

Challenging the Book of Mormon

by

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1. Although members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) derive none of their unique doctrines from it, they cling steadfastly to the authenticity and authority of the Book of Mormon (BOM).
2. Whenever one encounters a Mormon, it is not long before he is challenged to “test” and see if that book is another witness of Jesus Christ.
3. Books are written, speeches are given and hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent annually to promote this volume as scripture and history.
4. Most recently, while perusing the Mormon websites on the Internet, I came across a challenge issued to prove that the Book of Mormon is both scripture and history. This writer had heard many of the arguments before, but this was the first time they had been found all in one place and issued as a challenge.
5. As I read through the statements, I decided to answer them as a body, as they were presented. My prayer is that these answers will find their way to the maximum number of people so when Mormon missionaries come calling with a smile and a free copy of the Book of Mormon, truth will prevail.
6. Many of these statements are very misleading. Taken the way they are phrased, without clarification, grants some LDS presuppositions.
7. When discussing doctrinal or historical points with Mormons, one must be careful to define terms. Mormons use the same terms as orthodox Christians, but define them differently.
8. Those who dialogue regularly with Mormons often express how frustrating it is to communicate with them meaningfully.
9. Taking the following challenge will demonstrate that such communication can be very time-consuming and detailed. Don't be discouraged!
10. If you love Mormons enough to share the true Gospel with them, be ready to spend quality time preparing and communicating that truth. With that in mind, let's get on with...

The Challenge

If one scoffs at the missionary's explanation of the Book of Mormon, he is in so many words claiming it to be false: That it is a deceiving fraud formulated through the efforts and talents of a common man. What is produced by one man can always be duplicated by another. The challenge that the Book of Mormon makes to the world is that of duplication. Because the book complies with every one of the following conditions, in order to produce a similar record, one must comply with the same conditions. Well, here they go. They can't get through the first paragraph without throwing in a false presupposition: *Because the book complies with every one of the following conditions, in order to produce a similar record, one must comply with the same conditions.* We will see in short order that the BOM complies with very few of the conditions, let alone with all of them. But, if you accept this as stated you begin in a limited position. Here is the challenge: Can you accept it? You Bet!

1. **Write a history of ancient Tibet covering a period from 2200 BC. to AD 400.**

Why ancient Tibet? Because you know no more about Tibet than Joseph Smith (or anyone else) knew about ancient America. This condition presupposes several things. First, that Joseph knew little about ancient America, or that no one else knew much about ancient America. Second, that what Joseph or anyone else knew about ancient America was accurate. Third, that what was written in the BOM about ancient America is accurate to the exclusion of erroneous ideas held in the 1820s. We will not grant these presuppositions, and as we proceed you will see why.

2. **You are 23 years of age.**

File this in the "so what" department. There are today and were in Joseph's day many very intelligent 23-year-old people. That Joseph Smith was precocious, I think we can all agree. If we can't agree on that, then read on, because I will document it thoroughly.

3. **You have had no more than three years of formal school education, and have spent your life in backwoods farming communities.**

The truth of this condition is easily enough documented. But we can't just quit with the phrase as written. Even though Joseph didn't have a full education, he did learn to read and write. And although his spelling left a lot to be desired (which was not at all unusual for the day), documents show his reading comprehension was quite good.

Very early in the young LDS church's history, Joseph undertook to chronicle the beginnings of that body. Two years after the publication of the Book of Mormon, he wrote a history of his life. In it he stated, "*At about the age of twelve years my mind became Seriously imprest with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul which led me to Searching the Scriptures believing as I was taught, that they contained the word of God thus applying myself to them ... I discovered that [men] did not ... adorn their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred depository ... thus from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things ... and by Searching the Scriptures I found that mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised*

from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament.”

From the above quote we see that the young Joseph was contemplative, and had sufficient reading skills to seek the Scriptures for answers to spiritual and moral questions. A very revealing quote from Joseph’s mother in her biography of her son and his ancestors further corroborates the fact of Joseph’s biblical astuteness. She mentions a man that was attempting to bring about a union of the warring denominations in their area and remarks: *“This seemed about right to me, and I felt much inclined to join with them; in fact, the most of the family appeared quite disposed to unite with their numbers; but Joseph, from the first, utterly refused even to attend their meetings, saying, ‘Mother, I do not wish to prevent your going to meeting, or any of the rest of the family’s; or your joining any church you please; but, do not ask me to join them. I can take my Bible, and go into the woods, and learn more in two hours, than you can learn at meeting in two years, if you should go all the time.’”*

Even though he did spend most of his formative years in rural farming communities in New England, that does not mean that he was isolated from the religious and historical ideas of his time. Just from the quotes above, it is easy to see that Joseph was intimately involved in theological issues.

These issues that were being debated in the various churches around the area was what supposedly drove Joseph to go to the grove to pray and see what church to join which ultimately produced his *“first vision.”* Oddly enough these were the same issues that are supposedly answered by revelation from God in the Book of Mormon.

4. Your history must be written on the basis of what you now know. There was no library that held information for Joseph Smith. You must use none. There is to be no research of any kind.

This condition is a huge blunder on the part of our challenger. At best it shows a lack of historical knowledge of frontier America and its inhabitants. This is especially true of Joseph and his community.

