

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM

---



Edited by  
Daniel H. Ludlow

*The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure  
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Macmillan Publishing Company  
New York

Maxwell Macmillan Canada  
Toronto

Maxwell Macmillan International  
New York Oxford Singapore Sydney



Copyright Brigham Young University, 1992.

Archived at Book of Mormon Central by Permission.

———. *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 130–63. Salt Lake City, 1990.

Welch, John W., and Tim Rathbone. “The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information.” *F.A.R.M.S. Paper*. Provo, Utah, 1986.

JOHN W. WELCH  
TIM RATHBONE

---

## BOOK OF MORMON TRANSLATIONS

After the Prophet Joseph SMITH’s original translation of the Book of Mormon from the gold plates into English in 1829 and the return of those plates to the angel Moroni, no translations from English into other languages appeared until the 1850s. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Church produced translations of the Book of Mormon irregularly, often in groups of languages, and at widely separated intervals. However, in the 1970s and later, translations from the English text of the Book of Mormon became systematic and frequent.

Making the Book of Mormon and other STANDARD WORKS available in many languages is foreshadowed by the divine injunction “that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language” (D&C 90:11). As missions were opened on the continent of Europe in 1850 and 1851, Church leaders in many of the newly opened missions mounted simultaneous translation efforts. The Danish edition (1851), produced by Erastus Snow for the Scandinavian Mission from a Danish translation by Peter Olsen Hansen, was the first printed (see SCANDINAVIA, THE CHURCH IN). At the same time, John TAYLOR supervised translations into French by Curtis E. Bolton and German by George P. Dykes, while Lorenzo SNOW was working on the Italian edition and John Davis on a Welsh one. All of these appeared in 1852, and culminated with George Q. Cannon’s translation of the Book of Mormon into Hawaiian in 1855. No further translations were published for twenty years.

In 1875 Meliton G. Trejo and Daniel W. Jones produced the first translation of selections from the Book of Mormon into Spanish. This ninety-six-page document, comprising only the books of 1 and 2 Nephi, Omni, 3 Nephi, and Mormon, was the first partial translation and one of only two par-

tial printings of the Book of Mormon in book form at the time. (The other was the publication of 1 Nephi—Words of Mormon in the DESERET ALPHABET.) Trejo and James Z. Stewart completed a translation of the entire book into Spanish in 1886. The remainder of the nineteenth century produced three further translations: Swedish (1878), Maori (1889), and Dutch (1890). Sixteen more, including the first in Asian languages and several in South Pacific tongues, appeared between 1903 and 1977.

In 1971, in support of an expanding missionary program, the Church organized a Translation Services Department (see ORGANIZATION) to direct a systematic program of scripture translation. They began with the production of a large number of translations of *Selections from the Book of Mormon*, designed to place selected chapters in the hands of missionaries, general readers, and members as quickly as possible and to train translators. The *Selections*, chosen and approved by the FIRST PRESIDENCY and the QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES, were the same in all languages, and consisted of the following:

<i>Book</i>	<i>Chapters</i>
1 Nephi	1–7, 16–18
2 Nephi	1–4; 5:1–20; 9, 29, 31–33
Enos	all
Mosiah	2–5, 17, 18
Alma	5, 11, 12, 32, 34, 39–42
Helaman	13–16
3 Nephi	1, 8, 11–30
4 Nephi	all
Mormon	1, 4, 6–9
Moroni	all

This *Selections* volume is being progressively replaced by full translations. As of 1990, the entire Book of Mormon was available in 36 languages (including English), while *Selections* was available in 44 additional languages.

Retranslations of early editions began in 1952 with the second translation into Spanish. Subsequently, the Japanese, Italian, and German editions were retranslated; other retranslations appeared as *Selections* from 1980 on. With the issuance of the 1981 English edition of the Book of Mormon (see BOOK OF MORMON EDITIONS), the Church Translation Department began systematically reviewing all existing translations, setting pri-

orities for retranslation, and producing new editions more in conformity with the English format.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

“Book of Mormon Editions, Translated and Published.” *Deseret News 1989–90 Church Almanac*. Salt Lake City, 1988.  
*The Millennial Star*, Vols. 13–14 (1850–1851).

