

Did a Professor say the Book of Mormon Translation was Authentic?

The founder of the Mormons, Joseph Smith claimed to have been led to golden plates with ancient scriptures on them. He claimed to have power from God to translate them so essentially God was the translator. Translated from an unknown script called Reformed Egyptian the end work became the Book of Mormon which according to the Mormon articles of faith is the word of God.

THE ANTHON QUESTION

Joseph Smith claimed in his scripture The Pearl of Great Price that his associate Martin Harris was sent to Professor Charles Anthon with a copy of the Reformed Egyptian characters from the Golden Plates and their translation. Anthon allegedly wrote a certificate that the characters were real and translated properly. But when he heard about the angel and the religious nature of the enterprise he supposedly tore it up. Thus there is only hearsay that the certificate ever existed.

The Mormons say the Anthon episode fulfils a prophecy in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 27) that is much the same as Isaiah chapter 29. The prophecy says the scholar will not be able to understand the script which contradicts Smith and Harris's claim that Anthon knew that the script was genuine and the translation correct.

The prophecy in the Book of Mormon says that words will be taken from the book to the learned man who shall ask for the book so that he can read the whole book and when informed that the book is sealed and cannot be brought he says he cannot read it or the words.

Mormons say that Anthon must have said to Harris at one point that he could not read the words on the sheet and was lying for Harris said he did testify to the accuracy of the translation. Why do they bother with Anthon's alleged testimony for the Book of Mormon when they regard him as a pathological liar?

They say that Anthon's game, according to the prophecy, was to convince Harris to bring him the rest of the Book and that he would only want it if the writing on the sheet was not a fake. But how could he when he couldn't even read the transcription he was given? The prophecy - if you pretend the Mormon interpretation is right - gives no hint that he understood the writing on the transcript. The prophecy never says Anthon lied. The prophecy says that Anthon wanted the whole book so that he could get a better picture of how to maybe decipher the writing on the sheet so Harris and Smith lie when they said he could make sense of the sheet.

Mormons believe Harris and Smith's lie that Anthon tore up the certificate he used to authenticate the translation when he heard about the angel bringing the gold plates. The prophecy - in the Mormon understanding - says this cannot be true for he wanted the whole book. He must have known that the book was found under supernatural circumstances and contained supernatural tales as it was a religious book. It certainly means that Anthon was not turned off by stories of gold books in the ground that were brought to light by angels which makes a liar of Smith. If Anthon was not bothered by that then the story of the torn certificate was a lie. Why could Harris not get the certificate out of the bin or something? It would have done even if it had been in bits though there was no scotch tape in those days.

It is only one testimony, Harris', we have that this prophecy is fulfilled which contradicts the biblical and Book of Mormon requirement that one is not good enough. Mormons will reply that we know from other ways that Harris would not have lied for God chose him to have a vision of the plates so it is good enough. But when prophecy is given as evidence from Heaven that the word of God is true this logic is appalling. Each prophecy has to be verified as written before the event and well attested to have been fulfilled after and it has to be treated separately from any other considerations or prophecies for the divine law is that a prophet who gives many fulfilled prophecies and gets one wrong is a fake and to be avoided for God is not slack or stupid. The episode refutes the Book of Mormon's claim to be the word of God. Mormons will point at examples from the Bible in which the word of one man was taken for the word of God. But that does not matter for the Bible is not the word of God either! It cannot keep up to its own standards. The Bible has had a lot to answer in setting up the Mormon fraud. When Mormons are reminded that the Book of Mormon characters have left no evidence that they really existed, they point at the Bible which in the cases of Adam, Enoch, Abraham and Jesus has not been complemented by any evidence that they existed either. One rotten apple corrupts the next.

Mormons say, "It is plausible to believe that when Anthon heard that a religion was starting over the Plates he knew that his recognition of them would bring him into disrepute for scholars would see him as unorthodox and eccentric and so he tore up the certificate. It was okay to say such things to one or two men but to be quoted by a missionary religion would ruin him." It is anything but plausible. Smith said that Anthon only knew about the angel. But Anthon knew that even if a man

came in saying that an angel gave gold plates to Smith that only meant that the angel was a lie if angels don't appear anymore but that there really were gold plates according to the piece of paper he had.

The Book of Mormon is a religious book. It is ludicrous to think that a learned man verified a translation about God and Jesus and wrote a certificate if that learned man was a bigoted anti-religionist like we are led to believe about Anthon.

