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The Title Page

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I am grateful to have been asked to discuss the title page of the Book of Mormon.^[1] I was both surprised and dismayed when I reviewed my book *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*—in which I consider each book in the Book of Mormon, chapter by chapter and verse by verse—to find that I did not discuss there or even mention the title page. As I reviewed other commentaries on the Book of Mormon, I found that, almost without exception, they begin with the first verse of the first chapter of 1 Nephi and end with the last verse of the tenth chapter of Moroni. I soon became convinced that the title page of the Book of Mormon is one of the least studied and least understood parts of this holy scripture. Articles and comments on the title page are indeed few and far between.

Perhaps more disturbing, some of us may have been applying a misleading personal interpretation to the origin and the meaning of some of the statements in the title page because of the lack of thoughtful consideration we have given to these statements. For example, one statement in the title page is quoted very frequently (and I believe correctly) as referring to the entire Book of Mormon: “Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.” Yet many people would say that in the present paragraphing of the title page that passage should refer only to Moroni’s abridgment of the book of Ether.

Now let me share with you the steps I followed in my study of the title page. First, I read and reread the following statement by Joseph Smith about the title page, which appears in the standard histories of the Church:

“I wish to mention here 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 collection or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated, the language of the whole running the same as all Hebrew writing in general; and that said title page is not by any means a modern composition, either of mine or of any other man who has lived or does live in this generation.”^[2]

Next, I obtained copies of the title pages from all major editions of the Book of Mormon—1830, 1837, 1840, 1852, 1879, 1920, and 1981. I noted that in the 1981 edition the text of the title page is divided into twelve major statements. I then compared the wording, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation of each of the twelve statements in all of the major editions. Later in this essay, I will share with you the results of these comparisons.

I also studied the earliest sources of the title page text. The earliest available source is the “printer’s manuscript,” which is largely in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery. It is now in the possession of the Community of Christ in Independence, Missouri. With assistance from the staff of the Church Historical Library in Salt Lake City, I obtained a copy of the title page from that manuscript. I have prepared a typewritten copy of that manuscript page, listing its text word-for-word and letter-by-letter. I will include that copy at a later point.

Furthermore, I obtained copies of the two other early documents which contain the title page. The first is a handwritten copy on the copyright application form of 11 June 1829, and the second is a printed copy from the 26 June 1829 *Wayne Sentinel*.

With all these copies gathered, let us now examine some of the items I have noted in analyzing the text of the Book of Mormon title page.

But first, let me propose an experiment. Below is a typewritten copy of the title page of the Book of Mormon as it appears in the printer’s manuscript. The spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are as shown.

Assume that (1) you are a typesetter working in a publishing house in 1830, and (2) you have the assignment to set this material in type after correcting obvious errors. Now go ahead, edit the material, and punctuate it into sentences and paragraphs.

“The Book of Mormon An account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi Wherefore it is an abridgment of the record of the People of Nephi & also of the Lamanites written to the Lamanites which are a remnant of the house of Israel & also to Jew & Gentile written by way of commandment & also by the spirit

of Prophecy & of revelation written & sealed up & hid up unto the Lord that they might not be destroyed to come forth by the gift & power of God unto the interpretation thereof sealed by the hand of Moroni & hid up unto the Lord to come forth in due time by the way of Gentile the interpretation thereof by the gift of God an abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also which is a record of the People of Jared which were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the People when they were building a tower to get to heaven which is to shew unto the remnant of the house of Israel how great things the Lord hath done for their fathers & that they may know the covenants of the Lord that they are not cast off forever & also to the convincing of the Jew & Gentile that Jesus is the Christ the Eternal God manifesting himself unto all Nations & now if there be fault it be the mistake of men wherefore condemn not the things of God that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ—By Joseph Smith Junour, Author & proprietor”

How did you do? Did you edit it in the same way it was edited for the 1830 edition? The possibility that you did it differently is quite high. You saw that the copy of the title page in the printer’s manuscript contains virtually no punctuation marks, but you also saw that it is capitalized quite carefully. The experiment you just completed is what the typesetter for E. B. Grandin had to do. According to the following statement by B. H. Roberts in *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, the foreman in the Grandin printing establishment, John H. Gilbert, claimed that he was largely responsible for the punctuation and capitalization (possibly not all) of the first edition, which would include determining the sentences and the paragraphs: “It is said by Mr. Gilbert, Grandin’s foreman printer and chief compositor on the *Book of Mormon*, that the manuscript as sent to him was neither capitalized nor punctuated, and that the capitalization and punctuation in the first edition was done by him.”^[3]

Previously I mentioned two early documents of the title page text. The earliest of these two versions is the copy of the copyright application of 11 June 1829 (see figure 1). You will note that in the space on the application form for the title of the book, the Prophet Joseph Smith included all of the text of what we now call the title page. You will note also that the text is written with some capitalization and a considerable degree of punctuation but is not divided into paragraphs.

