

The *Book of Mormon*

Part Two

The Book of Mormon is a sizable book. The version I am looking at has nearly 800 pages. It is hard to believe that Joseph Smith could have dreamed it up all by himself. In fact, this is one argument his followers have continued to raise in its defense. They reason that Joseph Smith could not possibly have generated the book himself, therefore they have good reason to believe that it must be from God, as claimed. On the other hand, ever since the Book of Mormon appeared in 1830 its critics have tried to identify other documents which Joseph Smith could have used as a source.

It is very likely that a number of sources were available to Joseph Smith as he developed his concept of the Book of Mormon. The sources which have received the most attention from scholars include Solomon Spaulding's *Manuscript Found*, Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*, Josiah Priest's *The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed*, the King James Version *Apocrypha* and last, but not least, the literature of Freemasonry.

Solomon Spaulding's *Manuscript Found*

A theory surfaced in 1833 that Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon was nothing more than the publication of a lost manuscript authored by a former New England preacher, Solomon Spaulding. It was said that Spaulding had written a historical novel about the ancient inhabitants of North America before his death in 1816. The manuscript was supposedly stolen by Sidney Rigdon from the printers' office in Pittsburgh and delivered to Joseph Smith for his own publication as the Book of Mormon. For years the manuscript could not be found to evaluate these claims. It finally surfaced in Hawaii and was first published by the RLDS church in 1885.

Although Spaulding's *Manuscript Found* and the Book of Mormon share a number of very interesting similarities, scholars have since discounted the theory of direct plagiarism. In comparing the two books Fawn Brodie says "Both were said to have come from out of the earth; both were stories of colonists sailing from the Old World to the New; both explained the earthworks and mounds common to western New York and Ohio as the result of savage wars."¹ Despite these similarities, however, there are differences in style, names and certain expressions which argue against common authorship. Even though it is clear that the Book of Mormon is not

1. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 449.

the once thought plagiarism of Spaulding's *Manuscript Found*, their similarities do illustrate just how popular these concepts were in the early 1800s.²

Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*

In recent times most of us have heard that the American Indians are of Mongoloid stock and came to this continent by means of a land-bridge which once connected Alaska with the eastern-most tip of Russia. But such was not the theory espoused in the early 1800s. The popular view at that time was that the Indians were of Jewish origin, or were perhaps a part of the ten lost tribes of Israel.

“America's most distinguished preachers—William Penn, Roger Williams, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards—had all espoused the theory. Edwards had even written a tract pointing out what he thought were likenesses between the Muhhekaneew Indian tongue and Hebrew. The historian H.H. Bancroft later wrote: ‘The theory that the Americans are of Jewish origin has been discussed more minutely and at greater length than any other. Its advocates, or at least those of them who have made original researches, are comparatively few, but the extent of their investigations and the multitude of the parallelisms they adduce in support of their hypothesis exceed by far anything we have yet encountered.’ [*Native Races*, Vol. V, pp. 77–8] Josiah Priest wrote in 1833 in his *American Antiquities*: ‘The opinion that the American Indians are descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes is now a popular one and generally believed.’ ”³

Fawn Brodie cites six works, including the two discussed in this chapter, which set forth this theory. They were published in 1775, 1799, 1816, 1823, 1825 and 1828.⁴

One of these works was Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*. This book was originally published in 1823 in Poultney, Vermont. The 1823 edition sold out quickly and a second edition was published in 1825. (It should be noted that Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith's cousin as well as the principle scribe for the Book of Mormon, was living in Poultney when Ethan Smith published *View of the Hebrews*. In fact, Oliver's step-mother was a member of Ethan Smith's congregation.⁵ It is possible this family link is how Joseph acquired *View of the Hebrews*.) Ethan Smith was a pastor and had become fascinated with the origin of the American Indian and the prophesied restoration of Israel. In his book he presents eleven “arguments in favour of the natives of America being the descendants of Israel,” followed by a discussion of “where they came to this country.” In addition, “*View of the Hebrews* made much of the legend that the ‘stick of Joseph’ and the ‘stick of Ephraim’—symbolizing the Jews and the lost tribes—would one day be united; and Joseph Smith's first advertising circulars blazoned the Book of Mormon as ‘the

2. For more background on this “Spaulding–Rigdon Theory” see Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, pp. 68, 143–145, 442–456. For an in–depth analysis of the Spaulding manuscript see Tanner, *Did Spaulding Write the Book of Mormon?*, (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1977).

3. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 45.

4. *Ibid.*, note.

5. Wesley P. Walters, “The Origin of the Book of Mormon,” *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, vol. 3, no. 3, (Fall 1979), p. 130, as reprinted in Tanner, *An Examination of B.H. Roberts Secret Manuscript*, (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1979), part 1.

stick of Joseph taken from the hand of Ephraim.’ ”⁶ This should strike a familiar chord based on our discussion of Ezekiel 37 in the last chapter.

The prominent Mormon scholar and historian, B.H. Roberts, conducted an intense comparison of this *View of the Hebrews* to the Book of Mormon sometime between 1922 and the time of his death in 1933. To say that B.H. Roberts was highly regarded would be an understatement. In 1969 he was the leading nomination for a list of “the five most eminent intellectuals in Mormon history,” among a survey of top Mormon intellectuals.⁷ His study grew to 149 pages and unearthed what he calls “many major things.” He later boiled his research down to 18 major parallels between the two books. Understandably, the Mormon church never let his work be published. Instead, it circulated among family and a close circle in Utah.⁸

Excerpts from Roberts’ study make it clear that he had lost confidence in the divine origin of the Book of Mormon, in favor of the probability that a highly imaginative Joseph Smith produced it using such sources as *View of the Hebrews*. For example, he says that *View of the Hebrews* was very likely “a ground-plan for the Book of Mormon.” And later in his discussion he begins referring to the Book of Mormon as a “wonder-tale.”⁹ I will conclude with four brief excerpts from his study, which I feel sum up his excellent case.

“This study supposes that it is more than likely that the Smith family possessed a copy of this book by Ethan Smith, that either by reading it, or hearing it read, and its contents frequently discussed, Joseph Smith became acquainted with its contents. The date of publication of the second edition would even make this possible...Contact with it, and knowledge of its contents, by the Smiths, is in every way a great probability.”¹⁰

“It will appear in what is to follow that such ‘common knowledge’ did exist in New England; that Joseph Smith was in contact with it; that one book, at least, with which he was most likely acquainted, could well have furnished structural outlines for the Book of Mormon; and that Joseph Smith was possessed of such creative imaginative powers as would make it quite within the lines of possibility that the Book of Mormon could have been produced in that way.”¹¹

“Can there be any doubt, but what the things said in Ethan Smith’s book, on the matter of the ‘Urim and Thummim,’ ‘Breast Plates’ and ‘curious stones’ and ‘attachments to breast plates’—all published from eight to five years before the Book of Mormon was, are sufficient to suggest the Urim and Thummim as described by Joseph Smith?”¹²

6. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 47.

7. Leonard J. Arrington, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, (Salt Lake City: Dialogue Foundation), vol. 2, no. 2, Spring 1969, pp. 22–23, as cited in Tanner, *An Examination of B.H. Roberts' Secret Manuscript*, Introduction, p. 1.

8. Roberts' summary of his 18 major parallels has been included in the forepart of Jerald and Sandra Tanner's reprint of Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews; or the Tribes of Israel in America*, second edition, (Poultrey, VT: self-published, 1825), and is available from their Utah Lighthouse Ministry in Salt Lake City.

9. Walters, “Origin of the Book of Mormon,” p. 130.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 131–132.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

“...it could with good reason be urged, which, given the suggestions that are to be found in the ‘common knowledge’ of accepted American Antiquities of the time, supplemented by such a work as Ethan Smith’s ‘View of the Hebrews,’ would make it possible for him [Joseph Smith] to create a book such as the Book of Mormon is.”¹³

Josiah Priest’s *The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed*

This was yet another book which promoted the idea that the American Indians were of Israelite descent. It was a very popular book, printed twice in 1825, once at Rochester and again at Albany, New York. A copy of it was in Joseph Smith’s home town library in Manchester, New York (five miles from his house) whose records show that it was repeatedly checked out from 1826 to 1828.¹⁴ When B.H. Roberts reviewed this book he found that it summarized a variety of related material which was available before 1830. He found that it directly quoted about 40 writers, “half of whom are Americans, who advocate in one way or another, that the American Indians are Israelites.”¹⁵

Over thirty pages of this book present “Proofs that the Indians of North America are literally descended from the ancient Hebrews.”¹⁶ Interestingly, it uses a rather unusual turn of phrase which shows up in the Book of Mormon as well. Regarding geography it makes reference to “a narrow neck of land [that] is interposed betwixt two vast oceans.”¹⁷ Compare this to the Book of Mormon, “And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land” (Ether 4:68, see also Alma 30:6).

