

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



Edited by
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of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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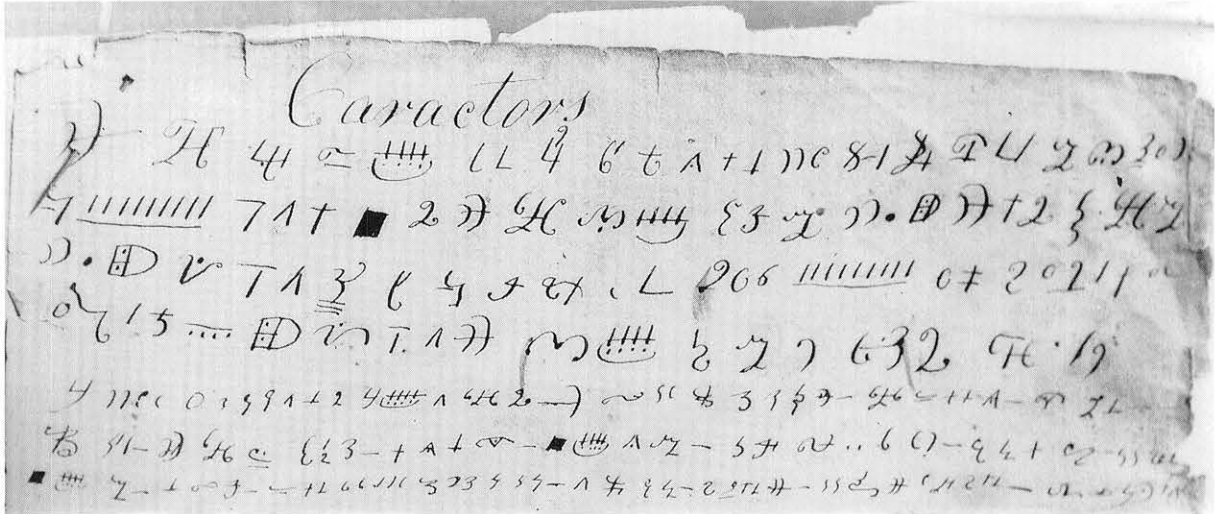
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This document represents the Book of Mormon characters on the gold plates. It may be the transcript taken by Martin Harris to Charles Anthon in 1828, or a copy of it. The heirs of David Whitmer sold this document to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This text is too short to be deciphered. Courtesy Library-Archives, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri.

text known as the Anthon Transcript that contains seven horizontal lines of characters apparently copied from the plates. David WHITMER, who once owned the document, said it was this text that Martin Harris showed to Charles Anthon. However, this claim remains uncertain because the transcript does not correspond with Anthon's assertion that the manuscript he saw was arranged in vertical columns. Even if the document is not the original, it almost certainly represents characters either copied from the plates in Joseph Smith's possession or copied from the document carried by Harris. Twice in late 1844, after the Prophet's martyrdom, portions of these symbols were published as characters that Joseph Smith had copied from the gold plates—once as a broadside and once in the December 21 issue of the Mormon newspaper *The Prophet* (see MAGAZINES). In 1980 a document surfaced that seemed to match Anthon's description and appeared to be the original Anthon Transcript. But in 1987, Mark W. Hofmann admitted that he had forged it (see FORGERIES).

Harris's visit with scholars was more than just an interesting sidelight in the history of Mormonism. By his own report, Harris returned to Harmony convinced that the characters were genuine. Thereafter, he willingly invested his time and resources to see the Book of Mormon published. Moreover, the Prophet, Harris himself, and later generations of Latter-day Saints have viewed his visit as a fulfillment of Isaiah 29:11–12, which

speaks of “a book that is sealed” being delivered to “one that is learned” who could not read it (*PJS* 1:9; cf. 2 Ne. 27:6–24; see also BOOK OF MORMON, BIBLICAL PROPHECIES ABOUT). His efforts apparently encouraged Joseph Smith in the initial stages of the translation. The Anthon Transcript is also important to subsequent generations as an authentic sample of characters that were inscribed on the gold plates and thus one of the few tangible evidences of their existence.