Aside from the fact that Joseph had more than a passing knowledge of the Bible, he had many other resources to draw upon to piece together what was to become the Book of Mormon and it can be amply demonstrated that he used them liberally. Christian researchers of the early history of Mormonism, H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters observed: *“With opportunities for formal education limited, the Smith family, like others on the frontier, relied on other avenues of instruction and information. One source of wide-ranging information was the newspaper, which the Smiths received weekly in Palmyra [N.Y.]”*

They cite Orsamus Turner who served a five-year printer’s apprenticeship in Palmyra between 1818 and 1822. Turner observed, *“He [Joseph] used to come into the village of Palmyra with little jags of wood ... and once a week he would stroll into the office of the old Palmyra Register, for his father’s paper.”*

“After they moved to their Manchester farm, the Smith family received the Wayne Sentinel, a successor to the Register and the Herald. A notice giving the subscription cost and the published amount of Joseph Sr.’s delinquent bill suggest that the Smiths received the paper for more than two years. The Sentinel cost \$2.00 per year if picked up at the office. The 11 August 1826 issue listed ‘Joseph Smith’ among delinquent subscribers with the amount due \$5.60.”

The importance of the Smiths being newspaper subscribers is twofold. It establishes that other sources of information were available to the burgeoning prophet, and by examining the paper’s content, it documents that some of the foundational ideas of the Book of Mormon may have emanated from that very source. A prime example of this is a reprint of an address given by one Mordecai M. Noah.

Published in the Wayne Sentinel on October 11, 1825 (five years before the publication of the BOM), this address puts forth Noah’s theory on the Hebrew origin of the American Indian, *“Those who are conversant with the public and private economy of the Indians, are strongly of (the) opinion that they are the lineal descendants of the Israelites, and my own researches go far to confirm me in the same belief.”*

Of course, the central theme of the BOM is that of tracing migrations of Israelites to ancient America, and one of the families becoming evil, being cursed with a dark skin, and degenerating into the progenitors of the American Indian.

Space prohibits a thorough examination of the degree of the Wayne Sentinel’s probable influence over Joseph’s writing of the Book of Mormon.

There is, however, sufficient evidence to show that Joseph did have access to the then current marketplace of ideas. Moreover, the above quip about no library being available to Joseph is simply false. Approximately five miles from the Smith farm was the local Manchester Rental Library. There is no reason to believe that given Joseph’s propensity for theological reflection, he would not avail himself of volumes of a theological nature.

5. Your history must be 531 pages and over 300,000 words in length.

Okay, this can and was done. It might be difficult to do if you agreed with the above conditions, however, we have seen that Joseph had help in subject matter.

I have not yet mentioned that Joseph copied lengthy portions of Scripture directly from the King James Version of the Bible, sometimes altering the verses, sometimes not.

Add to this Joseph’s active and fertile imagination (documented by his mother) and you have a strong foundation.

For example, Lucy Smith wrote: *“During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode*

of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.”

These “*amusing recitals*” were done years before Joseph translated the Book of Mormon. It is apparent that even then Joseph had some of the basics of his “history of the ancient inhabitants” in mind and could supply details (either true or false) at the drop of a hat. All things considered, this proposition is not at all unusual.

6. Other than a few grammatical corrections, you must have no changes in the text. The first edition as you dictate it to your secretary must stand forever.

Again, there is a major difficulty with this condition. Neither sentence of this condition is accurate. There have been many more than “*a few*” grammatical corrections. It takes only a few minutes of comparing the latest edition of the BOM with the first edition to see that there have been *thousands* of spelling and grammatical changes, as well as some significant historical and doctrinal changes.

As I write, I have before me a reprint of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon with all but the most recent changes marked. This volume is available to any one who wishes to compare the modern editions of the BOM with the original.

Space prohibits a detailed examination of the many changes, but I think it important to include a few of the more serious doctrinal and historical changes. I do so without comment to show that the above condition is totally in error. (Words in bold type are the added words.)

- 1 Nephi 11:18 — “*Behold, the virgin which thou seest, is the mother of God, after the manner of the flesh*” (1830 ed., pg. 25).
- 1 Nephi 11:18 — “*Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh*” (1989 ed.).

This mistake was made and rectified in two other places:

- 1 Nephi 11:21 — “*And the angel said to me, behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father!*” (1830 ed., pg. 25).
- 1 Nephi 11:21 — “*And the angel said to me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!*” (1989 ed.).
- 1 Nephi 13:40 — “*These last records ... shall make known to all kindreds, tongues and people, that the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father and the Savior*” (1830 ed., pg. 32).
- 1 Nephi 13:40 — “*These last records ... shall make known to all kindreds, tongues and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of Eternal Father, and the Savior*” (1989 ed.).

- And in Mosiah 21:28 (1830 ed. pg. 200), we read about king Benjamin having a gift from God, but since BOM chronology actually has Benjamin dead at that time, it was later changed to king Mosiah having a gift from God.

Again, the changes are too numerous to list here. The facts demonstrate that this condition is not accurate.

7. This record is to contain the history of two distinct and separate nations, along with histories of different contemporary nations or groups of people.

This condition is not difficult to accomplish if you have an active imagination, as Joseph Smith obviously had. What makes this condition interesting, is that the supposed “*history*” of these two nations has never been verified.

Although many scholars both inside and outside of the Mormon church have tried to verify the historicity of the Book of Mormon by archaeological means, to date this has not been accomplished.

