

# 1: INTRODUCTORY PAGES OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

## Interesting Points about the Text, Structure, and Messages of the Title Page

Welcome to your renewed study of the Book of Mormon. May this be the most rich and rewarding experience you have ever had while studying this sacred text. And, most importantly, may it help you build and strengthen enduring faith in Jesus Christ.

Take a few minutes to meet the Title Page of the Book of Mormon. It will give you a helpful and impressive overview of the contents and purposes of the Book of Mormon. The Title Page has been printed, with slight modifications, as the opening page of every full edition of the Book of Mormon since it first came off the press in March, 1830.

### **When was the Title Page translated?**

While it is the first page that readers generally encounter in the Book of Mormon, it was not the first page translated by Joseph Smith. In fact, Joseph Smith once remarked that “the Title Page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the *very last leaf*, on the left hand side” of the plates of Mormon.<sup>1</sup> Because the Small Plates of Nephi (1 Nephi–Words of Mormon) were translated during the month of June, 1829, at the Peter Whitmer home, in Fayette, New York, and the plates of Mormon (containing Mosiah–Moroni) had been translated beforehand during April–May 1829, in Harmony, Pennsylvania, Joseph’s statement means that the Title Page was translated right after he had completed translating the book of Moroni, and just before he commenced translating the book of 1 Nephi.

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<sup>1</sup> [“History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\],” p. 34, \*The Joseph Smith Papers\*](#), accessed December 30, 2019, online at [josephsmithpapers.org](http://josephsmithpapers.org).

## Who wrote the Title Page?

The Title Page is really more Moroni's Title Page than Mormon's. The Title Page states that the Book of Mormon was being "sealed up and hid up unto the Lord ... sealed by the hand of Moroni." It also mentions that it includes Moroni's abridgment of the book of Ether, about the people of Jared. So the Title Page most probably was written, or at least given its final form, after Moroni had finished his work on the book of Ether, sometime between AD 400 and 421 (see Mormon 8:6 and Moroni 10:1). Indeed, the presentation of the Title Page found in the third edition of the Book of Mormon, printed in 1840 under the direction of Joseph Smith, ends with an explicit attribution of this text to Moroni. See Figure 1.

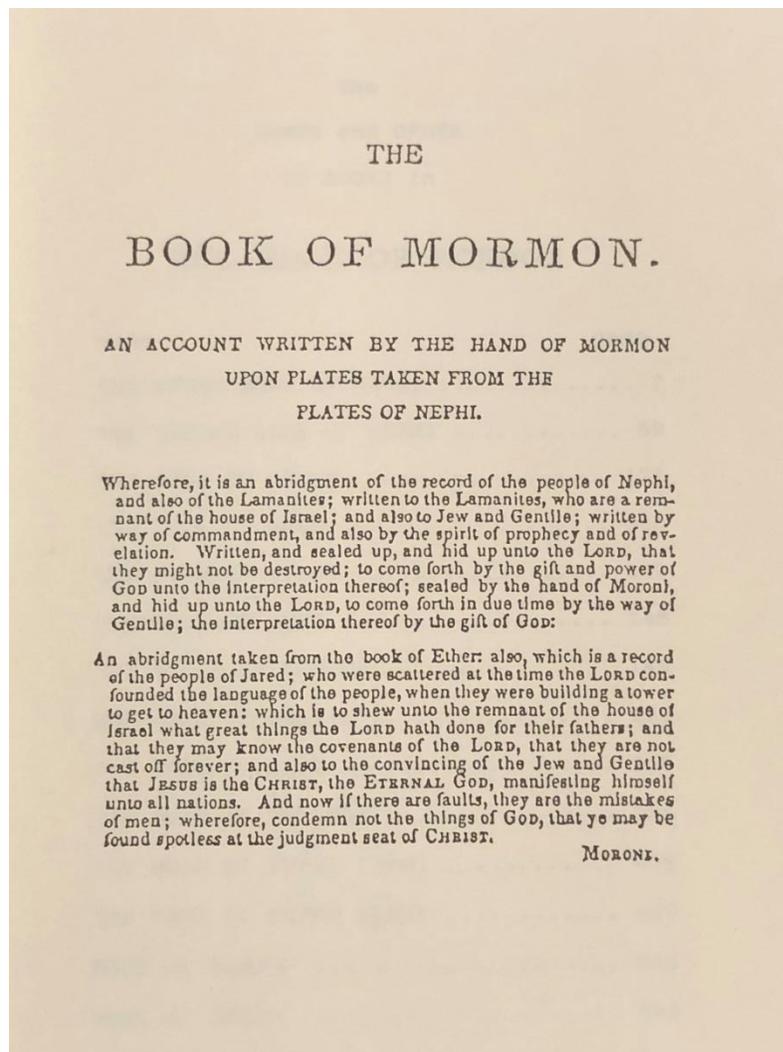


Figure 1 Title Page of the 1840 Edition of the Book of Mormon.