Later in his life Joseph Smith demonstrated a familiarity with the work of both Josiah Priest and Ethan Smith. In 1842, for example, he cited reference to a legend that the Indians “had not long since had a book which they had *for a long time preserved*. But having lost the knowledge of reading it, they concluded it would be of no further use to them; and they buried it with an Indian chief.”¹⁸ Joseph published this quote in 1842 as additional support for the concept behind his Book of Mormon.¹⁹ But even though this quote originated in Ethan Smith’s 1825 *View of the Hebrews*, Joseph was careful to cite his own source as a subsequent book by Josiah Priest, *American Antiquities*, which was published in 1833—three years after his Book of Mormon appeared.

The King James Version Apocrypha

The *Apocrypha* is a controversial collection of fourteen books which originated largely in the “time between the Testaments,” from about 300 b.c. to 100 a.d. They have been both included and excluded from the Bible throughout the history of Christianity. The Protestant church has

13. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–131.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Josiah Priest, *The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed*, (Albany, NY: 1825), p. 297, as cited in Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*, p. 84.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, p. 223.

19. *T&S*, vol. 3, no. 15, June 1, 1842, pp. 813–814. See also Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, pp. 46–47, and Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*, p. 84.

generally excluded them from the Bible because of their dubious authorship, historical and geographic inaccuracies and doctrines which are at variance with acknowledged scripture. This century has seen a renewed interest in the books of the Apocrypha for their literary and historical value, if not for their divine inspiration.²⁰

Joseph Smith's personal Bible was a King James Version which included the Apocrypha. It was this Bible which he altered to come up with his own *Inspired Version*. Joseph did not include any of the Apocryphal books in his *Inspired Version* because he claimed a revelation that these books were a mixture of both good and bad material and that they did not need to be included.²¹ But perhaps the real reason he did not include them in his *Inspired Version* is that he had borrowed from them in his production of the Book of Mormon.

Recent Study Shows Parallels in the Book of Mormon. In late 1995 Mormon researchers Jerald and Sandra Tanner published the results of a study which shows an abundance of material from the Apocrypha which Joseph Smith very likely used while developing his Book of Mormon.²² They discovered a variety of parallels which are clustered in portions of each book. For example, their study identifies thirty-two parallels. The parallel material from the Apocrypha comes from 1 & 2 Maccabees and Judith. Twenty-eight of these parallels are found in *the first 157 verses of the Book of Mormon* (RLDS edition). An amazing coincidence? Below are a few of their other findings.

The Book of Mormon Source of "Nephi." *Nephi* is a major name in the Book of Mormon. "At least four men in the Book of Mormon are named Nephi. It is also the name of four books in the Book of Mormon, a city, a land, and a people."²³ You will recall that he was among those who formed the major migration to the Americas. Book of Mormon scholars have speculated for years on the origin of this name, most opinions centering on derivations of various Egyptian names. But it was right in the Apocrypha all along. "Then the king, inclosing the place, made it holy, after he had tried the matter. And the king took many gifts, and bestowed thereof on those whom he would gratify. And Neemias called this thing Naphthar, which is as much as to say, a cleansing: but many men call it *Nephi*" (2 Maccabees 1:34–36, KJV).

Abridgements, Brass Plates and Treasuries. As can be seen from the excerpts below, Joseph Smith made quite an issue of *abridgements* in the Book of Mormon. Is it possible that he got this idea from 2 Maccabees?

Book of Mormon	King James Version Apocrypha
Wherefore, it is an <i>abridgement of the record</i> of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites... (Title Page)	All these things, I say, being declared by Jason of Cyrene in five books, we will assay to <i>abridge in one volume...</i> to us, that have taken upon us this painful labour of <i>abridging</i> , it was not

20. For more information see articles on the *Apocrypha* in *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, pp. 70–71 and Cross, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, second edition revised and edited by F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 70–71.

21. *D&C* 88; *RHC* 1:282.