I quote LDS scholar Dee F. Green, who from 1958-1961 was editor of (Brigham Young) University Archaeological Society Newsletter. In an article in 1969 for the Mormon periodical, Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought, Green wrote: *“The first myth we need to eliminate is that Book of Mormon archaeology exists. Titles on books full of archaeological half-truths, dilettante on the peripheries of American archaeology calling themselves Book of Mormon archaeologists regardless of their education, and a Department of Archaeology at BYU devoted to the production of Book of Mormon archaeologists do not insure that Book of Mormon archaeology really exists. If one is to study Book of Mormon archaeology, then one must have a corpus of data with which to deal. We do not. The Book of Mormon is really there so one can have Book of Mormon studies, and archaeology is really there so one can study archaeology, but the two are not wed. At least they are not wed in reality since no Book of Mormon location is known with reference to modern topography. Biblical archaeology can be studied because we do know where Jerusalem and Jericho were and are, but we do not know where Zarahemla and Bountiful (nor any other location for that matter) were or are. It would seem then that a concentration on geography should be the first order of business, but we have already seen that twenty years of such an approach has left us empty-handed.”*

8. You must describe their religious, economic, political, and social cultures and institutions. Cover every phase of their society, including the names of their coins.

Again, with an inventive mind like Joseph’s, you can describe these cultures and institutions, and without any means of verification, you can hold out for better than a hundred and fifty years of maintaining that the facts are there, we just haven’t found them yet. In the meantime, the only means of verification of the truth claims of the BOM, will be a “*feeling*,” a burning sensation or tightness in the chest.

This is supposedly the Holy Ghost spiritually verifying that the BOM and all that it describes is true. This “testimony” will be used to authenticate the BOM and dispel all the evidence that the book was a concoction of Joseph Smith’s fertile imagination and then contemporary documentation.

A word about coins. Nowhere in the text of the BOM do you find the word coins. In the first edition of the BOM there were no chapter headings, or verse numbers. According to the frontispiece of the 1957 edition of the BOM these were added later by Apostle Orson Pratt and first issued in 1879, 35 years after Joseph’s death.

When the chapter heading for Alma 11 was added, the phrase “*Nephite coins and measures*” was included. Many in the LDS church believe that the names given for pieces of gold and silver (senine, senum, onti, etc.) in Alma 11 are names of measures, not coins.

Facts indicate that though gold and silver was prevalent in pre-Colombian society (supposedly BOM times), no system of coinage was ever used.

In other parts of the world, coins, many thousands of years old, have been found. No Nephite coins have ever been uncovered.

9. Change your style of writing many times. Many ancient authors contributed to the Book of Mormon, each with his own style.

You can file this one under the “*opinion of the writer.*”

I have read the BOM 1957 edition cover to cover once and the 1830 edition cover to cover once, as well as studied various parts of the book on many occasions and the writing style (except those portions that were copied from the King James Version of the Bible) is clearly that of one person.

This is especially easy to see in the 1830 edition. Moreover, the present theory in LDS circles on how the BOM was translated is that God revealed to Joseph the concepts of the BOM and he then wrote them in his own words. This, they say, is why the first edition was such a mess of bad spelling and bad grammar.

10. Weave into your history the religion of Jesus Christ and the pattern of Christian living.

This would not be particularly difficult to do if you had the King James Version New Testament laying open beside you as you wrote. There is ample evidence that Joseph did not only have his Bible open, but that he copied passages and lifted ideas from the New Testament and put them in the “historical” time frame of the Old Testament. More on this below.

11. You must claim that your smooth narrative is not fiction with moral value, but true and sacred history.

Any one can make the claim, but the proof of the claim is in the study of the book. In the case of the Book of Mormon, however, it has been weighed in the balances and found wanting. There is no correspondence whatever between archaeological sites and cultures as revealed by scientific investigations and as recorded in the Book of Mormon, hence the book cannot be regarded as having any historical value from the standpoint of the aboriginal peoples of the New World.

12. The next condition is a long one, with multiple parts. For clarity, I will break it down into bite sizes.

- **You must include in your book fifty-four chapters dealing with wars.**

You will remember that Joseph's mother included "*mode of warfare*" as part of the "*amusing recitals*" that Joseph gave his family long before the BOM. A cursory examination of the chapters dealing with wars in the Book of Mormon shows that Joseph definitely had not lost his imagination.

Just from the sixth chapter of Mormon alone we read of 229,976 Nephites killed in a gigantic battle near where present day Palmyra, New York stands. And that number doesn't even include the Lamanite opposition forces.

Yet there are no archaeological finds that corroborates this fantastic battle. For this many men to fall in battle in the space of a few days without benefit of modern weapons (swords, spears, and bows only please), the imagination must really be stretched.

- **twenty-one historical chapters.**

The term "historical" here should be in quotes, because as we have seen, even the LDS church's own scholars say this is a history that is totally uncorroborated. No Nephite or Lamanite cities, artifacts, battlefields, inscriptions, or burial sites have, to this day, been found.

- **fifty-five chapters on visions and prophecies. Remember when you begin to write visions and prophecies, you must have your record agree meticulously with the Bible.**

There are a couple of ways to approach this condition. First, we must ask the question, "*Which Bible do you speak of?*" If you mean by this statement the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible then you are correct that there is general agreement.

The reason for this being that the facts show that Joseph copied large portions directly from the KJV into the BOM. Wesley Walters recognized:

“The Old Testament not only provided a framework for Joseph Smith’s tale about ancient America and provided names and events as models after which to pattern parts of the story, it also provided blocks of material which he was able to work into the text largely as quotations from the biblical prophets.