Of course, Mormon's abridging hand and purposes are still clearly reflected in the Title Page, as Moroni had no doubt worked closely with his father on this massive research project, as well as the extensive source-selection process that it surely required. Perhaps the two of them had even discussed how the record should be finished and what declarations the sealing inscription of the Title Page should include. Readers may recall, for example, that Mormon had promised to later include the story of the Jaredites in his book (see Mosiah 28:17–19). It is quite possible that Mormon eventually charged Moroni with the duty of abridging and including the book of Ether because he knew that he would not be able to get around to finishing that part of the project.

While Moroni mentions himself by name in the Title Page as the one who would seal the record so that it could come forth in the Lord's time and way, it is impressive how much more Moroni honors his noble father, who had died courageously in about AD 385. After all, while Moroni *could* have called the book "The Book of Mormon and Moroni," he names it simply "The Book of Mormon." Furthermore, drawing no attention to his own significant contributions to the volume, Moroni credits his father exclusively, saying that the account was "written by the hand of Mormon."

[Click on this link for a beautiful and engaging video.](#) Its narration substantially draws from the wording of the Title Page to provide an overview of the Book of Mormon and the circumstances out of which the Title Page arose.

### **Where is the earliest copy of the Title Page to be found?**

The earliest copy of the Title Page would have been written by Oliver Cowdery at the very end of May, 1829, as Joseph finished dictating the translation of the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God. Unfortunately, that original transcription of the Title Page—along with three-quarters of the Book of Mormon's Original Manuscript—were either destroyed by water or mold in a time capsule in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House or have gone missing. Fortunately, the wording of the Title Page is triple-attested, thanks to an official legal document filed on June 11, 1829.

In 2005, a fantastic discovery was made in the Library of Congress, as people there were preparing to celebrate the bicentennial of Joseph Smith's birth in 1805. What they discovered was the application filed by Joseph Smith in a federal court in the northern district of New York to secure his copyright of the Book of Mormon. Attached to that copyright application was a printed version of the Title Page. (See Figure 2, made available by the Library of Congress. The front side of this printed page can be found, together with added notes, on [www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/title-page-of-book-of-mormon-circa-early-june-1829/1](http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/title-page-of-book-of-mormon-circa-early-june-1829/1).) It is the earliest printed page from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! It was folded long-ways (as legal papers

were folded and filed in that day), and it was dated with Joseph Smith's name on the back, making it officially certain that this application was completed and filed on June 11, 1829. That page would have been typeset only a few days earlier from the Original Manuscript, which had been translated by Joseph Smith and transcribed by Oliver Cowdery only about a week before that.