22. Jerald and Sandra Tanner, "Joseph Smith's Use of the Apocrypha," *Salt Lake City Messenger*, (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry: 1995), Issue No. 89.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Book of Mormon

King James Version Apocrypha

Behold I make an *abridgement of the record* of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore after I have *abridged the record* of my father, then will I make an account of my own life. (1 Nephi 1:17)

...after I had *made an abridgement* from the plates of Nephi... (Words of Mormon 1:4)

Therefore I write *a small abridgement*, daring not to give a full account... (Mormon 2:36)

Now I, Moroni, after having made *an end of abridging* the account of the people of Jared... (Moroni 1:1)

Early in the Book of Mormon there is a drama wherein Nephi absconds with sacred writings on plates of brass from the treasury of Laban, an evil enemy. A very similar concept is contained in 1 Maccabees 14.

Book of Mormon

King James Version Apocrypha

...I went forth unto *the treasuries* of Laban. And as I went forth towards *the treasury* of Laban, behold I saw the servant of Laban, who had the keys of *the treasury*. And I commanded him in the voice of Laban, that he should go with me into *the treasury*...And I also spake unto him that I should carry the engravings which were upon *the plates of brass*, to my elder brethren, who were without the walls...And it came to pass that we took *the plates of brass* and the servant of Laban, and departed into the wilderness, and journeyed unto the tent of our father. (1 Nephi 1:122–124, 127, 145)

They wrote unto him in *tables of brass*, to renew the friendship and league which they had made with Judas and Jonathan his brethren: Which writings were read before the congregation at Jerusalem...So then they wrote it in *tables of brass*, which they set upon pillars in mount Sion... (1 Maccabees 14:18–19, 27)

So they commanded that this writing should be put in *tables of brass*, and that they should be set up within the compass of the sanctuary in a conspicuous place; Also that the copies thereof should be laid up in *the treasury*, to the end that Simon and his sons might have them. (1 Maccabees 14:48–49)

In addition to what we have discussed above, the Tanner's study identifies a variety of other material in the Apocrypha with parallels in the Book of Mormon. It seems clear, then, that the King James Apocrypha provided yet another source of ideas for Joseph Smith's fertile imagination.

The Masonic Connection

Freemasonry is the final source which we will discuss, but is perhaps the most eerie of them all. As you will recall from chapter 1, Joseph Smith became infatuated with Freemasonry during the Nauvoo era of the church, 1839–1844. This infatuation led to many secret Masonic rituals being adopted into the church. But the influence of Masonry on Joseph’s church apparently did not start in Nauvoo.

1820s “Anti-Masonry” Reflected in the Book of Mormon. Freemasonry in the United States was dealt a serious blow in September 1826 by the murder of William Morgan. Morgan had been in the midst of publishing an exposé of Masonry’s secret rituals and oaths. These oaths threaten dismemberment and death for such disclosure. Five prominent Masons were later tried for Morgan’s murder. The result was wide-spread public outcry against Masonry and its diabolical secrets. When Joseph Smith began producing his Book of Mormon in 1827 he was quick to get on this anti-Masonic band-wagon by introducing a parallel group called “Gadianton robbers.” This Gadianton band bore a striking similarity to Freemasonry. They, too, swore secret oaths and had secret signs as a means of fraternal identity and to assure mutual protection. They also had their own system of judgment for any who betrayed their pledge to secrecy (see *BM* Helaman 2:141–156). This anti-Masonic sentiment is further reflected in the renunciation of various “secret combinations,” a theme which runs throughout the book.²⁴

The Book of Mormon, then, clearly reflects the public sentiment of its time, which was decidedly against secret societies. Within a few years, however, the public outcry died down a bit and Masonry recovered some of its social acceptability. Therefore, as we discuss in chapter 1, when Joseph got to Nauvoo, Illinois in the early 1840s he did an about-face by not only embracing Freemasonry personally, but by bringing its secret rituals into the very bosom of his church.

Parallels With Freemasonry’s “Legend of Enoch.” But Joseph Smith’s eeriest connection with Freemasonry is the way his own story parallels that of Masonic ritual legend. The 13th, 14th and 21st degrees of Masonry act out an ancient “Legend of Enoch.” This legend bears striking and unmistakable resemblance to Joseph Smith’s story of himself, the Book of Mormon and his role in bringing it forth. In 1980 Dr. Reed C. Durham, Jr. was the Director of the L.D.S. Institute of Religion at the University of Utah. In April 1974 the Mormon History Association held its convention, ironically, in Nauvoo, Illinois. As the immediate Past-President of this association, Dr. Durham delivered a Presidential Address which he titled “Is There No Help For the Widow’s Son?” In this address he examines the close parallels between the Masonic “Legend of Enoch” and the story of Joseph Smith and his Book of Mormon. Dr. Durham briefly outlines the legend and then draws some striking parallels with the story of Joseph Smith.