Some twenty-three chapters are introduced into the book at various points, with twenty-one of these coming from the Book of Isaiah and two from Malachi. In addition the Ten Commandments are quoted, along with portions from Micah and scattered verses from Jeremiah and the rest of Isaiah. The material is all taken from the King James Version of the Bible, and altered in varying degrees by Smith.

A good portion of the alterations consisted of deleting the italicized words supplied by the translators of the Authorized Version, and in some instances Joseph substituted wording of his own in place of the deleted italics.

There is no clear evidence that Joseph Smith had any authentic Hebrew text before him from which to make his alterations. In fact, the cumulative evidence would indicate the contrary. It appears from the nature of the alterations that Joseph simply took the King James Version and changed it in whatever manner he felt desirable no matter what violence it did either to the text or to the context. This will become apparent as individual passages are examined.”

After the above quote, Walters then spends the next fifty-three pages of the typed manuscript giving examples of how Joseph incorporated these verses and chapters from the KJV into the BOM, and made the many unjustified alterations that he seemed so fond of doing.

For brevity, I cite only one In the BOM, the 19th chapter of 2nd Nephi is an altered version of Isaiah chapter 9. Although Joseph made changes to the KJV, enough remains to clearly see that this text was lifted from Isaiah 9. Verse 1 of the KJV reads, *“by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.”*

However, when Joseph was *“translating,”* he inserted the word *“Red”* and it became, *“by way of the Red Sea beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.”*

Walters further observes: *“However, Zebulon, Naphtali and Galilee were in the northern part of Israel near the sea of Galilee. The Red Sea, on the other hand, was over 250 miles south of there. No ancient text or version reads Red Sea (Yam Suph), and Joseph Smith’s addition makes a geographical impossibility out of the text.”*

Agree with the Bible? I don’t think so!

- **You must write seventy-one chapters on doctrine and exhortation, and you must check every statement with the scriptures or you will be proven a fraud.**

Given the facts above, it is really not all that difficult to prove Mr. Smith a fraud. That he copied from the KJV Bible is undeniable. That he made unjustified alterations to the verses he copied is also undeniable. That he copied from other sources available to him in his time and area is evidentially sound.

Also, as I pointed out earlier, even though the BOM does contain Joseph Smith's doctrine, the majority of that doctrine runs contrary to what the LDS church teaches and believes today.

For example, it is clearly taught in the BOM that there is only one God:

- ❖ *Alma 14:5 — “And the people went forth and witnessed against them—testifying that they had reviled against the law, and their lawyers and judges of the land, and also of all the people that were in the land; and also testified that there was but one God, and that he should send his Son among the people, but he should not save them”*
- ❖ *Mormon 7:7 — “And he hath brought to pass the redemption of the world, whereby he that is found guiltless before him at the judgment day hath it given unto him to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom, to sing ceaseless praises with the choirs above, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, which are one God, in a state of happiness which hath no end”*

And yet today, it is the doctrine of the LDS church that there are many gods. A sampling from the late LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie's encyclopedic Mormon Doctrine shows this clearly:

“Joseph Smith speaks of ‘the head of the Gods’ calling ‘a council of the Gods’ to arrange for the creation and peopling of the earth.” “Joseph Smith said: ... ‘Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you.’” “To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, these three [Father, Son, Holy Ghost] are the only Gods we worship. But in addition there is an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods.”

- **You must write twenty-one chapters on the ministry of Christ, and everything you claim He said and every testimony you write in your book about Him must agree absolutely with the New Testament.**

Again, this is not difficult if you have your trusty KJV New Testament (NT) in front of you. The importance of the above condition arises when you consider that the majority of the narrative of the BOM takes place in times contemporary with the Old Testament events, but Joseph uses material from the NT and places it hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus.

For example,

- ❖ “*ye must pray always, and not faint*” (2 Nephi 32:9/Luke 18:1);
- ❖ “*depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Mosiah 26:27/Matthew 25:41);
- ❖ “*steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works*” (Mosiah 5:15/1 Corinthians 15:58);
- ❖ and lastly, “*the thoughts and intents of his heart*” (Mosiah 5:13/Hebrews 4:12).

There are hundreds of such instances of anachronistic “*borrowings.*”

13. **Many of the facts, claims, ideas, and statements given as absolute truth in your writing must be entirely inconsistent with the prevailing beliefs of the world. Some of these worldly beliefs must be the direct opposite of your claims.**

This condition is a red herring slipped in by the person that wrote the challenge. The facts show that the topics Joseph chose to cover were the ones that were being debated in the theological circles of the day.

Topics such as infant baptism, a paid clergy, origin of the ancient inhabitants of America, which was the true church, and so forth was discussed. Joseph used this supposed forum of divine revelation to settle the debate swirling around these and other topics.

14. **Included in your narrations will be authentic modes of travel; whether or not those ancient people used fire; description of their clothing, crops, mourning customs, and types of government. You must invent about 280 new names that will stand up under scrutiny through the years as to their proper application and derivation.**

As to the authentic nature of Joseph’s narration, again we have a major disconnect.

Smith mentions that the Nephites had chariots seven times in the BOM, four times weapons and implements of steel are mentioned, and twice are mentioned elephants and two animals known as *cureloms* and *cumoms*.

I have found no evidence that the pre-Colombian inhabitants of this continent ever used wheeled conveyances of any kind, let alone two-wheeled vehicles.

