Upon their arrival they begin to develop the land and their culture as the Jaredite migration had done. Not long after this a growing rift divides this group into two factions. The righteous group become known as Nephites, after their leader, while the wicked become known as Lamanites, after Nephi's evil brother Laman. Most of the remaining part of the book chronicles the contention between these two groups.

About 200 b.c. the Nephites come across degenerate Mulekites (discussed below) whom they label "the people of Zarahemla." These Mulekites subordinate to the leadership of the Nephites and from this point on the two groups unite (Omni 23–39).

The crucifixion of Christ is marked on this continent by catastrophic disaster accompanied by three days of absolute darkness. There were hurricane force storms and giant earthquakes which completely disfigured the earth. Every wicked person was completely destroyed while it was "the more righteous part of the people who were saved" (3 Nephi 4:66). Shortly after His ascension into heaven Jesus returns to minister on the American continent. (Observation: In the Bible Jesus declares His mission, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" [Luke 19:10]. Accordingly, through His personal ministry as recorded in the Bible many sinners, His lost sheep, were brought to salvation. But according to the Book of Mormon all of the unrighteous, or sinners, were annihilated by Him before He even got here to minister. Can you see something wrong with this picture?)

During His ministry in the Americas Jesus chooses twelve special disciples, heals people and teaches. Included in His teaching is the complete Sermon on the Mount directly out of Matthew 5–7. Most of it is verbatim King James Version, with a little editorial comment added here and there (3 Nephi 5:50–6:37).

As part of His ministry Jesus grants the hearts' desire of His twelve special disciples. Three of them desired to not die but remain on earth until Jesus' second coming. These are referred to as "The Three Nephites." Because they were allowed to continue ministering until Jesus' second coming many RLDS believe they have had spiritual encounters with them. Rumors abound of these Three Nephites traveling incognito as spiritual apparitions or as mysterious human visitors.

3 *BM*, 1 Nephi 1:61; Mosiah 1:3–6.

These kinds of encounters are held as very special blessings, and of course viewed as testimony to the truth of the Book of Mormon.

After Jesus completes His ministry this Nephite civilization experiences a “golden age” of righteousness, peace and prosperity which lasts nearly two hundred years. At this point the previous Lamanite contention resurfaces and the society is once again split. The rest of the book describes this contention. Through a series of bloody conflicts the righteous Nephites and the wicked Lamanites annihilate each other so that by 421 a.d. there is only one righteous survivor: Moroni, the keeper of the sacred records. Moroni then chronicles the demise of his people, delivers a series of doctrinal and liturgical instructions and hides his records on plates of brass, and in “reformed Egyptian” in a “hill Cumorah.”

As it turns out, this hill Cumorah was very near Joseph Smith’s farm in western New York State. In 1827 Joseph takes possession of these plates and from them produces what we have today as the Book of Mormon. The actual production of the Book of Mormon is discussed in chapter 2 Myth and Reality.

The Mulekite Migration. The third migration was led from Jerusalem by Mulek, a son of King Zedekiah, shortly before the Jewish exile to Babylon, around 590 b.c. This migration is the least significant of the three, and comparatively little of it is described. We do know that they did not bring any sacred records with them, that their language became corrupt and that they became a degenerate people. Somewhere around 200 b.c. they come across Coriantumr and a record of his Jaredite people, all of whom by this time have been annihilated. After living with the Mulekites for about nine months we hear no more of Coriantumr. Their brief story is summarized in Omni 23–39 and alluded to in Helaman 2:129; 3:56–57.

Reformed Egyptian?

According to the Book of Mormon, the compiler of its brass plates was a prophet by the name of Moroni. As he nears the end of his work he tells us that the language he inscribed on his plates was “reformed Egyptian.” And since no one else on earth knew anything about reformed Egyptian, interpreters (which Joseph Smith would later call the “Urim and Thummim”) would be provided to facilitate their translation. “We have written this record according to our knowledge in the characters, which are called among us the reformed Egyptian...and because that none other people knoweth our language...[the Lord] hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof” (*BM*, Mormon 4:98,100).

It is significant to note that the entire Old Testament is written in Hebrew, with the sole exception of a few passages in Aramaic.⁴ These comparatively brief passages in Aramaic relate directly to the Jewish exile in Babylon, and understandably reflect this universal language of the Babylonian Empire. After the affairs of the exile are behind them the Biblical writers return immediately to Hebrew.