“The basic, introductory aspect of the legend [of Enoch] is: that up in the pre-existence, there was a special Secret Doctrine that was given by Deity, and it was given down to Earth first to Adam. Adam then was to carefully guard this Secret Doctrine because it contained all the Mysteries. It contained the knowledge of God, and the name it contained was the sacred name of

24. These are referred to in the *Book of Mormon* variously as secret “oaths,” “works,” “combinations,” “covenants,” “abominations,” etc.

God. Adam then bestowed it upon his son, Seth, who guarded it very carefully—only among the inner circle of believers—and then it was handed down until it came to Enoch. And, Enoch is the central figure in the legend. It is with Enoch that the remarkable resemblances with Joseph Smith and Mormon history become disconcertingly clear. The major details of the legend are outlined as follows:

1. Enoch, seventh in the line of patriarchs from Adam, was 25 years old when he received his call and vision.
2. He was taken up in vision onto a hill called Moriah.
3. In vision he saw a cavern in a hill, a sacred vault in the bowels of the earth. The cavity was symbolized as being a container for sacred treasures, like an holy ark, and it had a lid on it.
4. In vision, Enoch perceived a shiny gold plate containing unknown engravings and symbols.
5. He recognized the letter ‘M’ upon the gold plate, which designated the name of the hill.
6. He further saw the sacred name of God, which had been lost to all mankind, and he was commissioned by Deity to preserve this knowledge.
7. He foresaw that a flood would come to destroy all mankind. Therefore, he felt it was his duty to preserve the Sacred Mystery.
8. He placed two pillars inside the hill:
 - a. One of marble upon which, written in Egyptian hieroglyphics, were found the historical events connected with the tower of Babel, and
 - b. One of brass, which contained the history of creation, and the Secret Mysteries. These records were placed in the hill along with the treasure of the gold plate.
9. This brass pillar had a metal ball on its top, within which were contained maps, and directions of the world and of the universe, and which also acted as a sort of oracle.
10. Enoch then placed a stone lid, or slab, over the cavity into the hill.
11. Enoch predicted that on the other side of the deluge an Israelitish descendant would discover anew the sacred buried treasure.
12. As predicted after the flood, a great king, named Solomon, came to power and desired to build a sacred house for the in-dwelling of the divine presence.
13. Solomon and his builders, the Masons, while building and excavating for the temple at Mt. Moriah, discovered the cavern and the sacred treasure.
14. After three attempts to obtain the treasure, they were finally successful. Those Masons were very rejoiceful upon receiving these preserved Mysteries.

15. But three wicked men intervened and committed a horrible crime. They attempted to force one of the Masons, one of the faithful Masons who had discovered the treasure, Hiram Abif; or Hiram, the widow's son, to reveal the hiding place and the contents of the hidden treasure.
16. He would not reveal his knowledge and therefore they killed him.
17. While being slain, Hiram, with uplifted hands, cried out, 'Oh Lord, My God, is there no help for the widow's son?' This has since become a general Masonic distress call.
18. Then three loyal Masons, seeking revenge, pursued the three evil ones.
19. One of the three faithful Masons overtook one of the arch-villains. He was asleep with his sword, or knife, nearby.
20. The Mason slew the villain with his own knife by cutting off his head.
21. In Masonic ceremonies, the words 'strike off his head' were employed.
22. Also in Masonic ceremonies, in revolutionary France, the reenacting of the killing of this villain, the tyrant's name was King Phillippe le Bel.
23. The loyal Mason was rewarded by King Solomon.
24. The recovered treasures then became part of the temple treasury. It consisted of the brass records, the gold plates, the metal ball, the breast plate and the urim and thummim.

“Such is the Masonic legend of the Secret Doctrine, or the sacred treasure in the sacred hill, or the treasure of the widow's son.

“*The parallels of Joseph Smith and the history of Mormonism [with the Masonic Legend of Enoch] are so unmistakable, that to explain them only as coincidence would be ridiculous [emphasis added]. Joseph Smith was named Enoch, even by God.²⁵ He was 25 when he brought forth his sacred record. His sacred record was buried in the hill by a man who had the initial 'M.'* There were gold plates containing the mysteries of God. They were also in Egyptian hieroglyphics or some Egyptian form. There were brass plates, which also contained an account of the creation of the world. There was another record which contained an account of the tower of Babel. The cavity in the hill, and the hill and the cavity Joseph both saw in vision, was covered with a stone lid. The other treasures in the stone box were the breastplate, the urim and thummim, as well as the round metal ball which served as a director and was called the Liahona.