Also, “*Iron working was unknown in the New World until the arrival of the Europeans.*”

Without a knowledge of iron working, there is no steel manufacturing, hence, no steel swords.

While almost everyone knows what elephants are, and there is zero evidence that the pre-Colombian MesoAmericans knew what they were, let alone had any.

Further, there is none alive today that can identify a *curelom* or a *cumom*.

The idea that any of this can stand up under scrutiny is absurd.

The derivation of the names from the BOM, gives us more insight into the inventiveness of Joseph Smith. While much is made in the Mormon community about Joseph's inability to have "*made up*" so many names, an examination of those names shows something quite different.

In 1979, a linguistic scholar by the name of Dr. John R. Krueger did a computer study titled "Book of Mormon Names."

In that study, he concluded that there were

141 biblical names,
189 non-biblical names,
and 35 entries that didn't fall into either category in the BOM.

This shows that the number of names manufactured by Joseph is far from the 280 mentioned in the condition.

As far back as 1910, the Mormon periodical *Improvement Era* noted that the BOM names were modeled on biblical names.

On *page 238 of Vol. 13, No. 3*, LDS readers were treated to a four-column chart showing, in parallel, Bible names and their BOM derivatives.

For example,

| | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Bible: Abinad-ab | BOM: Abinad-om |
| Bible: Hag-gai | BOM: Hag-oth |
| Bible: Enoch | BOM: Z-enock etc. |

Not only are there names built on variant spelling of biblical names, but there are many that are built on rhyme formation of biblical names.

For example,

| | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Bible: Gideoni | BOM: Giddianhi |
| Bible: Riblah | BOM: Riplah |
| Bible: Shimeon | BOM: Shimnilon etc. |

The origin of the important BOM name “*Nephi*” (at least 4 men, a city, a land, a people and four books in the BOM are named Nephi) while not a biblical name, nevertheless, has been identified.

In the Apocrypha, in 2 Maccabees 1:36, we read, “*And Neemias called this thing Naphthar, which is as much as to say, a cleansing: but many men call it Nephi.*”

Facts show that Joseph was as consistent in coming up with names as he was with all other aspects of the BOM. Copy where you can, invent where you can’t.

15. You will have to properly use figures of speech, similes, metaphors, narrations, exposition, descriptions, oratory, epic lyric, and parables.

We’ll get into this in much more detail below. The word to keep in mind here is “*properly*” use. While he did use these types of grammatical expressions, did he use them properly?

16. You must invite the ablest scholars and experts to examine the text with care, and you must strive diligently to see that your book gets into the hands of those eager to prove it a forgery, and who are most competent to expose every flaw in it.

And expose them they have:

- ❖ the erroneous history,
- ❖ the heavy borrowing from both biblical and non-biblical sources,
- ❖ the anachronisms,
- ❖ the important changes,
- ❖ the lack of archaeological confirmation,
- ❖ the lack of geographical confirmation,
- ❖ not to mention the fantastic narratives that have no basis in reality (that is, the gigantic battles, the impossible voyages etc.) proves it to be a very flawed volume.

17. Thorough investigation, scientific and historical evidence, and archeological discovery for the next 125 years must verify its claims and prove detail after detail to be true, for many of the details you put in your history are still buried beneath the soil of Tibet.

Sorry, as documented above, this condition just isn’t true. There have been no credible archaeological finds that confirm any detail in the BOM. There have been massive amounts of conjecture, and attempts to force evidence, but nothing has been actually found.

Mormon archaeologist John L. Sorenson has said, “*Various individuals unconnected with these institutionalized activities have also wrestled with the archaeological problem. Few of the writings they have produced are of genuine consequence in archaeological terms. Some are clearly on the oddball fringe: others have credible qualifications. Two of the most prolific are Professor Hugh Nibley and Milton R. Hunter, however, they are not qualified to handle the archaeological materials their works often involve.*”

18. You must publish it to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people declaring it to be the word of God and another witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

With this condition, you have to give the LDS credit where credit is due. They do spend a great deal of money, time, and effort promoting the book. There are toll-free “800” numbers that you can call to get a free copy of the BOM, the missionaries give away thousands of copies in many different languages, all over the world, and there are websites on the Internet where you can download computer versions of the book.

The irony of this condition is that while they spend so much time and effort on the book, it has consistently been a thorn in the side of the LDS church. A massive amount of continuing damage control is done each year to explain away the internal difficulties of the book, as well as explanation as to why the general doctrine of the BOM differs in many respects with the current doctrine of the LDS church.

19. The book must not contain any absurd, impossible, or contradictory statements. Your history must not contain any statement that will contradict any other statement elsewhere in the volume.

Here is where the challenge really begins to unravel. A volume unto itself could (and has many times over) be produced to answer this point of challenge.

- **First the absurd:** The next to last book in the BOM (the book of Ether) purports to be an account of a migration of people from the Middle East at the time of the confounding of languages at the Tower of Babel.

A godly man by the name of Jared and his even godlier brother (and his friends and family) are told by the Lord to migrate to a land across the sea.