[See also Book of Mormon Language.]

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ANTICHRISTS

Antichrists are those who deny the divinity of JESUS CHRIST or essential parts of his gospel and actively oppose the followers of Christ or seek to destroy their faith.

The epistles of John explicitly condemn as antichrists those with a lying spirit who deny that Jesus is the Christ and deny the physical resurrection. Antichrists are to be notably active in the last days (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 1:7).

The Book of Mormon profiles many subtle and sophisticated aspects of antichrist characters, though the text explicitly refers to only one of them as antichrist.

Sherem (c. 540 B.C.) rejected the prophetic Christian teachings of the Nephite prophets, arguing that belief in the coming Christ perverted the law of Moses. He employed several archetypical arguments and methods, claiming that no one could know of things to come, including the coming of Christ. When confronted, Sherem asserted that if there were a Christ he would not deny him, but he knew “there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be,” thus contradicting his own argument that no one could “tell of things to come.” Demanding a sign of divine power, Sherem was stricken by God, and then confessed that he had been deceived by the DEVIL in denying the Christ (Jacob 7:1–23).

Nehor (c. 91 B.C.), a practitioner of PRIEST-CRAFT, preached and established a church to obtain riches and worldly honor and to satisfy his pride. He taught that God had created everyone, had redeemed everyone, and that people need not “fear and tremble” because everyone would be saved. Furthermore, he said priests should be supported by the people. Nehor attacked and killed a defender of the true doctrine of Christ, and was tried before Alma₂ and executed (Alma 1:2–16). He was not executed for being an antichrist, but for having enforced his beliefs “by the sword.”

Korihor (c. 74 B.C.) was an extremist, rejecting all religious teachings, even to the point of not posturing either as a defender of traditions or as a reformer of corrupted religious practices. He was labeled “Anti-Christ” because he taught that there was no need for a Christ and that none would come. He described the religious teachings of the church as foolish traditions designed to subject the people to corrupt and lazy priests. In a dramatic confrontation with the Nephite chief judge, and with the prophet Alma₂, Korihor claimed that one cannot know anything that cannot be seen, making knowledge or prophecy of future events impossible. He ridiculed all talk of visions, dreams, and the mysteries of God. He called belief in sin, the atonement of Christ, and the remission of sins a derangement of the mind caused by foolish reli-

gious traditions. He denied the existence of God and, after demanding a sign as proof of his existence, was struck dumb. After Alma accused him of possessing a lying spirit, Korihor confessed that he had been deceived by Satan, had taught words and doctrines pleasing to the carnal mind, and had even begun to believe them himself (Alma 30:6–60).

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ANTI-MORMON PUBLICATIONS

Anti-Mormonism includes any hostile or polemic opposition to Mormonism or to the Latter-day Saints, such as maligning the founding prophet, his successors, or the doctrines or practices of the Church. Though sometimes well intended, anti-Mormon publications have often taken the form of invective, falsehood, demeaning caricature, prejudice, and legal harassment, leading to both verbal and physical assault. From its beginnings, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members have been targets of anti-Mormon publications. Apart from collecting them for historical purposes and in response to divine direction, the Church has largely ignored these materials, for they strike most members as irresponsible misrepresentations.

Few other religious groups in the United States have been subjected to such sustained, vitriolic criticism and hostility. From the organization of the Church in 1830 to 1989, at least 1,931 anti-Mormon books, novels, pamphlets, tracts, and flyers have been published in English. Numerous other newsletters, articles, and letters have been circulated. Since 1960 these publications have increased dramatically.

A major reason for hostility against the Church has been its belief in extrabiblical REVELATION. The theological foundation of the Church rests on the claim by the Prophet Joseph SMITH that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and angels appeared to him and instructed him to restore a DISPENSATION of the gospel.

Initial skepticism toward Joseph Smith’s testimony was understandable because others had made similar claims to receiving revelation from