

Anachronism and The Book of Mormon

An anachronism is “something out of its proper time,” an object that belongs to a different time frame. A manual typewriter at Google headquarters would be a sore thumb of an anachronism.

Sometimes an anachronism is simply an author’s accident. You can find on-line lists of famous anachronisms in movies. They include:

- In the Civil War movie *Glory*, a soldier is seen wearing a digital wristwatch from the 1980’s.
- In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indiana Jones’ plane flies over a map of Thailand, which wouldn’t exist on maps for another three years.
- In *Malcom X*, the main character shouts for someone to call 911, which wasn’t in service until 1968, three years after *Malcom X* was assassinated.
- In *Robin Hood*, Morgan Freeman’s character uses a telescope, which wouldn’t be invented for another 400 years.

These goofs are funny to notice, and remind us that movies are fictional accounts, and that producers are humans who make mistakes, no matter how hard they try to do their historical research and be consistent.

But it’s not funny at all when anachronisms are spotted in a book that claims to be the inspired word of God!

I’m not talking about the Bible. There are no anachronisms in the Bible, except for a few poor translations in the King James Version due to limited knowledge of the day (such as the translation of Isaiah 3:18-23, which uses some Victorian articles of clothing to translate Hebrew words that the translation committee wasn’t familiar with).

No, I’m talking about the Book of Mormon, a book so crushingly burdened with anachronisms, that it becomes impossible to conclude that it is the product of a divine mind. They include:

- A ship’s compass used around 600BC, when even the most primitive compass was not invented for another 17 centuries.
- Wheeled transportation and steel weaponry in the Western Hemisphere, when there is no archaeological evidence of such before the arrival of Europeans.
- Transparent glass windows mentioned around 2000BC, when glass windows were not

invented until around 1100AD.

- Horses and donkeys, which did not exist in the Western Hemisphere until brought by the Spaniards.
- Other animals, such as elephants, sheep, pigs, cattle, and silkworms, for which there is no fossil evidence on the American continent during the days covered by the book of Mormon.

However, in my opinion, the most damning anachronisms in the Book of Mormon take a little digging to discover. They are direct quotations from the King James Version.

Mormons often celebrate the fact that the book of Mormon quotes from the KJV, as proof of their common inspiration. But actually, this proves quite the reverse. Carefully follow the correct reasoning:

Mormon doctrine teaches that God revealed the book of Mormon in the “Reformed Egyptian” language (whatever that is) and had it inscribed on golden plates which were buried in 400AD in an area which would later be upstate New York. Then, in 1830AD, Joseph Smith unearthed them, and translated the plates into English by direct inspiration, through a special “seeing stone” given to him by God.

Please remember—the KJV is not the Bible per se. It is an uninspired translation of the inspired Bible. It was published in 1611AD. If the book of Mormon was similar to the Hebrew or Greek Bible, that would be something to marvel at. But instead, it contains direct quotations or paraphrases from the KJV.

The particular phrasing and vocabulary of the KJV is a huge anachronism when it shows up in the book of Mormon. According to Mormon doctrine, the book of Mormon predates the KJV by over 1000 years. But it clearly came after! There is simply no reasonable way to understand the evidence except that the book of Mormon was written after the KJV.

But it gets more obvious than simple quotation. There are a number of problems in the KJV—I hate to call them mistakes, but they are places where the translators had some problems—and these mistakes are mindlessly copied by Joseph Smith. For example, 2 Nephi 23:21–22 mentions “dragons and satyrs,” like the KJV translation. But, modern scholars of the Bible realize that this is not at all what the Bible authors meant in Isaiah 13:21–22; it was a mistranslation. The problem was with the translators, not the inspired text. The KJV is faulty on this count, and the book of Mormon follows its fault. If the book of Mormon came first, it would not contain this fault.

Another example: 3 Nephi 25:2 speaks of the “Son of Righteousness,” and is a direct quotation of Malachi 4:2. But, Malachi speaks of the Sun of righteousness. These two words are homophones in English, but are quite different in Hebrew (not to mention Egyptian). Such a

glaring error indicates that Joseph Smith was simply misreading the KJV, not receiving an inspired translation of an ancient text.

Every modern Bible scholar agrees that Isaiah 2:16 is mistranslated in the KJV. The end of the verse should be “and every stately vessel” but somehow was rendered “and upon all pleasant pictures.” The book of Mormon, in 2 Nephi 12:16, follows this error.

One more. Every modern Bible scholar agrees that Isaiah 9:1 is mistranslated in the KJV. The middle of the verse should read “in the future He will honor Galilee of the Gentiles” but somehow the KJV renders it “afterwards did more grievously afflict...” giving the exact opposite meaning. The book of Mormon, in 2 Nephi 19:1, follows this error (and, in fact, inserts a glaring geographical error to boot, placing the Red Sea with the Sea of Galilee).

OK, one more. In the original 1830 edition of the book of Mormon, Joseph Smith used the word “straight” every time he was quoting from the KJV word “strait.” For example, in the KJV, Matthew 7:14 reads, “strait is the gate and narrow is the way...” Many English speakers who don’t know any better think that “strait” is just another way of spelling “straight.” It’s not. In the outdated English of the KJV it means “narrow, constricted.” But Joseph Smith quotes Matthew 7:14 in 3 Nephi 14:14 and uses the word “straight.” These glaring errors were corrected in later editions of the book of Mormon, except for an example in 2 Nephi 9:41 where the context prohibits an easy correction.

To review: that the book of Mormon obviously quotes from the 1611 KJV rather than the Greek or Hebrew is a gigantic problem. What conclusion will a sensible person draw? While the Bible passes the tests of inspiration, the Book of Mormon is riddled with errors and problems. The Book of Mormon is a work of fiction that fails the tests of inspiration. While Joseph Smith created an interesting setting, his limited mind was unable to catch all the problems that he included.

—John Guzzetta