HUGH G. STOCKS

---

## BOOK OF MORMON WITNESSES

Beginning with the first edition of 1830, the Book of Mormon has generally contained two sets of testimonies—the “Testimony of Three Witnesses” and the “Testimony of Eight Witnesses.” When Joseph SMITH first obtained the GOLD PLATES, he was told to show them to no one. As translation progressed, he and those assisting him learned, both in the pages of the Book and by additional revelation, that three special witnesses would know, by the power of God, “that these things are true” and that several besides himself would see the plates and testify to their existence (Ether 5:2–4; 2 Ne. 27:12–13; D&C 5:11–13). The testimonies of the witnesses affirm that these things occurred.

The witnesses were men known for truthfulness and sobriety. Though each of the Three Witnesses was eventually excommunicated from the Church (two returned), none ever denied or retracted his published testimony. Each reaffirmed at every opportunity the veracity of his testimony and the reality of what he had seen and experienced.

A June 1829 revelation confirmed that Oliver COWDERY, David WHITMER, and Martin HARRIS would be the Three Witnesses (D&C 17). Soon thereafter, they, with Joseph Smith, retired to the woods near FAYETTE, NEW YORK, and prayed for the promised divine manifestation. The “Testimony of Three Witnesses” summarizes the supernatural event that followed, when an angel appeared and showed them the plates and engravings and they heard the Lord declare that the Book of Mormon was “translated by the gift and power of God.” They said that the same divine voice “commanded us that we should bear record of it.”

Joseph Smith’s mother later recounted Joseph’s great relief at no longer being the sole witness of the divine experiences of the restoration

(see LAW OF WITNESSES). That others had also seen an angel and “will have to testify to the truth of what I have said for now they know for themselves” relieved him of a great burden (Lucy Smith Preliminary Manuscript, Church Archives).

Soon afterward, at the Smith farm in New York, eight others were allowed to view and handle the plates: Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jr., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Sr., Hyrum Smith, and Samuel H. Smith. Their signed “Testimony of Eight Witnesses” reports that Joseph Smith showed these eight men the metal plates, which they “hefted” while turning the individual “leaves” and examining the engravings of “curious workmanship.” In 1829 the word *curious* carried the meaning of the Latin word for “careful,” suggesting that the plates were wrought “with care and art.” Five of these Eight Witnesses remained solidly with the Church; John Whitmer was excommunicated in 1838, and his brother Jacob Whitmer and brother-in-law Hiram Page then became inactive.

Most of these eleven witnesses were members of the large Smith and Whitmer families—families who had assisted in guarding and in translating the ancient record. Not surprisingly, other family members reported indirect contact with the plates and the translation. Young William Smith once helped his brother Joseph carry the plates wrapped in a work frock. Joseph’s wife Emma SMITH felt the pliable plates as she dusted around the cloth-covered record on her husband’s translating table. Burdened with daily chores and caring for her family and visitors working on the translation, Mother Whitmer (Peter Whitmer, Sr.’s, wife) was shown the plates by a heavenly messenger to assure her that the work was of God.

Martin Harris, a prosperous farmer of Palmyra, New York, who had long sought a religion fulfilling biblical prophecy, assisted with the translation previous to his experience as a witness. In 1828 he spent two months transcribing as Joseph Smith dictated the first major segment of Book of Mormon translation—116 handwritten pages. After Martin lost these pages, he wrote no more for the Prophet, but he later financed the publication of the book.

Oliver Cowdery was the main scribe for the Book of Mormon. A schoolteacher, he learned of the gold plates and the translation while boarding with Joseph Smith’s parents near Palmyra, New York. In early April 1829, Oliver walked from the