The later of these two documents is the 26 June 1829 *Wayne Sentinel* (see figure 2). You will note that the text is separated into the following clauses, sentences, and paragraphs:

1. An introduction: “The Book of Mormon, an account, written by the hand of Mormon upon plates, taken from the plates of Nephi.”
2. A first paragraph beginning, “Wherefore it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi,” and ending, “an abridgment taken from the book of Ether.”
3. A second paragraph beginning, “Also, which is a record of the people of Jared,” and ending, “that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ.”

The *Wayne Sentinel* was published by the E. B. Grandin publishing concern. Undoubtedly this 26 June 1829 version reflects the punctuation and paragraphing that had already been determined for the first printing of the Book of Mormon.

It is pretended that it will be published as soon as the translation is completed. Meanwhile we have been furnished with the following, which is represented to us as intended for the title page of the work—we give it as a curiosity :—

“ The *Book of Mormon*, an account, written by the hand of Mormon upon plates, taken from the plates of Nephi :—

“ Wherefore it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, written to the Lamanites, which are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile; written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy, and of revelation; written and sealed and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed,—to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—sealed up by the hand of Mormon, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by the way of Gentile—the interpretation thereof by the gift of God: an abridgment taken from the book of Ether.

“ Also, which is a record of the people of Jared, which were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to Heaven; which is to shew unto the remnant of the house of Israel how great things the Lord hath done for their fathers: and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever: and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations. And now, if there be fault, it be the mistake of men: wherefore condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ.—By JOSEPH SMITH, Junior, Author and Proprietor ”

Figure 2. Text of the title page as printed in the *Wayne Sentinel*, 26 June 1829

You will notice (see figure 3) in the reproduction of the title page in the first edition (1830) that the wording, the essential punctuation, and the paragraphing are identical to that in the article already published in the *Wayne Sentinel*. These two versions established the pattern of publishing the title page in three sections: a brief introduction and two paragraphs. This same format has been used in all subsequent editions published in English.

One change was made in the title page in the second edition (1837). The clause “An abridgment taken from the book of Ether” was 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. This clause has remained in this position in all subsequent editions in English, including both those of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and those of the Community of Christ.

The 1840 edition of the title page is virtually identical to the 1837 edition, except that the word *Moroni* appears after the second paragraph. The name *Moroni* also is printed in the same place both in the LDS edition of 1852 and in the RLDS editions of 1874 and 1908.

The only changes between the 1830 and the 1981 editions in the language or spelling are shown in the following list:

1830 Edition

which [are a remnant]
[spirit of] prophesy
by the way of Gentile
which [were scattered]
[Which is to] shew
how [great thing the Lord hath done]
if there be fault, it be
the mistake of men
judgment seat
By Joseph Smith, Junior, Author and
Proprietor

1981 Edition

who [are a remnant]
[spirit of] prophecy
by the way of the Gentile
who [were scattered]
[Which is to] show
what [great things the Lord hath done]
if there are faults they are
the mistakes of men
judgment-seat
Translated by Joseph Smith Jun.