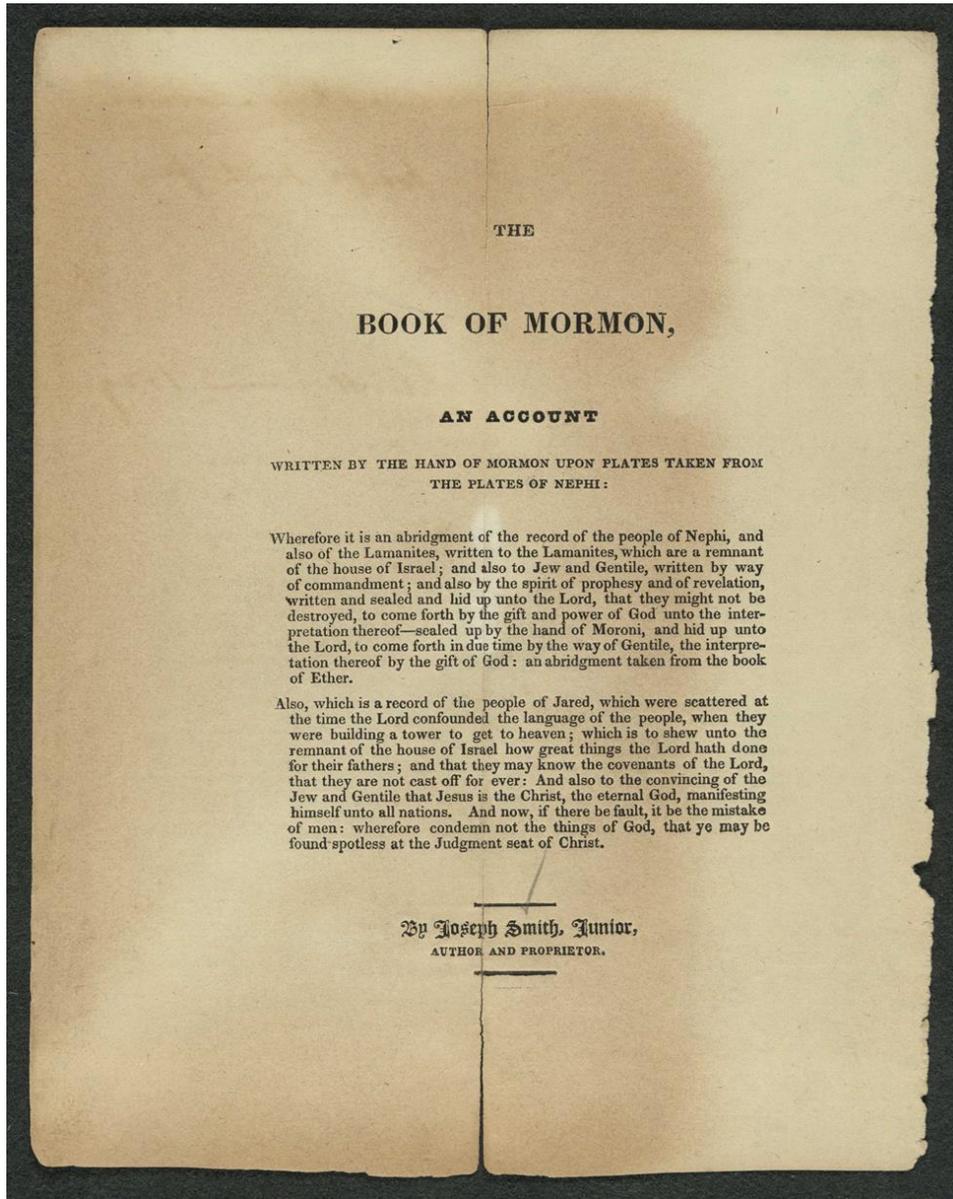
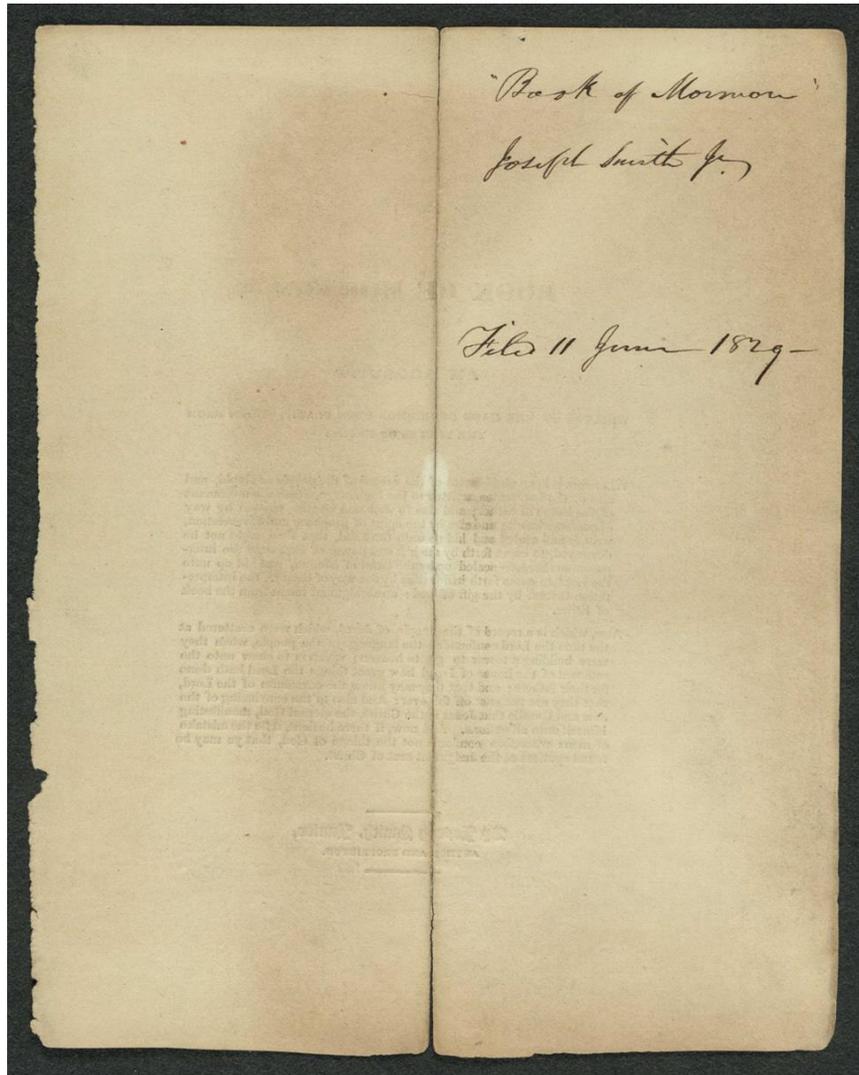