The first absurdity we are treated to is the lack of identity of Jared’s brother. Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie said: *“Some of the greatest heavenly manifestations ever vouchsafed to man were given to the Brother of Jared.”*

And yet, we are never given this holy man’s name. He is always addressed as the *“brother of Jared.”*

In fact, in the first six chapters of the Book of Ether he is addressed as

| | |
|---|------------------|
| <i>“brother of Jared”</i> | forty times, |
| <i>“Jared with his brother”</i> | one time, |
| <i>“Jared, his brother”</i> | one time, |
| <i>“Jared and his brother”</i> | six times, |
| <i>“Jared said unto his brother”</i> | three times, and |
| <i>“Jared died, and his brother also”</i> | one time. |

How much easier to just give us the brother’s name!

- **Next we are treated to a description of the Lord’s revelation for building “barges” to get Jared and his associates across the ocean.**

I offer the below description without comment. It is up to the reader to judge the absurdity of the narrative.

Ether 2:16-21 — “And the Lord said: Go to work and build, after the manner of barges which ye have hitherto built. And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did go to work, and also his brethren, and built barges after the manner which they had built, according to the instructions of the Lord. And they were small, and they were light upon the water, even like unto the lightness of a fowl upon the water. And they were built after a manner that they were exceedingly tight, even that they would hold water like unto a dish; and the bottom thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the sides thereof were tight like unto a dish; and the ends thereof were peaked; and the top thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the length thereof was the length of a tree; and the door thereof, when it was shut, was tight like unto a dish. And it came to pass that the brother of Jared cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, I have performed the work which thou hast commanded me, and I have made the barges according as thou hast directed me. And behold, O Lord, in them there is no light; whither shall we steer? And also we shall perish, for in them we cannot breathe, save it is the air which is in them; therefore we shall perish. And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: Behold, thou shalt make a hole in the top, and also in the bottom; and when thou shalt suffer for air thou shalt unstop the hole and receive air. And if it be so that the water come in upon thee, behold, ye shall stop the hole, that ye may not perish in the flood. And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did so, according as the Lord had commanded.”

- **Next, I offer a couple of examples of the impossible.** Close to the end of the book of Ether, we find ourselves in the New World. Again we find ourselves in what is to become upper New York State, near a hill that will one day be named Cumorah and once again we are witnesses to an epic battle.

The descendants of Jared (led by King Coriantumr) are about to be annihilated by the armies of an evil king named Shiz. Coriantumr is wounded and carried away to recuperate. Here we pick up the story:

Ether 15:1-2 — “And it came to pass when Coriantumr had recovered of his wounds, he began to remember the words which Ether had spoken unto him. He saw that there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people, and he began to sorrow in his heart; yea, there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children.”

Even if only half of the two million mighty men had only one wife and one child, that would put the casualty list at four million, and that doesn’t account for fatalities in Shiz’s army! This number matches about one half of all the military deaths of World War I. And all without benefit of modern weapons or a war of many years duration!

- **The last impossibility is the demise of Shiz himself.**

Ether 15:29-31 — “Wherefore, he did pursue them, and on the morrow he did overtake them; and they fought again with the sword. And it came to pass that when they had all fallen by the sword, save it were Coriantumr and Shiz, behold Shiz had fainted with the loss of blood. And it came to pass that when Coriantumr had leaned upon his sword, that he rested a little, he smote off the head of Shiz. And it came to pass that after he had smitten off the head of Shiz, that Shiz raised up on his hands and fell; and after that he had struggled for breath, he died.”

As I try to construct a mind picture of this tableau, I wonder which part of Shiz was struggling for breath, the headless torso or the severed head? Also, the idea that a headless body would raise itself up on its hands is quite ludicrous.

20. Many theories and ideas as to its origin must arise, and after discovering and examining the facts, they must fail.

So sorry, this doesn't work at all. After you examine the facts it is easy to see the true origin of the BOM. It is clearly the product of Joseph's imagination; supplemented by information readily available from the Bible, books, newspapers, and other periodicals. This has been amply demonstrated above.

21. You have claimed that your knowledge had come from divine origin, and this claim continues to stand as the only possible explanation. The strength of this explanation must not decrease as time passes, but actually increases to the point where it becomes the only logical explanation.

Anything but. The only portions of the BOM that conform to divine revelation are those portions that were copied from the Bible, and those only in the context of the Bible from which they were lifted. The claim that the book was from divine origin is just as spurious as the claim that it was actual history.

The only “*proof*” as to the BOM's authority and authenticity is the so-called “*testimony*,” or the “*burning in the bosom*” sought after by all serious LDS believers. This is really no proof at all.

22. Your record is to fulfill many Bible prophecies, even in the exact manner in which it shall come forth, to whom delivered, its purposes, and its accomplishments.

When you manufacture a historical setting that covers many thousands of years, and populate that setting with supposed prophets, and have them utter prophecies, then it is no large feat to manufacture fulfillment of those prophecies.

If you have your Bible in front of you as you are building your narrative, you can manufacture supposed events that fulfill those biblical prophecies.

If you take upon yourself the mantle of a prophet, then you can choose a prophecy from the Bible and manufacture a fulfillment of that prophecy, and dare (based on your supposed authority) anyone to disagree with you. Joseph Smith did all of these things.

23. Call down an angel from heaven in the middle of the day and have him bear testimony to four honest, dignified citizens of your community that the record is the word of God.

Our challenger here makes reference to the three witnesses that testified to seeing the golden plates upon which was written the contents of the BOM, all under the auspices of an angel.

Their testimony can be found in the front of the book. These witnesses must bear the angel's testimony to the world, not for profit or gain, but under great sacrifice and severe persecution, even to their death beds.