Anthon could have verified the Book of Mormon even if he was a good orthodox Christian for Christians have no problem verifying supernatural events that they believe are devil-inspired. And all he had to say was that he didn't know how Smith got the characters and how Smith translated them. And at that time there was no reason to believe Smith could start a successful Church. Smith and Harris' allegation that Anthon was motivated by anti-Mormon prejudice is not believable. And Harris was unreliable in religious matters. Anthon should be believed. Anthon himself said that he never saw the translation but only a page with some strange letters on it and said that far from writing a certificate of authenticity he told Harris that it was all a hoax. There was no harm in him saying that he saw the translation if he saw one so he did not see the translation. He could have lied saying it was wrong or he could not see if it was right. That would have been more suited to a man who was lying about the miracle plates like Smith said for why tell a big lie when a small one would do.

Mormons say, "Why did Anthon who was an enemy of Mormonism not sue Harris or Smith if they were lying? The Mormon Church was an easy target in the early years for it had few members."

Not everybody slandered like Anthon considers suing necessary. The Mormons were not that numerous anyway so the slander was not that important. Anthon's colleagues believed Anthon's side of the story and that was enough. One might as well ask why the Mormons did not sue Anthon.

Harris said that he went to Dr Mitchell after he went to Anthon and Dr Mitchell agreed with Anthon that the script was real and the translation correct. But Anthon always said that Harris went to Dr Mitchell first. The records allow us to believe that Harris saw Mitchell before and after he met with Anthon which means there is no contradiction.

Another contradiction was between Anthon saying he got no translation with the transcript and Harris saying he did. If there was no translation then it is a lie that Harris went to Dr Mitchell with the translation and that Mitchell accepted the translation as correct like Anthon. The Mormons said that Anthon was lying about when Harris went to Mitchell just because he reasoned like that. But there is no evidence that he did reason thus so it is worthless speculation.

Dr Mitchell backed up Anthon all along that the scrawl Harris had was a hoax and Smith accepted the Bible and the Book of Mormon that two or more witnesses was sufficient. This means that the Anthon Mitchell affair cancelled out the evidence of Smith's witnesses. At best we don't know if the plates then were genuine or not. Smith's witnesses believed in the enterprise before they got any evidence for it which shows that they were credulous in relation to Smith's magic book. The thought of being a help in the production of a lost section of the Bible and being famous forever was the big attraction.

If God went to the bother of predicting the event, it must have been a very important event. Needless to say the prophecy appeared after the event too! So we have somebody's testimony about Anthon then not Anthon's testimony.

No matter what evidence Mormons can come up with to back up Smith's account of how the Book of Mormon appeared one thing is for sure. He denied he believed in the Book of Mormon himself later on when he started introducing doctrines like God the father having been an ordinary sinful man and a temporary Hell which completely contradicted the Book. He even changed the wording - Mother of God became Mother of the Son of God. What Smith then told us by his actions shows that there is no way he could have been a true prophet or his Book of Mormon the word of God.

ANTHON AS APOLOGETIC

Mormons use the Anthon Incident to lend credibility to the claims for the Book of Mormon. They give the impression a testimony came from a scholar about the truth of the ancient gold plates story. But it is Martin Harris' version of events they go by!

This means we have just Martin Harris' word which is preserved by Joseph Smith so it is really just Joseph's word that Anthon verified the Book of Mormon. Remember that Smith said that he had a lot of dirt on his witnesses including Harris. So he could have blackmailed them to keep up their testimony to the Book of Mormon whatever they did. Smith certainly did use blackmail against many people. So if Smith twisted what Harris told him Harris would not have dared contradict him.

What use is Anthon's testimony when the only person, Smith, who wrote that he even made it was the very person who needed Anthon to back up the claim that Smith really could translate? That is like a man saying he needs another witness and him writing down what he thinks the witness would or did say.

Nobody could translate Egyptian before the Rosetta Stone was discovered and Smith and Harris definitely lied when they said Anthon said the translation was correct. Neither were any good as witnesses to the work of God so there was no work of God and if it was supernatural the work was not supervised by God but by Satan.

Some Mormons say, "Smith declared that Anthon said that the translation was perfect. This has been ridiculed for Egyptian was an unknown language. But even if a language is unknown you can tell from the characters and the translation if it is really a language, if it has syntax and meaning and grammar. Smith must have been sure that Anthon could not destroy his new religion. Smith knew Anthon would have to admit the translation was right when he sent Harris to him for what was on the page was really ancient script. Smith knew that even if Anthon could not understand the Reformed Egyptian, he would have known if the characters and the translation corresponded which would indicate that the characters were a real language." But Smith would have had an excuse ready for Harris if Anthon said it was a hoax. He had one in the allegation that the characters were Reformed Egyptian an unknown language and script and that you needed magical stones or the power of divination to tell you what the characters meant. Smith may have believed that Anthon would reject the story but had to give in to Martin Harris who wanted to go to him.