Figure 2 First printing of the Title Page, about June 8, 1829, front

This filed application form (Figure 4, in the Library of Congress) also includes a handwritten description of the Book of Mormon, which reproduces the full language of

the Title Page. That handwritten description would have been copied from the printed sheet onto the form to which the single printed sheet was attached (Figure 3: <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/title-page-of-book-of-mormon-circa-early-june-1829/2>).



*Figure 3 First printing of the Title Page, about June 8, 1829, back.*

Finally, a second copyright application form (See Figure 5 available at <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/copyright-for-book-of-mormon-11-june-1829/1>) was completed and signed by R. R. Lansing, the clerk of the court. That duplicate form also contains the full text of the Title Page, filled in by hand and likewise copied from the attached single printed sheet. Joseph Smith retained this copy of the copyright application, which he used in January 1830 in successfully demanding that

Abner Cole cease and desist from publishing in his newspaper parts of the Book of Mormon as it was being typeset in the Grandin print shop.

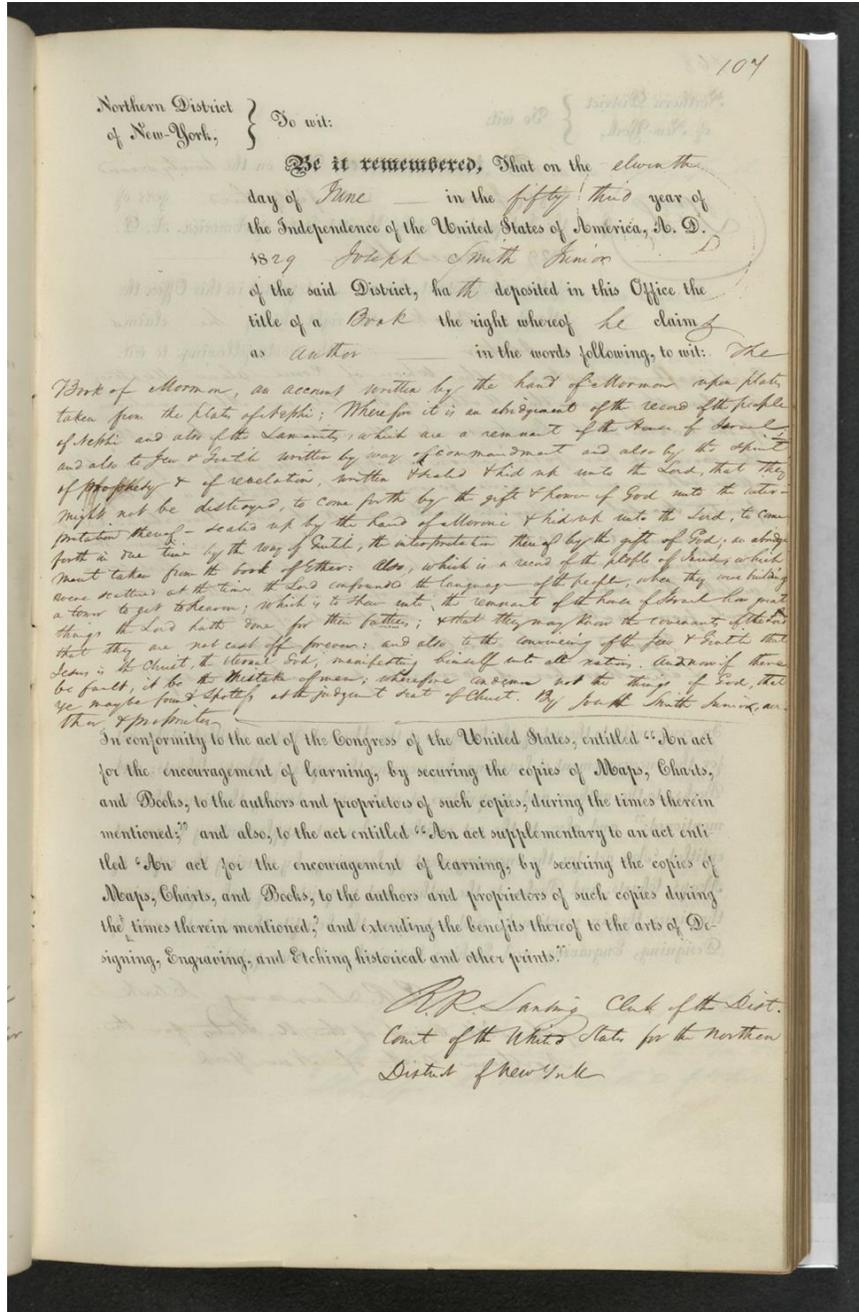


Figure 4 Copyright application for the Book of Mormon, filed June 11, 1829, containing a handwritten copy of the complete Title Page used as the legal description of the publication.



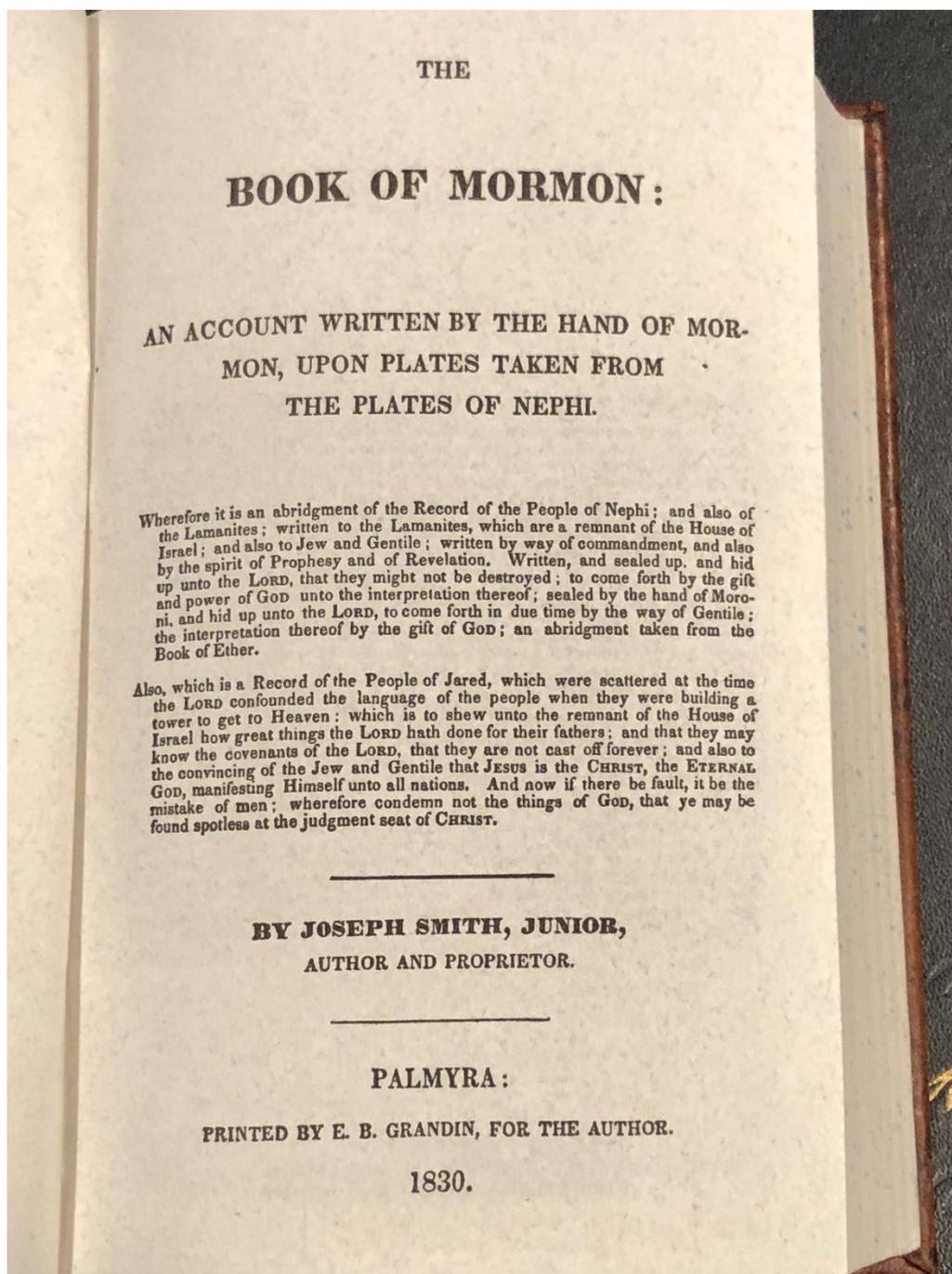


Figure 6 Title page from the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