The Israelites rightly saw themselves as God’s chosen and *exclusive* people. Only after Israel rejected Jesus Christ as their promised Messiah were Gentiles offered the invitation to join them as God’s elect people. Prior to this *all* Gentile nations were seen as *unclean* and *unholy*. The Hebrew language was an important part of their national identity as the chosen people of God.

4. Dan. 2:4–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; Jer. 10:11.

This is nowhere more evident than in their transmitting the name of God. Scribes would have to ritually purify themselves before writing the name *Yahweh*, the unspeakable name of God in the Old Testament.

The Book of Mormon, however, makes a radical break with this heritage. Here we are told that a group of Israelites makes a conscious choice to record *their* sacred record in the language of their enemies: the Egyptians who had mercilessly enslaved them for 400 years. A devout Israelite could no more stomach this than he could a plateful of pork.

But why *reformed* Egyptian? Because Joseph had unwittingly trapped himself. Before he and Oliver Cowdery produced the surviving portion of the Book of Mormon Joseph had transcribed some of its characters for Martin Harris to take to New York City for verification of authenticity. While Egyptian was not yet *translatable*, it was at least *recognizable*. And these characters bore absolutely no resemblance to conventional Egyptian whatsoever. (Copies of Joseph's characters can be found in various reference works.⁵) His characters, therefore, would have to have been so radically "reformed" as to constitute an entirely new language. Is this reasonable? After all, even the Old English reflected in the epic poem *Beowulf* bears some clear resemblance to contemporary English.

We conclude that Joseph Smith's use of "reformed Egyptian" is another device to avoid detection of his fraud. It would have been completely unthinkable for devout Israelites to record their sacred history—especially while on an errand from God—in the unclean language of their former taskmasters, the Egyptians. We shall have more to say about this "reformed Egyptian" below in our discussion of Martin Harris' visit to Professor Anthon.

Martin Harris' Encounter with Professor Anthon—the *Learned Man*

As you may recall from chapter 2, Martin Harris was an important financial supporter of Joseph Smith's early days and one of his scribes for the Book of Mormon. In the face of this mounting investment, and the nagging of a highly skeptical wife, Martin began seeking some confirmation that all of this translation business was legitimate. He finally convinced Joseph to transcribe some of the Book of Mormon characters which he would then take to scholars for testimony of their authenticity. In early 1828 Martin took a page full of these characters to New York City and presented them to Charles Anthon, professor of Greek and Latin at Columbia College. According to Joseph's 1838 official *History of the Church*, this is how Martin related the experience upon his return home.

"I went to the city of New York and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Professor Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic, and said that they were the true characters. He gave me a certificate certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had been translated was also correct. I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked how

5. See *RHC* 1:23; Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p.43; Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*, p. 106.

the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him.

“He then said to me, ‘Let me see that certificate.’ I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him, he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, ‘I cannot read a sealed book.’ I left him and went to Dr. Mitchill, who sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said respecting both the characters and the translation.”⁶

It should be noted that, although Professor Anthon confirms having met with Martin Harris, he completely denies any endorsement of these characters *or* their translation. In a letter from him in 1834 Anthon says “The whole story about my having pronounced the Mormonite inscription to be ‘reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics’ is *perfectly false*.” At first he thought the whole story was “a trick, perhaps a *hoax*.” But after hearing more he “began to regard it as a scheme to cheat the farmer [Martin Harris] of his money.”⁷

Two Major Contradictions. The foregoing story presents two major contradictions, one regarding *reformed* Egyptian, the other regarding *conventional* Egyptian. From our discussion above you will recall the following quote from the Book of Mormon. “We have written this record according to our knowledge in the characters, which are called among us the reformed Egyptian...*and because that none other people knoweth our language...[the Lord] hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof*” (*BM*, Mormon 4:98,100, emphasis added). The theory here is that virtually no one other than the Book of Mormon peoples knew anything about their reformed Egyptian. That is why Joseph Smith himself needed to use the “interpreters” which God had also provided, the so-called “Urim and Thummim.” If that were true, then Professor Anthon could not *possibly* have known anything about that language either, and could never have vouched for any translation therefrom.