But Anthon would not be able to say it was an ancient language for he had only a piece of paper. He would have needed to see the Plates to be sure it was an ancient language and not somebody's invented language.

Only Charles Anthon could provide any evidence that the Book of Mormon was an ancient script for none of the witnesses of the book were qualified. God then would have made sure the book was written in Hebrew even though the Nephites altered the Hebrew for at least then a scholar would have a chance to see if there was a real language on the transcript.

Smith and Harris said that Anthon knew the translation was right and that he said so. But the Book of Mormon itself claims to have been written in a tongue that no outside nation knows. Smith and Harris then are backing up Anthon's claim that he did not verify the transcript as genuine when they endorsed their Book of Mormon as the word of God. We should believe Anthon that the Book of Mormon was a fraud.

Mormons may point out that Smith could have been lied to by Harris and that Smith was only recording what Harris said. But Smith took Harris' version very seriously. And it was Smith who reported what Harris said so was it reported correctly and truthfully? Smith is trying to get us to take hearsay as verification. If Smith had been a genuine man of God and his story was true, he would have done better than that. And its a strange way of proving something to say, "The professor said the translation is correct and the characters a real language and if he now says different he is lying."

WHAT WAS ON THE SHEET?

Professor Charles Anthon said, according to Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, that the translation from the Egyptian was correct. But at that time nobody knew how to translate Egyptian and the Book of Mormon itself says that God had to prepare a miraculous way of translating the plates it was on for it was in a completely unknown tongue (Mormon 9:34).

Smith said that he said the characters Anthon read were Assyrian, Chaldian, Arabian and Egyptian. But this mixture would make it impossible for him to understand the translation! And Assyrian and Egyptian do not have alphabets but the other two do which makes it all the worse. Thus Anthon's sworn statement in the form of a letter from February 17th, 1834, that he did not authenticate the Book of Mormon must be the truth. Also, the Anthon Transcript with the Book of Mormon characters on it still existed then so Anthon would have been afraid to lie if what Smith said was true. All Smith had to do was to get his men to take it to Egyptologists and not say what the source was but he didn't because he knew the characters were made up and the translation was a fake. The Mormon Church believed that the Transcript could still exist when it bought a forged one in the nineteen eighties despite the alleged power of the head of the Church to translate ancient scriptures. Smith unwittingly backed up Anthon's assertion that the page he got had alphabets copied from old books on it.

Why did Smith let the transcript of the characters be lost if it is part of the verification for the Book of Mormon? He published other things and why not it? He knew what would happen – he would be found out.

Mormons say, "Anthon must have said that the text was a mixture for if Smith had been lying we would expect him to say that Anthon said it was Egyptian. Smith never said there was Hebrew in it which supports this statement for had he been lying he would have said Anthon recognised Hebrew in the book. Why else would Smith mention alphabets that his Book of Mormon never mentioned?" Since when did a liar's mistakes prove that he was telling the truth? If there had been any Egyptian on the page Anthon would have said so and would have surmised that it came from some book. Anthon was not as deceptive as Smith who was famous for lying and stealing and adultery. Anthon is the one to be trusted.

Smith was telling lies. He said that the letters were from different alphabets for he claimed the plates were written upon in an unknown language and if they were from different alphabets then there was something suspicious going on. Mormons

never think of the possibility that Smith himself was fooled by plates that were not from the time of the Nephites at all.

Mormons reply that the Book of Mormon does not mention all the migrations to the New World so it might be that these alphabets were brought to it and used to create a new alphabet. For example, a Chaldiac letter might be noun meaning anything like Nephi or tree in the New World. They used the alphabet and changed the meaning.

This is hopelessly implausible. It would take a long long time for a language to alter so drastically. The Nephites were only in America from 600 BC to 421 AD. A very short period of time.

Anthon would not have gone to much trouble to decipher the scrawl. What professor would if somebody came in with a page to him and could not prove to him where the figures came from? Anthon would have needed days and weeks to work out if the scrawl did make linguistic sense. But Harris had only a short meeting with him.

Conclusion

Anthon does nothing for those who wish the Book of Mormon to be true. Martin Harris in saying, "I left him [Professor Anthon] and went to Dr. Mitchell who sanctioned what Professor Anthon said respecting both the characters and the translation" proved himself only to be a liar. Harris also lied that Anthon wrote a letter to authenticate the translation and then tore it up when Harris told him where the characters came from - an angel! No scholar who sees a work that seems real dismisses it just because the finder claims an angel led him to it! Its about the work nothing else. Anthon would have known the book was claiming to be part of a Bible from the "translation" which must have mentioned God and Jesus. Anthon said he was shown something that contained script from the Mexican zodiac. This shows that Smith was trying to pass off the Aztecs as Hebrews which is total rubbish.