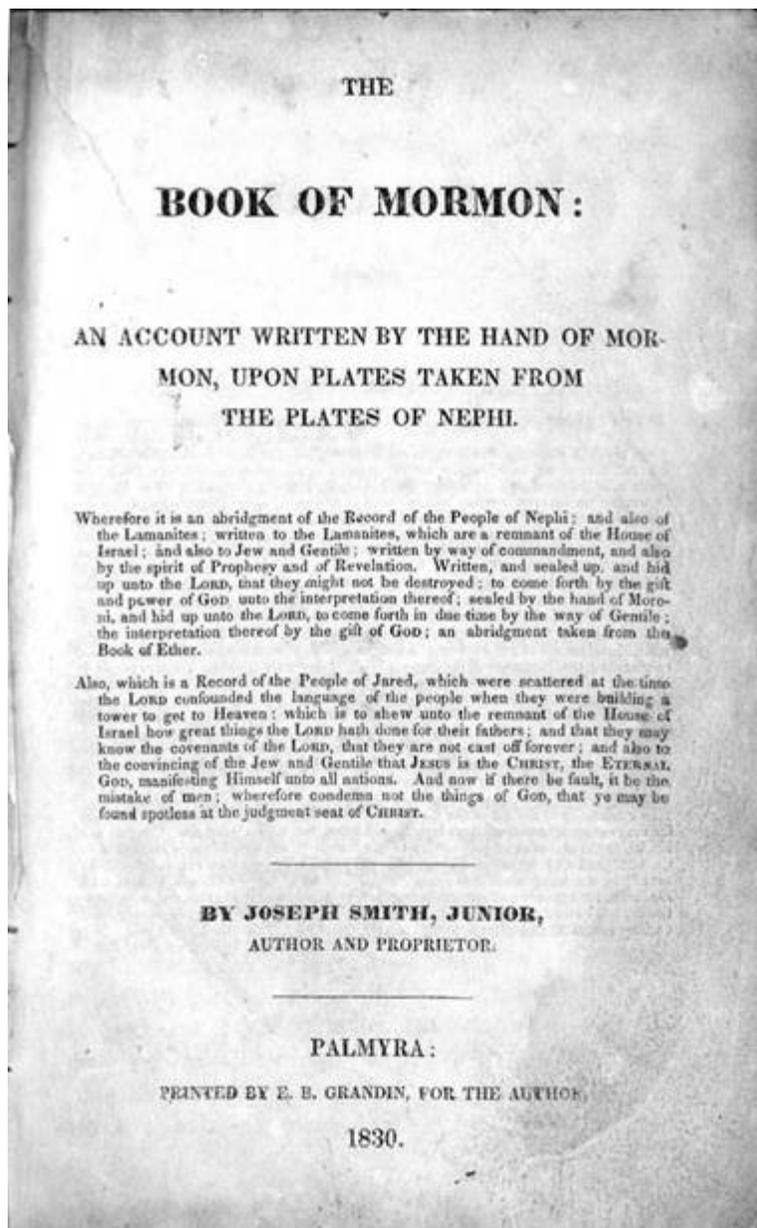


Figure 3. Title page of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon Courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University

Some of the non-English editions of the title page have paragraphing different from that of the English editions. The 1980 edition in Fijian has four paragraphs,

and the Rarotongan edition has three paragraphs.

Interestingly, changing the number of paragraphs might lead to additional insights as we ask such questions as: (1) *who* the author is (or who the authors are) of the various statements of the title page, and (2) *when* the various statements were written. For example, publishing the title page in two paragraphs and adding the word *Moroni* in some editions undoubtedly influenced virtually all early students of the Book of Mormon to conclude that Moroni was the only author of the title page. According to this reasoning, one would conclude that the title page must have been written after about A.D. 385 when Moroni received the plates from his father, Mormon. This view has been expressed by different scholars, including Dr. Sidney B. Sperry, who concluded that Moroni wrote the entire title page at two distinctively different times in his life:

“In the opinion of the writer this statement [Mormon 8:12–13] was Moroni’s original farewell. A careful study of what precedes and what follows these words must lead one to realize the possibility of this being so. Verse 13 is a logical point for a chapter division.

“It is quite likely that at this point Moroni wrote the first paragraph (as we now have it) of the title page of the Book of Mormon.

““Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites—Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile—Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the

gift of God.’

“He 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 therein.”^[4]

Dr. Sperry then reviewed the contents of Mormon 8:14–9:37 and added:

“There may be those who will prefer to believe that this is the point at which Moroni wrote the first paragraph of the title page rather than at Mormon 8:13, as I have advocated. But no matter—Moroni finds that he still has space left on the plates upon which he may write something of value. He ponders the matter and finally decides on making an abridgment of the Book of Ether for the benefit of future generations. . . .

“Having finished his task of abridgment, Moroni then proceeded to add another paragraph to his title page. This was a logical necessity. Thus we read:

“An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven—Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also, to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations—And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.”^[5]

According to Dr. Sperry, Moroni then proceeded to give us the text now found in Moroni chapters 1 through 10.

Virtually all other scholars and students of the Book of Mormon who have written commentary about the title page have reached exactly the same two conclusions: (1) the title page was written entirely by Moroni, and (2) he wrote it at two different times in his life.

Just as a matter of interest, however, let us change the paragraphing of the title page into a brief title (The Book of Mormon) and six paragraphs that we will number 1 through 6 for ease of reference in this discussion. The title page then would appear as follows:

The Book of Mormon

1. “An account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites. Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile. Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation. Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed, to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof.

2. “Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile, the interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

3. “An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven.

4. “Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers, and that they may know the covenants of the Lord that they are not cast off forever.

5. “And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.

6. “And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.”

Let us now reread the entire title page word-for-word but with this new paragraphing and consider additional possibilities as to the *person* who might have written certain paragraphs and as to the *time* when those paragraphs might have been written.

The brief four-word title (The Book of Mormon) has appeared on the title page of all editions.

In reading the first paragraph, let us change our mind-set and assume that Mormon wrote it rather than Moroni. After all, Mormon was the major abridger or compiler of the writings we have in our present Book of Mormon. Surely, he would have been justified in writing a preface of some type for his work.

“An account, written by the hand of Mormon upon plates, taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites.

“Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel, and also to Jew and Gentile. Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation. Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord,

that they might not be destroyed, to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof.”