All three of the witnesses left the church, with Oliver Cowdery and David Witmer never returning.

Martin Harris, however, did eventually come back to the fold, but was thereafter under a cloud.

The claim of the LDS church is that none of the witnesses ever denied their testimony, although there seems to be some evidence to the contrary.

In the 26-volume collection of some of the early addresses of Mormon prophets known as *Journal of Discourses*, there is this enlightening statement,

“Some of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, who had handled the plates and conversed with the angels of God, were afterwards left to doubt and disbelieve that they had ever seen an angel” (see Vol. 7., pg. 164).

There was also a poem published in the Mormon newspaper, *Times and Seasons* (Vol.2, pg. 482), in 1841 which contained a stanza that read,

“Or prove that Christ was not the Lord Because that Peter cursed and swore? Or Book of Mormon not his word Because denied, by Oliver?”

For an excellent, documented character study of the witnesses of the BOM, please see Jerald and Sandra Tanners' *The Case Against Mormonism* (Vol. 2, pp. 1-62).

You must put that testimony to the test by becoming an enemy to these men. And Joseph did just that. You did not disagree with the “*Prophet of the Restoration*” without becoming his enemy.

24. Thousands of great men, intellectual giants, national and international personalities, and scholars for 125 years must accept your history and its teachings even to the point of laying down their life rather than deny their testimony of it.

This is getting down to the knot of it. At this point, we must address the dilemma that has faced the LDS people from the beginning. Because the prophet and founder of their church placed so much initial importance on the Book of Mormon, and taught that it was divine revelation and sacred history, it is impossible to repudiate one and not the other.

For this reason, these “*thousands of great men*” have had to suspend logic, and the laws of evidence, in order to “*keep*” the BOM so that they might “*keep*” the entirety of the LDS belief.

This is why the inward “*testimony*” becomes so very important.

When the laws of evidence and logic show that the BOM is a concoction of a rural 19th century New Englander, then one can always rely on the “*burning in the bosom*” that is supposed to be a manifestation of the Holy Ghost telling you that the Book of Mormon is true, and if the Book of Mormon is true, then Joseph was right, and if Joseph was right then he was a prophet, and if a prophet then the entire LDS fabric is sound.

Several years ago I had a meeting with two young Mormon missionaries where we spent several hours examining the evidence for the authenticity of the BOM.

Toward the end of the session it became evident to me that both young men were having some serious doubts about the historicity of the volume.

At one point there was a pause in the conversation and the duo’s leader said with great emotion, “*Well, Mr. Cannon, despite what you’ve shown me here today, I have a testimony. [He laid his open hand on his chest.] And even if a resurrected Joseph Smith walked through that door and told me that the BOM was not true, I would not believe it, because I have a testimony that it is true, and this I testify to you in the power of the Holy Ghost!*”

So, the sacrifices mentioned in this challenge, while on the surface point to the authority of a book, it is in reality more toward the entire fabric of LDS belief as represented by that book.

25. You must include within the record this promise: “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, He will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

This challenge is known as the promise of *Moroni 10*. This is the promise of “*the testimony*”. This inner feeling becomes the ultimate test of truth, not just of the BOM, but for all spiritual truth. Despite protestations to the contrary, in the final analysis, a subjective inner feeling

becomes the ultimate arbiter of truth for LDS believers. This is faith to a Mormon believer. Unfortunately it is a blind leap or credulous faith.

It is a faith that flies in the face of reason, that accepts a version of the truth in spite of all evidence rather than a biblical faith of accepting the truth because of good and sufficient reasons.

It is a faith that, like so many other man made religions, arms its adherents with a feeling that what they are doing is right. The problem with a feeling-based belief system is that feelings very often are in error.

I can feel with all my heart that the little white pill I am taking is an aspirin and will cure my headache, but if the pill is a laxative that someone just put in an aspirin bottle for safekeeping, then the results are going to be quite different from what I imagined, and my head will still hurt!

- 26. Missionaries must bear record to the world for the next 125 years that they know the record to be true because they put the promise to the test and found it to be true. The truth of it was manifested to them by the power of the Holy Ghost.**

And, this manifestation was a “burning in the bosom,” or an increased pulse rate, or any number of other “feelings.” A very poor barometer for testing truth claims.

- 27. Over 50,000 plus competent salesmen must be so sold on your book that they gladly give up two or more years of their lives to take it to all parts of the world for distribution. They not only pay their own way during these years, but return bearing testimony that the time spent will remain as one of the highlights of their lives. They receive nothing in return for their efforts but the joy of having shared your book with others.**

I would contend that the purpose of LDS missionary activity goes far beyond the distribution of the BOM. The present day church actually uses the BOM as more of a public relations “hook.” The real purpose of the missionaries is to bring new converts into the LDS church. Since, to Mormons, all churches but theirs are false, their plan is to get you to admit that your church is apostate and theirs is true.

- 28. Your book must not only raise the standards of millions of people but do it in such a way that they become one of the great moral, ethical, and dynamic marvels of the day. They must become world renowned for this.**

The idea that the majority of rank-and-file LDS people are hard-working, clean-living, ethical people will get no argument from me. It is with the leadership hierarchy that I have difficulty.

It is to this group of unscrupulous leaders that the charge of deception must be leveled. They are the ones that have available documentation to show the fraudulent nature of many of the claims of the church.