But according to Martin Harris and Joseph Smith, Professor Anthon never really said anything about *reformed* Egyptian. “Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the *Egyptian*. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were *Egyptian*, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic, and said that they were *the true characters*.” (By the way, neither Joseph Smith nor the Book of Mormon say anything about it containing Chaldaic, Assyriac or Arabic, so where did all that come from?) Since we have already concluded that Anthon could not possibly have known anything about reformed Egyptian, any of his comments would have necessarily referred to conventional Egyptian. This creates the second contradiction.

In 1828 Egyptian was still a lost language to the English speaking world. In 1822 the Frenchman Champollion had broken the code of the Egyptian language by use of the famous “Rosetta stone.” However, the results of his research would not be available to America until

⁶ As reported in Joseph Smith's 1838 official history as published in *T&S*, vol. 3, no. 13, May, 2, 1842, p. 773. Also cited in *RHC* 1:19.

⁷ Anthon wrote two letters, one in 1834 and the other in 1841, which seriously contradict the foregoing account of his meeting with Martin Harris. The 1834 letter was printed in its entirety in E.D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, pp. 270–272, parts of which are cited in *RHC* 1:21–22; Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, pp. 51–52; and Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*, p. 105. The 1841 letter is cited in *RHC* 1:22.

1837 through John G. Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*. Therefore, while Anthon could have possibly been able to *recognize* Egyptian, there is no way he could have vouched for a *translation* of Egyptian.

Conclusion. Based on these two obvious contradictions it seems clear that Joseph's story of Martin Harris' encounter with Professor Anthon was largely fabricated to make it look like a remarkable fulfillment of Isaiah 29, which will be discussed below.

The Egyptian language would pose a problem for Joseph Smith again in 1835 when he came up with his *Book of Abraham* from ancient Egyptian funeral documents. This will be explored more fully in chapter 10 under the *Book of Abraham* portion of the *Pearl of Great Price*.

Does the Bible Prophecy of the Book of Mormon?

From the very beginning Joseph Smith and his followers have claimed that the Bible prophecies of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the last days. Their two favorite Old Testament texts are Isaiah 29 and Ezekiel 37. A careful look at these texts, however, show that nothing could be further from the truth.

Isaiah 29. As we mentioned above, Joseph Smith became enamored with this chapter when he found he could apply it to Martin Harris' encounter with Professor Anthon in New York City. Below we will see what this chapter is actually saying, and then see the ways in which Joseph Smith twisted an interpretation to fit his own purpose.

Isaiah begins this chapter by describing the future destruction of Jerusalem (Ariel) which God brought about by the nation of Babylon in 586 b.c.(vv. 1–4). He goes on to describe another onslaught to come upon a physically restored Israel just before the Lord's return. This time it is Israel's "many enemies" who unite in the attack which are destroyed (vv. 5–8). The Lord then scolds Israel for being so far away from their God that they cannot even understand this prophecy (vv. 9–16). He concludes by foretelling the spiritual restoration of Israel during the Messianic age. Then, even the deaf and blind will see, hear and thereby understand this prophecy which, because of their present rebellion is effectively sealed off from them. When they see the mighty work of God in their midst they will then reverence His holiness and receive instruction from His hand (vv. 17–24). Hallelujah! Little do we know how rapidly we are approaching this blessed day of the Lord's return and the conversion of Israel, His beloved.

It is clear that, from beginning to end, this chapter has only the literal nation of Israel in view. Joseph Smith, however, interpreted it to revolve around himself and his Book of Mormon. This interpretation revolves primarily around three verses.

“And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.

“And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.” (vv. 4, 11–12 *KJV*)

Instead of predicting the demise of Jerusalem, Joseph taught that verse 4 referred to a remnant of Israel who would write a sacred history which would then be buried for a long time in the earth. In the future, when this record was unearthed, this remnant would figuratively “speak out of the ground...thy speech shall be low out of the dust...out of the ground...thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.” Since this record would be inspired by God it would also have “a familiar spirit.” You can see how this interpretation fit the story of his Book of Mormon.

But if Joseph Smith had understood what a *familiar spirit* was, he might not have been so quick to apply it to the Book of Mormon. The underlying Hebrew for this term means “a divining demon present in the physical body of the conjurer.”⁸ It has to do with the occult practice of *necromancy*, the strictly forbidden practice of communicating with the dead. It is the same Hebrew term used in the following passage “*A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them*” (Lev. 20:27, *KJV*). I guess enough has been said of familiar spirits.

