

# **Variations between Copies of the First Edition of the Book of Mormon**



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Janet Jenson

Much has been written about changes between the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon (the first) and modern editions. But knowledge is less widespread about the variations that exist between different copies of the 1830 edition itself. We are now aware of 41 such changes, and there are certainly others that have not yet been discovered.

Three-fourths of the 41 changes were picked up when Alfred Bush of Princeton University Library, using a Hinman collator, compared the 1830 edition copy in the Scheide Library with a copy from Brigham Young University and one from the Historical Department of the Church. Using this list of changes as a base, and adding other changes discovered by other people, 70 different copies of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon have since been compared. I personally examined a number of copies in Utah, and many libraries around the country took time to check the list against their own copies.

Different combinations of corrections were found in 60 of the 70 copies, making 60 unique copies. The discovery of additional variants might well cause even those which are considered now alike to become unique. Seventy is not quite 1.5 percent of the total 5,000 which were printed, but with just the 41 changes so far discovered, it is mathematically possible that each of the 5,000 copies could be unique.

Table 1 shows the page and line of each change, including the error version and the corrected version of the change; however, it is difficult to tell in some cases which is the error and which is the correction. A preliminary list assumed that the correction would be the way it appeared in the 1837 edition. For instance, the word *Judges* was assumed to be the error and *judges* the correction because it appears as *judges* in the 1837 edition.

Subsequent work with the arrangement of the changes in the signatures, and the greater frequency of appearance of the word *Judges* led to the conclusion that *judges* was the error, *Judges* the correction, and that a change had been made back to *judges* in the 1837 edition.<sup>1</sup>

Table 2 is a list of errors which have not yet been discovered in a corrected state; however, a check of more copies might reveal that these errors also appear corrected in some copies.

There is also a probability that there are other errors which have been corrected in all copies that have thus far been checked for errors, and have therefore not yet been picked up as variants.

### Frequency of Errors

The number of errors per copy ranges from 3 copies with only 2 errors each, up to 2 copies with 14 errors each. Half of the 70 copies studied have from 5 to 8 errors.

Some errors appear more frequently than others. They apparently did not get corrected until later in the press run. For example, *Grert*, *Judeah*, and *mekness* appear in only 4 copies each, while 122 appears in 61 copies. The majority of the errors appear in 9 to 16 copies. Table 3 shows the frequency of different types of errors.

It is difficult to tell in all cases whether an error is a spelling error, or a typographical error, so the figures for those kinds might be adjusted differently.

**Table 1**  
**Variations in the 1830 Edition of the Book of Mormon**

Page &Line	Error	Correction
iv	vi	iv
74-21a	he	the
81-20	Holy one	Holy One
83-28	condescentions	condescensions
91-9	carcasses	carcasses
144-36a	about	about
207-37	exceding	exceeding
207-37	grert	great
212	122	212
218-43a	these which	those which
226-43	Amlicites	Amlicites,
231-6	judges	Judges
233-15	bretren	brethren
234-5	wokrs (1st)	works
236-26	God;	God,
275-19	this	This
286-27	ifthou	if thou
286-36	khown	known
341-29	brethrrren	brethren
341-18	River Sidon	river Sidon
343-1	River Sidon	river Sidon

343-2	River Sidon	river Sidon
343-10	lands, and	lands and
350-17	judges	Judges
351-38	armors	armours
352-34	Amalikiah	Amalickiah
387-28	Judeah	Judea
393-4	neither does	neither do
394-30	city; and	city, and
401-34	judges	Judges
408-17	Kishkumen and his band, which	Kishkumen, and his band which
458-31	them, as	them, As
458-18	Gaddianhi	Giddianhi
487	48	487
507-26/27	which is in my name	which is my name
514-2	maybe	may be
521-8/9	rumderers	murderers
575-15	elder priest	elder or priest
576-17/18	unto the baptism	unto baptism
582-41	mekness	meekness
583-31a	stireth	stirreth

**Table 2**  
**Errors Not Yet Discovered in a Corrected State<sup>2</sup>**

Page & Line	Error	Needed Correction
25-9	chid	child
39-11	daghter	daughter
90-17	horner	homer
113-14	to-mrrow	tomorrow
139-19	prophecy (2nd)	prophecy
144-43	feading	feeding
204-6	puteth	putteth
226-5	Sidom	Sidon
251-39	striped	stripped
268-2	tempels	temples
268-17	receive	receive
348-24	prohesy	prophecy
382-1	GHAPTER	CHAPTER
410-36	judgment	judgement
414-1	nobler	robber
426-16	Samnel	Samuel
426-33	bacause	because