**Does the Title Page refer to any words previously written by Mormon?**

Yes, it does. Mormon promised in Mosiah 28:17–19 that a record of the Jaredites (now known as the book of Ether) would be given “hereafter.” Thus, when Moroni added the book of Ether to the plates of Mormon, he was fulfilling his father’s prior editorial plan

and promise. Interestingly, Moroni's specific wording of the Title Page clearly draws attention to that fact. When discussing the book of Ether, the Title Page describes it as a record of the people of Jared

- 1 "who were **scattered**
- 2 at the time the Lord **confounded the language of the people,**
- 3 when they were **building a tower** to get to heaven" (Title Page).

Moroni appears to be quoting here, in reverse order, from the statements made by Mormon in Mosiah 28:17–19. These passages discuss King Mosiah's translation of a record that was discovered among a people whose history stretches

- 3 "back to the **building of the great tower,**
- 2 at the time the **Lord confounded the language of the people**
- 1 and they were **scattered** abroad" (Mosiah 28:17).

Reversing the order of a previous statement in this fashion was an ancient scribal practice often used to signal to the reader that the writer was intentionally quoting from or alluding back to that earlier text. Thus, the similarities between the title page and Mosiah 28:17 do not appear to be accidental. Such intertextual connections (several more of which will be discussed below) demonstrate that the wording of the Title Page itself deserves to be studied and admired.

### **How are the parts and words of the Title Page organized and structured?**

While many points can be—and several have previously been—raised about this interesting document, little attention has been paid to its intricate, balanced structures. The Title Page readily divides into two halves. The first half of the Title Page focuses on Mormon's main work in abridging the record of the people of Nephi (which was recorded on what is now known as the Large Plates of Nephi). Moroni's key work, mentioned in the second half, mainly deals with the record of the Jaredites. Perhaps this two-part structure was Moroni's way of signaling to his readers that he and his father Mormon had labored closely together on this massive archival publication project.

The two halves of the Title Page are constructed with four parallel parts. In each half,

- part 1 identifies the final written record as "an abridgment" of the "record" of certain people,
- part 2 announces the audiences to whom the final record was addressed and the purposes for which it was written,

- part 3 affirms the divine role involved in the record's production,
- and part 4 certifies that the work is of the Lord and sealed by authority, with the implications and consequences that follow therefrom.

Below, a proposed structure for the first half of the Title page is given (separated into parts A1, A2, A3, and A4), which is then followed by a structuring of the second half (separated into parts B1, B2, B3 and B4). After that, a detailed description of the proposed structure, along with an explanation of its particular elements or symbols (for example, p1-p2-p3, a1-a2-a3, a-b-c, i-ii-iii) will be given.

After the heading, "The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon Taken from the Plates of Nephi," the Title Page reads as follows:

A1 Wherefore it is an abridgment

- p1 of the record of the people Nephi,
- p2 and also of the Lamanites,

A2 Written to [audiences]

- a1 the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the House of Israel,
- a2 and also to Jew
- a3 and Gentile,

A3 Written

- by way of commandment; and also
- by the spirit of prophecy
- and of revelation,

A4 Written and [certifying that this is of the Lord]

- a sealed up and hid up unto the Lord, that they not be destroyed,
- b to come forth
- c by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—
- a Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord,
- b to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile,
- c the interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

B1 An abridgment [an additional abridgment]

- p3 from the book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared

w1 who were scattered at the time  
w2 when the Lord confounded the language of the people,  
w3 when they were building a tower to get to heaven [not a good thing]

B2 which is to show the remnant of the House of Israel [i.e., the Lamanites, audience a1]  
w3 what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and  
w2 that they may know the covenants of the Lord,  
w1 that they are not cast off forever [i.e., not scattered], and

B3 [Written] also to the convincing of the [a2] Jew and [a3] Gentile that  
Jesus is the [i] Christ,  
the eternal [ii] God,  
manifesting himself [iii] to all nations.

B4 [Implications of this being written of the Lord] And now  
if there are faults, they are the mistakes [iii] of men;  
wherefore condemn not the things of [ii] God,  
that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of [i] Christ.