“Joseph Smith also claimed to be an Israelite, and he too made several fruitless attempts at getting the treasure when he first saw it. Joseph Smith had three witnesses to the Book of Mormon and the record itself bears witness that an arch-villain named Laban was thwarting the availability and accessibility of the sacred records, had his head cut off by his own sword. This prophet also built temples for the in-dwelling of God's spirit.”²⁶

25. See D&C 77:1–2. That Joseph Smith defined himself as Enoch is also discussed in chapter 9 which deals with Joseph Smith's *Inspired Version* of the Bible under *Genesis, Chapters 6 and 7*.

26. Dr. Reed C. Durham, Jr., “Is There No Help For the Widow's Son?,” a Presidential paper delivered to the Mormon History Association in April 1974, published in the book *No Help For the Widow's Son* (Nauvoo, IL: Martin Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 25–27.

From this analysis it seems that Joseph Smith must have consciously patterned his own story after that of the Enoch of Masonry. But how could Joseph have gotten familiar with this legend since he was not yet a Mason? Parts of this Legend of Enoch had become “widely popularized in New York State”²⁷ through the publication of the *Freemason’s Monitor*, by Thomas S. Webb in 1802.²⁸ He may have also become familiar with this legend through his older brother Hyrum. “Hyrum received the first degrees of Masonry in Mount Moriah Lodge No. 112 of Palmyra New York, at about the same time that Joseph was being initiated into the presence of God and angels and was being entrusted with the sacred gold plates.”²⁹ Another item of interest is that the murdered William Morgan’s widow, Lucinda Pendleton Morgan Harris, became a follower of Joseph Smith. And in 1838 she became one of Joseph’s polygamous wives while the Smith’s were living in her home at Far West, Missouri.³⁰

The Masonic Legend of Enoch concludes with the murder of Hiram Abif, the hero of modern Masonry. Hiram Abif, a Mason, was murdered for not revealing “the hiding place and the contents of the hidden treasure.”³¹ While he was being slain Hiram lifted up his hands and cried “Oh Lord, My God, is there no help for the widow’s son?” His cry became the universal Masonic call of distress, to be used in times of dire emergency. Dr. Durham continues his analysis of the parallels of this legend to the story of Joseph Smith by saying,

“Now these parallels, dramatic as they seem, still do not represent the strangest part of the story. All of these aspects of the legend seem transformed into the history of Joseph Smith, so much so that even it appears to be a kind of symbolic acting out of Masonic lore.

“But there is a point in this drama where the action goes beyond metaphor and the symbol merges into a tragic reality. This has to do, of course, with the death of Hiram Abif in the legend and the martyrdom of Joseph Smith. In June Joseph Smith gave himself up to be imprisoned and on June 27, 1844, a mob stormed the little Carthage jail. Hyrum was killed instantly and John Taylor seriously wounded. Joseph Smith, Master Mason and widow’s son, went to the window and with upraised hands, commenced giving the Masonic distress call to fraternal Masons who were present in the mob: ‘Oh, Lord, My God....’ He was unable to complete his plea and fell out the window to his death.

“How does a Mormon historian interpret Joseph Smith and the Masonic Enoch legend? The parallels demand an answer. Was Joseph Smith the fruition of Enoch’s prophecy? Was this an extreme ‘grabbing on’ by the Prophet? Or did mysterious and divine, even magical, forces attach themselves to him? Can anyone deny that Masonic influence on Joseph Smith and the Church, either before or after his personal Masonic membership? The evidence demands comments.”³²

27. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 66n.

28. The “Legend of Enoch” portion of this *Freemason’s Monitor* is reprinted in Tanner, *Mormonism, Magic and Masonry*, pp. 77ff.

29. Durham, “No Help For the Widow’s Son,” p. 15.

30. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, pp. 459–460.

