

8. There was a book published in 1823 Vermont entitled *View of the Hebrews* .

SHORT ANSWER:

Yes, I know. I had to read the whole thing in order to respond to your letter. No one should have to read *View of the Hebrews*, because it's an extraordinarily boring and inaccurate book, and it bears only a superficial, cursory resemblance to the Book of Mormon. Anyone who thinks Joseph Smith plagiarized from it has clearly never bothered to read it.

(That includes you, Jeremy.)

LONG ANSWER:

A century after the fact, *View of the Hebrews* was republished by Brigham Young University, which suggests that the Church is not at all concerned if people read *View of the Hebrews* and compare it to the Book of Mormon. (They still have the entire *V of the H* text posted [on the BYU website](#).) Incidentally, Joseph Smith was equally unconcerned, and he even cited *View of the Hebrews* in 1842 as evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It would be a very curious thing, indeed, for a plagiarist to call attention to his source material.

To read a single page of Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* is to instantly recognize that the Book of Mormon did not plagiarize from it. In fact, for the benefit of those reading this, let's do precisely that. I'm going to pluck a paragraph at random and reproduce it here and let readers make a determination for themselves.

So here it is: the second paragraph from Chapter Three of *View of the Hebrews*, entitled "The Present State of Judah and Israel." Enjoy:

*The whole present population of the Jews has been calculated at five millions. But the probability is, (as has been thought by good judges,) that they are far more numerous. * One noted character says, that in Poland and part of Turkey, there are at least three millions of this people; and that among them generally, there is an unusual spirit of enquiry relative to Christianity. Mr. Noah says, that in the States of Barbary, their number exceeds seven hundred thousand. Their population in Persia, China, India, and Tartary, is stated (in a report of the London Society for the conversion of the Jews,) to be more than three hundred thousand. In Western Asia the Jews are numerous; and they are found in almost every land.*

In which part of the Book of Mormon can we expect to find Joseph's bastardized version of this?

And lest you think I'm plucking out a section that is unrepresentative of the majority of the *View of the Hebrews* text, feel free to reproduce any other section from *V of the H* and look

for where Joseph adapted it in to his own allegedly derivative work. In addition, *View of the Hebrews* is just over 47,000 words long, compared to over 265,000 words in the Book of Mormon. If Joseph was just ripping off *V of the H*, how is it that Joseph’s version is more than five times longer than his source material? True, Peter Jackson was able to pad out *The Hobbit* into a trilogy of three-hour movies, but this is even more ridiculous than that. (And *The Hobbit* movies were pretty darn ridiculous.)

It’s an apples-to-oranges comparison. *View of the Hebrews* is a polemical essay about Ethan Smith’s theory that the Indians are Israelites. It is not, like the Book of Mormon, a narrative history. It’s a recitation of historical facts and speculation; it has no story at all. In addition, the “evidences” that Ethan Smith provides to link the Indians to Israel are completely ignored in the Book of Mormon. You won’t find chiasmus or much in the way of King James-style English in V of the H. There are no Nephites, Lamanites, Jaredites, or Liahonas, or cureloms or cumoms, or any Book of Mormon proper names or places. Even Captain Kidd is nowhere to be seen.

Below is a chart comparing the *View of the Hebrews* to the Book of Mormon:

Okay, let’s take a look.

	VIEW OF THE HEBREWS <i><u>Online Source</u></i>	BOOK OF MORMON <i><u>Online Source</u></i>
<i>Published</i>	<i>1823, first edition 1825, second edition</i>	<i>1830, first edition</i>
<i>Location</i>	<i>Vermont Poultney, Rutland County</i>	<i>Vermont Sharon, Windsor County</i>
	<i>NOTE: Oliver Cowdery, one of the Book of Mormon witnesses, lived in Poultney when View of the Hebrews was published.</i>	<i>NOTE : Windsor County is adjacent to Rutland County.</i>

NOTE: You are incorrect. The Book of Mormon was first published in Palmyra, Wayne County, New York, not Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont.

Windsor is the county where Joseph Smith was born, 24 years prior to the Book of Mormon’s publication. The fact that Windsor County is adjacent to Rutland County is about as relevant as the fact that Keokuk, Iowa is where the Des Moines River meets the Mississippi.