Yet they are the ones that revise the history, perpetuate the fraud, stonewall the honest seekers of truth, intimidate the critics, both within and without the church, initiate the purges when seekers get too close to the truth, and spend vast amounts of money in slick public relations campaigns to attempt to legitimize the LDS church. Ever it was so since the beginning under Joseph Smith.

29. **For the next 20 years you must watch those that follow, and you, your family, and the dearest of your loved ones persecuted, driven time after time from their homes, beaten, tortured, starved, frozen and killed. Tens of thousands must undergo the most extreme hardships in your presence just because they believe your claims concerning the origin and content of what you have written on ancient Tibet.**

Pack your bags, folks, with these next two challenges you are about to go on a guilt trip.

Determining the motivation of an individual that you have the benefit of knowing face-to-face is most often a very difficult thing to do, let alone trying to do this 167 years removed.

Who really knows for sure what was in young Joseph's mind when he decided to author a book, palm it off as sacred history, and then found a religious movement around it.

Did he have any inkling that this small group of followers would one day evolve into a mighty force to be reckoned with as it was forced westward across this country?

History clearly shows that the LDS people were often unjustly persecuted and hounded. History also clearly shows that in many instances the persecution was brought on themselves.

The reaction of Joseph and other church leaders to unjust persecution also generated more violence. As to who threw the first punch, (metaphorically speaking) no one really knows, but as the church grew, action and reaction escalated and many innocent people on both sides suffered. Ultimately, Joseph lost his own life in the violence.

30. **You must gain no wealth from your work, but many times lose all that you have. Like those that believe you, you must submit yourself to the most vile persecution. And finally after 20 years of this, give your own life in a very savage and brutal manner, for your testimony concerning your history book. This must be done willingly on your part.**

Unfortunately, there is a little bit of revisionist history here. While Joseph was unjustly and brutally murdered, he did not die for his testimony to the authenticity of the BOM, and he did not go as willingly as our challenger would have you believe.

Early 1844 finds Joseph and his faithful followers living in the thriving Mississippi River town of Nauvoo, Ill., a town the Mormons had built out of a swamp.

Joseph had been secretly teaching the doctrine of plural wives for many years. Publicly he was denying it.

William Law, a Mormon dissident, announced his intention to start a newspaper (*The Nauvoo Expositor*) and use that as a vehicle to expose Joseph.

On June 7, 1844, the first and only edition of *the Expositor* was published. In it were references to the polygamy revelation and Joseph's recent ordination as *King of Israel on Earth*.

Under the prompting of Mayor Joseph Smith, the *Expositor* was declared a public nuisance by the city council and destroyed.

Because of the destruction of the newspaper, an arrest warrant for inciting a riot was issued for Joseph and his brother Hyrum.

Because of the recent activity surrounding Joseph's ordination as King, the charge of treason was added.

Fearing for their lives, Joseph, Hyrum and two others fled Nauvoo under cover of darkness on June 22nd.

Most of the faithful felt abandoned by their leaders, and even members of the inner circle of the church openly charged the Smiths with cowardice and abandoning the flock.

On June 24th, a dejected Joseph surrendered to the civil authorities. He, Hyrum and two devoted followers were incarcerated in the nearby Carthage, Ill., jail.

Joseph announced that this surrender will mean his death. D. Michael Quinn wrote: "*27 June, 5PM. A large group of men approaches Carthage Jail disguised with blackened faces. Smith at first assumes it is the Nauvoo Legion he has secretly ordered to rescue him. However, Major-General Jonathan Dunham has disobeyed orders knowing that a prison escape would mean the annihilation of Nauvoo. Instead the vigilantes storm the upstairs room, instantly killing Hyrum and severely wounding Taylor. Joseph defends himself with a pistol, jumps out the window, and begins to shout the Masonic cry of distress: 'Oh, Lord, my God, is there no help for the widow's son?' Masons in the crowd show no mercy and prop the semi-conscious Smith against a nearby well and shoot him several times at point blank range.*"

So, while Joseph was murdered, he did not go "*willingly.*" He used every means at his disposal to stave off his untimely demise, as any sane individual would. I do not fault Smith for defending himself, I would do the same, but the idea that Joseph went "*as a lamb to the slaughter,*" is not true history.

- 31. Start right now and produce this record which covers 2600 years of history, doing it, not in the peaceful atmosphere of your community, but under the most trying of circumstances which include being driven from your home several times, and receiving constant threats upon your life.**

Again, our challenger has seen fit to revise history.

It is true that because of much controversy surrounding the supposed plates, Joseph and his new wife Emma (Hale) Smith decided to go to her father's house in Harmony, Pa.

They arrived at the Hale house in December 1827. Joseph did some preliminary translating in January and February of 1828, but it wasn't until April of that year that Martin Harris came to Pennsylvania and became Joseph's scribe.

This work was to continue, on and off, under various scribes, in various towns until early 1830 when the manuscript was given to the printer. On the 26th of March, 1830, the Book of Mormon is first advertised for sale.

32. Please have your book completed, talk a friend into mortgaging his farm to raise money to have it printed—all in 60 days.

While Martin Harris did take out a mortgage on his property, the "*translating*" did take much longer than 60 days and the conditions under which this work was done were not nearly as severe as our challenger would have us believe.

33. There is only one answer: The Book of Mormon is a divine record. If not, its origin must be stated and its claims must be explained by the critic.

Been there, done that! The BOM is, by the laws of evidence, is not a divine record. It is clearly a product of the 19th century, not an ancient record.