Everything in that paragraph could reasonably and logically have been written by Mormon. Some might say that Mormon would have been too modest to include his own name. But at the time he would have written this paragraph, he was the *only* writer who had written on the plates that he refers to throughout the record as the “plates of Mormon.” Also, the word *Mormon* appears only twice on the entire title page: once in the four-word title, and once in the first paragraph of ninety-eight words. In Mosiah 18:30, however, Mormon used the word *Mormon* six times in the first forty-two words of the verse!

Let us now read the next paragraph, assuming as we do so that Moroni is its author. He has received the plates from his father and has engraved on the plates the text of Mormon chapters 8 and 9. Then he adds these words to the title page that his father had written:

“Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile, the interpretation thereof by the gift of God.”

These words obviously were written by Moroni. Therefore, the remainder of the title page also must have been written by Moroni, because he was the only one to engrave on the plates after his father, Mormon.

The assumption that Mormon wrote the first paragraph and Moroni wrote the second paragraph helps explain other difficulties that scholars have pointed out. Note, for example, the close parallels in wording and thought patterns between the last sentence of the first paragraph and the sentence now comprising the second paragraph of our illustration:

“Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed, to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof.

“Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile, the interpretation thereof by the gift of God.”

If Moroni had written both of these sentences, why would he have repeated himself so closely? But if Mormon wrote the first of these sentences and intended it to be the final sentence of his title page, could not Moroni logically have used almost the same wording in writing his sentence, which at that time he intended to be the final sentence of the title page?

As indicated earlier, Moroni definitely wrote the remainder of the title page *after* he had completed his abridgment of the plates of Ether. Notice the wording of the next sentence, which in our example forms one paragraph:

“An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven.”

Now let us read the final three paragraphs, assuming that Moroni wrote them at the very end of his writing and assuming that they pertain to the entire record on the plates of Mormon, both to the writings of Mormon and to the writings of Moroni:

“Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers, and that they may know the covenants of the Lord that they are not cast off forever.

“And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.

“And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.”

In the traditional printings, these paragraphs appear to pertain *only* to the “abridgment taken from the Book of Ether,” although most of us have quoted them as though they pertain to the entire Book of Mormon. The paragraphing suggested here would indicate that they do indeed pertain to the entire book, which is the most logical interpretation.

Let me emphasize that I am not suggesting that the present paragraphing of the title page is necessarily wrong. However, the decision to publish the title page text in two paragraphs was not determined by the Prophet Joseph Smith but by John H. Gilbert, the typesetter at E. B. Grandin’s publishing house, *before* he had the opportunity to read and study the entire Book of Mormon. Thus he would not have understood the separate and different contributions of Mormon and Moroni in the Book of Mormon: Mormon’s contribution to “the record of the people of Nephi” and Moroni’s contribution to the “abridgment taken from the Book of Ether.” Mr. Gilbert’s lack of understanding is evident in his decision to divide the introductory statement pertaining to the book of Ether in the title page into two sentences in two different paragraphs. Thus in the first edition of the Book of Mormon the wording “an abridgment taken from the Book of Ether” appears as the last part of paragraph 1, whereas the wording, “also, which is a record of the people of Jared,” appears as the first part of paragraph 2. As noted earlier, these two elements were combined in the 1837 edition to comprise the beginning of paragraph 2, where they have remained ever since.

Concerning the setting of the type for the title page, Mr. Gilbert has written: “In the forepart of June 1829, Mr.

E. B. Grandin, the printer of the ‘Wayne Sentinel,’ came to me and said he wanted I should assist him in . . . printing 5000 copies of a book. . . . Hyrum Smith brought the first installment of manuscript, of 24 pages, closely written on common foolscap paper. . . . The title page was first set up, and after proof was read and corrected, several copies were printed.”^[6]

That first setting of the type for the title page text into two paragraphs by Mr. Gilbert in “the forepart of June 1829” obviously established the two-paragraph pattern followed (1) in the 26 June 1829 article in the *Wayne Sentinel*, (2) in the first edition of the Book of Mormon, and (3) in all subsequent editions of the Book of Mormon in English.

Thus, I believe we may at least consider dividing the text of the title page into more than two paragraphs, knowing that the Book of Mormon is true and that the paragraphing of the title page in no way detracts from its divine nature. I give my testimony that I know the Book of Mormon is the true word of God, revealed to and written by earlier prophets and translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith through the gift and power of God

^[1] The author gave two separate presentations on this subject at the Second Annual Book of Mormon Symposium (1986). This written account contains material from both presentations.

^[2] Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932–51), 1:71.

^[3] B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), 1:159.

^[4] Sidney B. Sperry, “The Story of the Writing of the Title Page to the Book of Mormon,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1959), 123–24.

^[5] Sperry, “Title Page,” 123–24.

^[6] Wilford C. Wood, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work* (Salt Lake City: Wilford C. Wood, 1958), introductory section.