	VIEW OF THE HEBREWS <i>Online Source</i>	BOOK OF MORMON <i>Online Source</i>
The destruction of Jerusalem	√	√
The scattering of Israel	√	√
The restoration of the Ten Tribes	√	√
Hebrews leave the Old World for the New World	√	√
Religion a motivating factor	√	√
Migrations a long journey	√	√
Encounter "seas" of "many waters"	√	√
The Americas an uninhabited land	√	√
Settlers journey northward	√	√
Encounter a valley of a great river	√	√
A unity of race (Hebrew) settle the land and are the ancestral origin of American Indians	√	√
Hebrew the origin of Indian language	√	√
Egyptian hieroglyphics	√	√
Lost Indian records	√ <i>A set of "yellow leaves" buried in Indian hill. Elder B.H. Roberts noted the "leaves" may be gold.</i>	√ <i>Joseph Smith claimed the gold plates were buried in Hill Cumorah</i>
Breastplate, Urim & Thummim	√	√

	VIEW OF THE HEBREWS <i>Online Source</i>	BOOK OF MORMON <i>Online Source</i>
The destruction of Jerusalem	√	√
A man standing on a wall warning the people saying, “Wo, wo to this city...to this people” while subsequently being attacked.	√ <i>Jesus, son of Ananus, stood on the wall saying “Wo, wo to this city, this temple, and this people.”</i> <i>- Came to preach for many days</i> <i>- Went upon a wall</i> <i>- Cried with a loud voice</i> <i>- Preached of destruction of Jerusalem</i> <i>- Had stones cast at him</i> <i>(View of Hebrews, p. 20)</i>	√ <i>Samuel the Lamanite stood on the wall saying “Wo, wo to this city” or “this people”.</i> <i>- Came to preach for many days</i> <i>- Went upon a wall</i> <i>- Cried with a loud voice -</i> <i>Preached of destruction of Nephites - Had stones cast at him</i> <i>(Helaman 13-16)</i>
Prophets, spiritually gifted men transmit generational records	√	√
The Gospel preached in the Americas	√	√
Quotes whole chapters of Isaiah	√	√
Good and bad are a necessary opposition	√	√
Pride denounced	√	√
Polygamy denounced	√	√
Sacred towers and high places	√	√

	VIEW OF THE HEBREWS <i>Online Source</i>	BOOK OF MORMON <i>Online Source</i>
The destruction of Jerusalem	√	√
Messiah visits the Americas	√ Quetzalcoatl, the white bearded "Mexican Messiah"	√
Idolatry and human sacrifice	√	√
Hebrews divide into two classes, civilized and barbarous	√	√
Civilized thrive in art, written language, metallurgy, navigation	√	√
Government changes from monarchy to republic	√	√
Civil and ecclesiastical power is united in the same person	√	√
Long wars break out between the civilized and barbarous	√	√
Extensive military fortifications, observations, "watch towers"	√	√
Barbarous exterminate the civilized	√	√
Discusses the United States	√	√
Ethan/Ether	√ Elder B.H. Roberts noted: "Ethan is prominently connected with the recording of the matter in the one case, and Ether in the other."	√

Source: B.H. Roberts, Studies of the Book of Mormon, p.240-242,324-344

Poor B.H. Roberts. You have so woefully misrepresented his work on this subject that it's almost criminal. We'll get to that later.

My initial plan was to make another chart where I add a fourth column describing why these supposed parallels are largely insignificant and, in some cases, ridiculous, but each point requires more text than a small box can allow. So I guess we have to do this the old fashioned way.

A. Both books reference the destruction of Jerusalem

Well, sort of, and one much more than the other. Ethan Smith begins his essay with a discussion of the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, and then proceeds to describe all that immediately followed, lamenting the evils of Thadeus, Felix, Nero, and other Roman notables and quoting all the scripture in which Jesus foretold Jerusalem's sad fate. His entire first chapter is a historical recounting of the fate of Jerusalem after Christ, citing events and figures that play no role in the Book of Mormon whatsoever. More than 1/5th of its entire text is a synopsis and commentary on a slice of Palestinian history completely removed from anything in the Book of Mormon.

In contrast, the Book of Mormon recounts the family of Lehi escaping from the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem 670 years earlier and never mentions the Romans at all.