### **How do the four main parts of each half related to each other?**

Looked at together, part A1 in the first half and B1 in the second half both introduce the texts of the Book of Mormon as abridgments, coming from underlying records that had been kept by or about three different groups of peoples: p1, p2, and p3, namely Nephites, Lamanites, and Jaredites.

In part A2, the first half of the Title Page then identifies the three audiences to whom the Book of Mormon was written, namely the Lamanite remnant of the House of Israel (a1), Jews (a2), and Gentiles (a3), while parts B2 and B3 in the second half state the lessons that these same three audiences should learn from the abridgement of those records.

Part A3 in the first half testifies that the writing of this record was influenced by divine involvement in three ways, namely by way of God's commandments, also by the spirit of prophecy, and by the spirit of revelation. In turn, parts B2 and B3 in the second half set forth two sets of three eternal roles of the Lord, namely (in B2) His great interventions into human affairs in ancient times, His covenants, and His corrections; and (in B3) that the record is ultimately intended to convince both Jewish and Gentile readers of the divine truths that Jesus is still today the Christ, the eternal God, manifesting Himself unto all nations.

Finally, the concluding lines in part A4 in the first half speak twice of the book being sealed, twice invoking the name of “the Lord,” twice mentioning the book “coming forth,” twice speaking of its “interpretation,” twice referring to the “gift of God,” and twice referring to the involvement of human agents, namely Moroni and the as-yet-unnamed Gentile or Gentiles. And ultimately, the concluding lines in part B4 in the second half link to elements in its immediately preceding part B3. Here are found, with their elements in reverse order, two final sets of three items: Jesus manifesting Himself to all nations of men [B3iii], even through possible faults attributable to the mistakes of men [B4iii]; accepting Jesus, the eternal God [B3ii] by not condemning the things of God [B4ii]; and being found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ [B4i], who is Jesus the Christ [B3i].

### **Does the Title Page refer to any words previously written by Moroni?**

On top of all that, in two places the verbal expressions in the Title Page are particularly characteristic of statements and concerns made previously by Moroni. As he began his first farewell in Mormon 8:9–20, Moroni used many terms that reoccur in the Title Page, including references to the solely remaining Lamanites (v. 9), knowing the true God (v. 10), condemning not the record because of imperfections (v. 12), hiding up the record by commandment of the Lord (v. 14), the power of God to bring it forth (v. 15), covenant people (v. 15), faults of man (v. 16), and the judgment of the Lord (v. 20).

In addition, four elements in the very last line in the Title Page at the close of part B4 (to be found “spotless” at the “judgment” “seat” of “Christ”) allude to words found at the very end of Moroni’s closing farewell in Moroni 10:33–34 (to be perfected and sanctified in “Christ,” “without spot,” before the “bar” of the eternal “judge”).

Moroni accomplishes all of this while concisely using—although in a different order—words from his father Mormon regarding the Jaredite record found in Mosiah 28:17: “an account of *the people* who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the *building* of the great *tower*, at the time *the Lord confounded the language of the people* and they were *scattered* abroad upon the face of all the earth.”

### **How many triads are found within the structure of the Title Page?**

While much can still be observed about this interesting document, it is clear that the Title Page is a complicated text. While drawing on earlier passages, it is a masterwork of clarity and efficiency. It is also intricately structured and elegantly and meticulously balanced. Simultaneously operating within its overall balanced two-half structure, its subsections often manifest a strong preference for triadic (three-part) structures, which appear nine times: Three of which at first are simple three-element lists (p1, p2, p3; a1, a2, a3; and A3); the next two of which are directly parallel statements (a-b-c, a-b-c in A4);

while the final four parts crescendo as two chiastic sets (B1 X B2 and B3 X B4), each of which is composed of two triplets, all culminating before the final judgment bar of Christ. Perhaps a tenth triad stanza is found in the three personal proper names standing at the very beginning of the Title Page: The Book of *Mormon*, An Account Written by the Hand of *Mormon*, Taken from the Plates of *Nephi*.

### **Why did Moroni write the Title Page?**

Obviously, the words and phrases of the Title Page have been carefully chosen and arranged. The Title Page clearly articulates the essentials of the Book of Mormon. It states the who, the what, the when, the why, the whence, and the wherefore of the sacred volume that it now introduces, or—as one may also state—that it was written to conclude. Certainly, producing this concluding summation took considerable time, keen deliberation, and intimate familiarity with the entire volume.