Joseph’s use of verses 11–12 continue this theme. Here, the Israelite record which had been buried in the earth becomes a “sealed book.” Now Isaiah had used a “sealed book” as an allegory for the prophetic will of God, the first part of which was soon to be executed upon unrepentant Israel. The content of this “sealed book” is the judgments which had just been described in the first 10 verses of chapter 29. The first four verses describe the judgments which Israel would suffer at the hands of Babylon in 586 b.c. The next six verses describe the judgments of God upon the many nations which will join together in attacking restored Israel just before the Lord returns to usher in the Messianic age. This time God will spare Israel and punish her enemies instead. But because of her present rejection of Him, God had now blinded Israel from even understanding this prophecy of imminent judgment, but ultimate deliverance, “For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered” (v.10). The understanding of this prophecy would even be concealed from Israel’s so-called “learned” men.

Joseph Smith’s interpretation, however, has this “sealed book” being the Book of Mormon. He had maintained that a portion of the gold plates had been sealed off to prevent premature access. When Professor Anthon, a learned man, was told about this Joseph has him saying “I cannot read a sealed book.” Of course, Joseph Smith is the unlearned man of verse 12 who then goes on to do a “marvellous work and a wonder” (v. 14) by translating the Book of Mormon with God’s help alone. Prophecy fulfilled!

Joseph gained so much confidence using Isaiah 29 in this way that he developed a greatly embellished version of it to *precisely* fit the Anthon story and inserted it into the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 11:82–86, 118–160). Later when he produced his own *Inspired Version* of the Bible he fully incorporated these embellishments into the Biblical text. Joseph’s complete revision of Isaiah 29 will be examined in detail in chapter 9 which deals with his *Inspired Version* of the Bible.

Ezekiel 37. The second favorite Old Testament text which Joseph Smith and his followers have used as a prophecy of the Book of Mormon is Ezekiel 37:15–19.

⁸ Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 344.

“The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, ‘Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.’ Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, ‘Ephraim’s stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand.

“When your countrymen ask you, ‘Won’t you tell us what you mean by this?’ say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim’s hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah’s stick, making them a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.’” (Ezek. 37:15–19)

Their interpretation holds that the *sticks* referred to in this passage are actually books of scripture. They feel this interpretation is legitimate since Israel’s scriptures used to be scrolls which were rolled up on sticks. They then interpret the stick of Judah as being the Bible, since it is principally of Jewish authorship. The stick of Joseph is then interpreted as being the Book of Mormon since its people claim to be descendants of Joseph. And now in the last days these two sticks, the Bible and the Book of Mormon, have come together in God’s hand and are being used as equals in God’s only true church.

This is certainly an ingenious interpretation. The only trouble is that it has absolutely nothing to do with what the text is actually saying. To begin with, books of scripture are never referred to as *sticks*—not once. The word translated here as *stick* is used a number of other times in the Old Testament, where it always simply refers to a “piece of wood.” On the other hand, there are numerous other references to Israel’s scriptures in the Old Testament where they are explicitly referred to as *books* or *scrolls*. To maintain, then, that the sticks here refer to books of scripture is certainly unprecedented, and unwarranted.

But the biggest problem with Joseph Smith’s interpretation of this passage is what the actual text has to say about itself. It has been often said that “the Bible is its own best interpreter.” This is nowhere more evident than with this passage. The text immediately following these verses completely explains the symbolic act which the Lord had Ezekiel perform. “Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on and say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms’” (vv. 20–22).

One of the greatest themes of Israel’s prophets was the ultimate restoration and reuniting of both Northern and Southern kingdoms under one king, Jesus, during the Messianic age to come. Ezekiel 37 contains one of many such prophecies which point to this ultimate goal. Consider the clarity with which the following two passages also confirm this goal.

“At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. *In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance.*” (Jer. 3:17–18)

“In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent. I will repair its broken pieces, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be...I will bring back my exiled people Israel...I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them, says the LORD your God.”
(Amos 9:11–15)

Conclusion. We condemn Joseph Smith’s use of Isaiah 29 and Ezekiel 37:15–19 to support his Book of Mormon. He has torn these passages from their context and used them to support something for which they were never intended.

When following Joseph Smith in his use of these scriptures, his followers lose in two ways. First, they follow a false prophet right into his heretical ways, and become a partaker of these heresies right along with him. Second, they lose the *real* message of these scriptures, *which is being fulfilled right in front of our eyes*. These in fact are the last days. And time is too short, and too exciting, to waste it with *our* eyes closed.