426-34	mor over	moreover
427-14	higway	highway
429-23	befal	befall
429-24	iniquities	iniquities
431-6	treasures	treasures
435-2	angles	angels
443-36	arriven	arriven
461-3	Gaddianhi	Giddianhi
490-31	berak	break
491-35	mntitude	multitudeb
499-1	rereward	rearward
501-28	rereward	rearward
523-5	realise	realize
536-15	crated	created
541-1	clowd	cloud
541-39	brethern	brethren
542-7	brethern	brethren
556-34	opon	upon

**TABLE 3**  
**Frequency of Different Types of Errors**

Spacing	2
Paging	3
Punctuation	5
Wording changes	5
Spelling	7
Capitalization	9
Typographical	10
Total	41

### **Historical Information on Printing Process of 1830 Book of Mormon**

Those who were involved with the actual printing of the 1830 Book of Mormon have left very little information as to how the errors occurred and were corrected. Hyrum Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris have all been mentioned in various sources as having been at the printer's and as having carried the manuscript to the printer each day and taken it home again each night. No description written by any of them has been found dealing with the printing details of the work.

Stephen S. Harding, later governor of Utah, was a resident of Palmyra in his childhood. He claims to have spent a day in Grandin's print shop on a later visit to Palmyra. When he was in his eighties, he described the printing process in a work of anti-Mormon character:

The printing was done on a lever press of that period; and when a sufficient number of pages for the entire edition of five thousand copies had been completed, the type had to be distributed. This was a slow process in comparison with what is done in a jobbing office of to-day.<sup>3</sup>

The best source of information as to what went on in the print shop is probably John H. Gilbert, who worked for E. B. Grandin and composed 500 of the 570 pages of the book.<sup>4</sup> Gilbert has been quoted by several people. F. M. Lyman visited him on 23 October 1897 when Gilbert wrote the following statement in Lyman's journal:

... I was the principal compositor of the said [Mormon] Bible, commencing on the same in August, 1829, and finishing the same in March, 1830.<sup>5</sup>

Wilford Wood's reprint of the 1830 Book of Mormon includes a lengthy statement made by John H. Gilbert on 8 September 1892 at Palmyra, but gives no source for this statement. We learn from it, however, that Gilbert and J. H. Bortles did the press work from August to December, taking about three days for each form. Gilbert states that

the Bible was printed on a 'Smith' Press, single pull, and old fashioned 'Balls' or 'Niggerheads' were used—composition rollers not having come into use in the small printing offices.<sup>6</sup>

Gilbert also tells us that one sheet of paper would print 16 pages, 8 pages to each side, which was then folded into a signature. There are 37 of these 16-page signatures in the book.<sup>7</sup> In December a journeyman pressman, Thomas McAuley, was hired, and he and Bortles did the balance of the presswork.

### **How Did the Variants Occur?**

Type would be set for only one form (one side of the sheet—8 pages) at a time. That form would then be run off the press. As errors were noted during the printing process, the wrong piece of type would be changed, but the sheets printed with the error would not be discarded. When all 5,000 copies of this first form had been printed and were dry, the other form with its 8 pages would be run off on the reverse side of the sheet. The same correcting process might also occur on these pages. So various combinations of errors and corrections might occur on both sides of this one sheet which was then folded into a 16-page signature. As the different signatures were gathered to put together a copy of the book, each signature having its own combination of errors and corrections, the possibilities for variations multiplied.

The corrections in Table 1 occur in 17 of the 37 signatures. No corrections have yet been found in other signatures. Eight is the most changes

occurring in any one signature, the 22nd. Several signatures have only one change each.

### Variations Common in Early Printing

Variations such as we have between different copies of the 1830 Book of Mormon are fairly common in printing from early presses. They occur either accidentally through displacement of the type, or intentionally, by correction of the type after the printing process has already begun. Intentional correction may be necessary because of errors due to misreading of the manuscript, placing type in the wrong sequence, failure of memory, picking type from the wrong case, or having the wrong type in the case.<sup>8</sup>

Accidental displacement of type during the printing process was particularly likely when the type was dabbed with inkballs, which was the procedure used in printing the 1830 Book of Mormon, because the ink-balls tended to draw out loose type. This could have been the case with the error in the page number on page 487 if the 7 had been pulled out and not detected. This could also have happened on page 74, line 21, with the where the t could have dropped out to leave he. If a letter dropped out, it either might not have been replaced or it might have been replaced with an incorrect letter. In errors of a single letter it is difficult to tell whether the word was originally spelled correctly and a drop-out caused later versions to be spelled incorrectly, or whether the type was originally set incorrectly and later corrected to the right spelling.

Bibliographer Ronald B. McKerrow emphasizes the frequency and haphazard nature of variation between copies in early printing.