Moroni likely pondered and prayed over this text, especially as he wandered widely and kept himself out of harm's way during the twenty-one years after he had finished his work on the book of Ether. With this final one-page text in place, Moroni could rest assured that he had honorably completed the sacred assignment that his father Mormon had entrusted to him. As a result of his opening line in the Title Page which prominently mentions "the hand of Mormon," Moroni could well have foreseen that his father's name would become widely known among every nation, tongue, and people, and that Mormon would be seen as a prophet of God, a righteous leader of his people, and as a witness of Jesus Christ to all the world.

Moroni could also confidently place the Title Page as his protective and authoritative seal of approval upon this masterful book of scripture. Fortunately, solid documentary evidence of the Title Page has survived from the earliest stage in the publication of the Book of Mormon. Having this clearly inspired statement of purpose in front of them, readers can know, of a surety, the unambiguously good intent of the Book of Mormon, which was written unto the convincing of all people that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God, manifesting himself to all nations, so that people may know the mercies and covenants of the Lord, who desires all to come unto Him. This year, may the Title Page help readers everywhere better understand, enjoy, and embrace the truths of the Book of Mormon.

## Further Resources Listed Chronologically, with appreciation to Bryan Kerr

Ludlow, Daniel H. "The Title Page." In *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., 19–33. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988.

This article compares all major publications of the Book of Mormon Title Page before 1988 with the handwritten copyright application and the June 26, 1829 publication of the Title Page found in the *Wayne Sentinel*. Differences include punctuation, capitalization, and division into two or three paragraphs. Ludlow shows that in the 1837 publication of the Book of Mormon the clause, "An abridgement taken from the book of Ether" has been moved "from the last part of the first paragraph to the beginning of the second paragraph, bringing the two elements about the book of Ether together" (26). This adjustment may, potentially, avoid misreading the Book of Mormon's purpose as referring only to the book of Ether. In addition to minor changes in the English additions, Ludlow also states that "Some of the non-English editions of the title page have paragraphing different from that of the English editions" (27).

Rust, Richard Dilworth, "The Book of Mormon, Designed for Our Day: Annual FARMS Lecture." *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 2*, no. 1 (1990): 1–23.

This is a brilliantly written article. While not directly explaining the Title Page of the Book of Mormon, Rust nevertheless uses it as a prompt to discuss other topics. He focuses on five main literary techniques: *heroes*, *setting*, *action*, *supernatural beings*, and *ceremonial performance*.

Skousen, Royal, "The Original Book of Mormon Transcript." In *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, edited by John W. Welch, 9–12. Provo/Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS/Deseret Book, 1992.

Relevant to the Title Page, this brief piece notes: "Typical of the minor changes made in the Book of Mormon through its various printings, Joseph Smith in the 1837 edition changed this statement to read, 'If there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God.'"

Sperry, Sidney B., "Moroni the Lonely: The Story of the Writing of the Title Page to the Book of Mormon." *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 4*, no. 1 (1995): 255–259.

Sperry argues that Moroni wrote the Title Page on two separate occasions. Basing his ideas on the 1981 edition of paragraph separation, Sperry says, "It is quite likely that at this point Moroni wrote the first paragraph (as we now have it) of the page of the Book of Mormon" (257). He then goes on to suggest that Moroni "did not write the second paragraph of the title page at this time for the very good and sufficient reason that he had not yet abridged the book of Ether which is mentioned herein" (257). He even suggests that Moroni may have deposited the Book of Mormon in the Hill Cumorah after writing the first paragraph (as contained in the current edition of the Book of Mormon) and then went to retrieve it between 401 AD and 421 AD to write the second paragraph (258).

Tvedtnes, John A., "Who are the 'Gentiles'?" In *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*, 29–36. Redding, CA: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999.

This article argues that the term *Gentile(s)* in the title page of the Book of Mormon does not carry the modern connotation of non-Israelite, but instead refers to non-Ephraimites.

Williams, Clyde J., "More Light on Who Wrote the Title Page." *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 28–29, 70.

This short study advances evidence that Moroni wrote the entire Title Page of the Book of Mormon, based on the idea the redundancies were a way to "further illuminate the divine destiny of this important record." This study focuses on "two unusual words or word combinations that appear infrequently in the Book of Mormon" (29), namely *interpretation* and *sealed up*, as used by Moroni.

Nathaniel Hinckley Wadsworth, "Copyright Law and the 1830 Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2006): 77–99. Reprinted and updated as "Securing the Book of Mormon Copyright in 1829." In *Sustaining the Law: Joseph Smith's Legal Encounters*, edited by Gordon A. Madsen, et al., 71–92. Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2014).

John W. Welch, "Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten'," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 10–50, esp. 26–29, 47–48.