31. Durham, “No Help For the Widow’s Son,” p. 26.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

Summary and Conclusion

We have shown that the ideas which undergird the Book of Mormon were widespread in New England in the 1820s. We have also shown that Joseph Smith had ready access to popular books which laid out these ideas in great detail, two of which he confessed a knowledge of in later years. Important parallels to these works are found in the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith also owned a copy of the King James Version Apocrypha, certain phrases and concepts of which are also found in the Book of Mormon. Finally, one scholar concludes that many striking details of the Masonic Legend of Enoch “seem transformed into the history of Joseph Smith, so much so that even it appears to be a kind of symbolic acting out of Masonic lore.”

Each of these sources seem to find clear expression in the Book of Mormon and the life of Joseph Smith. It would seem that his vivid imagination gathered material from a variety of sources and then spun its own story. This would explain the amusing stories which his mother recalled.

“Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of traveling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.”³³

Remember, Joseph provided these family recitals three years before supposedly receiving the Book of Mormon plates. Indeed, some of his later work similarly reflects a variety of other influences which he picked up along the way.³⁴ But apart from his demonstrated imagination, there is another “magic” ingredient which helped Joseph pull all of this together—the *supernatural*.

Joseph Smith: Really a “New Age” Prophet. You will recall that Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon by placing a “peep-stone” in a hat and then pulling the brim up tight around his face in order to exclude all light. And in that darkness his stone would unfold its story. In today’s New Age movement this practice is called “channeling;” messages from the spirit world are “channeled” through a willing and adept human vessel who is the *medium*. There is a significant portion of our American population who are obsessed with this kind of spiritual “revelation” and there is a growing body of influential literature which has been produced in this way. Gary Kah has documented some of this channeled material in his recent book *The Demonic Roots of Globalism*.³⁵ Another New Age best-seller is *A Course in Miracles*, which was channeled by

33. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 85.

34. For example, his later study of languages taught him that the Hebrew for “God”—*Elohim*—had a plural ending, which actually connotes a sense of expansiveness, as in *mayim*, which means “waters,” such as an ocean. Instead, this plural ending got Joseph thinking about a multiplicity of Gods and contributed to his concept of a plurality of Gods in his *Book of Abraham* in 1835. The *Book of Abraham* will be discussed in chapter 10 as part of the *Pearl of Great Price*. Another example would be his infatuation with the secret rituals of Masonry in Nauvoo, which he then “restored” and brought into his church.

35. Gary Kah, *The Demonic Roots of Globalism*, (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House, 1995).

Helen Schucman, a self-proclaimed atheist before her experience with this book.³⁶

New Agers, therefore, have naturally identified with Joseph Smith's occult techniques and philosophy. They have been quick to see elements of ancient Gnostic doctrine in his writings to which his followers remain oblivious. After all, students of Gnosticism should be among the best qualified to make these kinds of assessments. One example is Gnostic student Harold Bloom who makes a number of observations regarding Joseph Smith in his *The American Religion*. He comes to the following conclusion. "The God of Joseph Smith is a daring revival of the God of some of the Kabbalists and Gnostics, prophetic sages who, like Smith himself, asserted that they had returned to the true religion...*Mormonism is a purely American Gnosis, for which Joseph Smith was and is a far more crucial figure than Jesus could be*" (emphasis added).³⁷

Which Master Was the Real Source of Joseph Smith's Power? Joseph Smith certainly had an ample supply of raw material from which to construct the Book of Mormon from the popular literature and theories of his day. And no doubt his active imagination played an important role—if not his intelligence—for his own wife once confessed that "Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon."³⁸ But when he placed his face in that hat the "magic" would begin to do its work. And its result was the Book of Mormon.

It is clear that demonic forces used Joseph Smith as a channel to produce this book. The massive heresy it promotes certainly could have never originated in the mind of our holy God. Joseph had already filled himself with many theories and their accompanying data. And he was a more than willing vessel. What he lacked in intelligence was more than offset by the spiritual forces which propelled him. These forces heightened his senses and provided a seemingly coherent outlet for the expression of his imagination. But even Joseph Smith himself may have never clearly discerned the *real* master he was serving.

36. Dr. Helen Schucman, *A Course in Miracles*, second edition, (Glen Ellen, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1976). See also the companion book by Robert Skutch, *Journey Without Distance: the Story Behind A Course in Miracles*, (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1984).

37. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1992), p. 123, as cited in Lance S. Owens, "Joseph Smith: America's Hermetic Prophet," *Gnosis Magazine*, Spring 1995, p. 57.

38. Emma Smith during an interview with her son, Joseph Smith III, in 1879, *RHC* 3:357.