... we may say that in any early book the probability of finding such variants is very great . . . it cannot be supposed that the binder, when gathering the sheets for binding, would trouble himself as to whether they represented the final correction or not; he would take them as they happened to come. It is therefore quite unscientific to speak of a more or less corrected copy of a book. . . .<sup>9</sup>

### Is There a “First Printed” Copy of the Book of Mormon First Edition?

This brings us to the question as to whether the uncut pages which Wilford Wood used for his reprint really are “the first printed uncut sheets of the First Edition of the Book of Mormon,”<sup>10</sup> meaning the first copies to come from the press. A Deseret News article in the 4 February 1895 issue also describes the “first Mormon bible ever printed” in the form of uncut pages in the hands of Pliny T. Sexton.<sup>11</sup> If McKerrow’s hypothesis applies to the 1830 Book of Mormon, it seems unlikely that there is a “first printed” copy of the book. If Wood’s uncut pages are the first printed copy, they ought to contain all the errors and none of the corrections, except in the

case of drop-outs where the reverse would be true. His uncut pages, however, contain only 10 of the 41 errors. It may well be the first collated or gathered copy, but it seems unlikely that there was a first printed copy in this special sense.

McKerrow's hypothesis certainly seems to be the case with the 1830 Book of Mormon. There is no particular pattern to the corrections, except that certain corrections on the same form of the same signature usually appear together.<sup>12</sup> But there are cases where even this is not true.

Pages 231 and 234 are on the same form. The errors on those pages, judges and wokrs, appear together in 5 of the copies. There is one copy, however, where wokrs appears, but judges has been corrected to Judges. The same thing occurs with bretren on page 233 and God; on page 236. On page 275 and 286 are three errors on the same form: this and khown appear in 16 copies and ifthou appears in 17 copies. Although ifthou and khown are on the same page, there are 2 copies where ifthou does not appear with the other, and one copy where this does not appear with the others.

It would be interesting to compare the list of errors in Tables 1 and 2 with the printer's manuscript, now in the hands of the Reorganized Church, but an inquiry directed to them regarding this possibility was not answered. An 1884 *Saints Herald* issue contains a report of a Book of Mormon Committee comparing the 1830 edition with the printer's manuscript, which was then in the hands of David Whitmer. Approximately 350 differences are listed, but of the 77 corrections and possibilities for correction in this study, only one is included in the Book of Mormon Committee report. That one is the word nobler which appears instead of robber on page 414, line 1.<sup>13</sup> It seems inconceivable that all of the errors in the present study were also errors in the manuscript. One can only conclude that the 1884 study did not pick up all the differences between the manuscript and the 1830 edition, or that the copy of the 1830 edition that they used had nearly all of the errors corrected.

The present study is obviously only a preliminary look at the subject. If the Hinman collator could be used to compare every copy of the 1830 edition with every other copy, many more variations might be discovered and more conclusions might be drawn. There are certainly many more extant copies of the 1830 Book of Mormon that could be checked also. With the present list as a starting point, perhaps we can begin to learn more about and understand the who, how, and why of the printing variations between copies of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

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1. The main basis for this decision was the hypothesis that errors on the same form will appear as corrections in the same copies. In other words *Judges* appeared with other errors in the forms where it occurred, and *Judges* appeared with other corrections in the forms where it occurred.

2. In perusing the various studies available concerning changes between the 1830 and later editions, changes were picked out which were similar in character to those known to have been corrected within the 1830 edition. This list could doubtless be lengthened by a more careful search for printing errors.

3. Thomas Gregg, *The Prophet of Palmyra* (New York: John B. Alden, 1890), p. 47.

4. Andrew Jenson and Edward Stevenson, interview with John H. Gilbert in *Infancy of the Church* (Salt Lake City, 1889), p. 37.

5. "An Affidavit," *Deseret News Church Section*, 4 February 1933, p. 1.

6. Wilford Wood, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1958), Memorandum made by John H. Gilbert . . . in the unpagged introductory material. This press was purchased by the Church in 1906 with an affidavit from Gilbert saying it was the press he used, (*Elder's Journal*, 3 [1 July 1906,] 391). It is now on display at the Museum in the Bureau of Information on Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Ronald B. McKerrow, *An Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), chapter 6.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

10. Wood, *Joseph Smith Begins*, Affidavits in unpagged introductory material.

11. "Major John H. Gilbert," *Deseret Evening News*, 4 February 1895, p. 8.

12. Wilford Wood's uncut copy of the 1830 edition allows us to determine the order of pages on each form of the signature. He has included a photograph of one uncut sheet in his reprint of the 1830 Book of Mormon titled *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*. A microfilm of this entire copy of uncut pages is available at the Historical Department of the Church (Call number: Film M222.1 A1 #1). The sequence of pages for each form is shown below.

8	9	12	5
4	13	16	1
2	15	14	3
6	11	10	7

13. "Book of Mormon Committee Report," *Saints Herald*, 23 August 1884, pp. 545-48.