Furthermore, its narrative leaves Jerusalem behind entirely after the 14th of its 531 pages and never goes back. With the exception of Jerusalem and Jesus Himself, none of the people, places, or events referenced in V of H's first 47 pages correlate in any way to the Book of Mormon. In content, length, and literary structure, the treatment of both books of two different historical accounts couldn't be more different.

Again, let's remember what *View of the Hebrews* is. As a treatise postulating an Israeli genealogy for Native Americans, it could not make its case without citing recorded historical events that overlap with events of concern to the Book of Mormon. How many other books have been written about these widely known and researched historical events? Should we assume that all of them have plagiarized each other?

B. Both books reference the Scattering of Israel

This should be considered a subsidiary of the first point, as Ethan Smith describes at great length Israel's scattering in the context of the Roman sacking of Palestine. The Book of Mormon, however, contains no description of any actual scattering and only makes reference to it in passing and in a much different doctrinal context. Ethan Smith focuses exclusively on the Lost Ten Tribes, which get a few passing mentions but don't really figure into the Book of Mormon narrative at all.

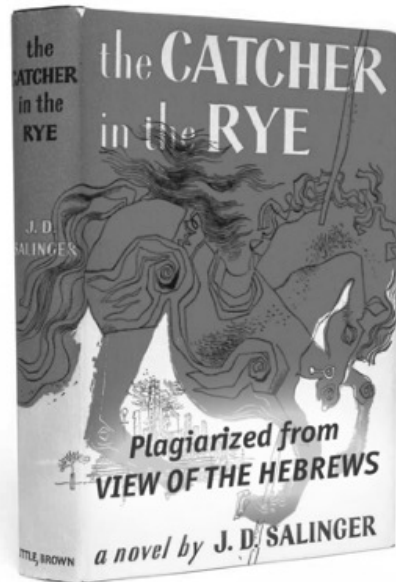
C. Both books reference the Restoration of the Ten Tribes

Well, yes, but with entirely different purposes and focus. In the Book of Mormon, the Ten Tribes are almost an afterthought – Lehi's family descend from Joseph, not the Lost Tribes, which is in direct contrast to Ethan Smith's theory that all Indians come from the Ten Tribes.

D. Both books reference Hebrews leaving the Old World for the New World

Yes, in very different contexts. Ethan Smith postulates that the Lost Tribes wandered into the Americas over the Bering Strait. Furthermore, he doesn't tell us any specific expeditions thing about any specific people in their company- remember, V of H isn't a story; it's an essay. The Book of Mormon introduces us to a group of people with names who leave

Jerusalem, wander in the wilderness, build a ship, and arrive in America – never specifically identified as America in the text itself – by sea, not by land. The events are different, as is the literary approach. It's the difference between reading an academic essay about boys in New England boarding schools and reading *Catcher in the Rye*.



E. Religion a motivating factor

Why, yes, it was. Why is this a separate category? When you're talking about the scattering and gathering of Israel, isn't religion going to be a motivating factor? All of these initial objections are essentially subsets of the main charge repeated with only slight variations.

F. Migrations a long journey

Again, a distinction without a difference, as it's just another element of the original charge. Would it have made a difference here if the migration in one of the books had been a short journey? You could add a category that said "In both books, people ate food in the course of the referenced migrations" and it would be as noteworthy as saying, essentially, "it's a long way from Israel to America," which is all you're saying here.

G. Encounter "seas" of "many waters"

The word "seas" appears in *View of the Hebrews* precisely three times.

"This writer says, "They entered into the Euphrates by the narrow passages of the river." He must mean, they repassed this river in its upper regions, or small streams, away toward Georgia; and hence must have taken their course between the Black and Caspian seas." – p. 76

"We have a prediction relative to the ten tribes, which fully accords with the things exhibited of them, and of the natives of our land... They shall run to and fro, over all the vast regions, the dreary wilds, which lie between those extreme seas." – footnote, p. 107

"Such texts have a special allusion to the lost tribes of the house of Israel. And their being called over mountains, and over seas, from the west, and from afar, receives an emphasis from the consideration of their being gathered from the vast wilds of America." – p. 159

Nobody seems to be actually encountering seas in any of these quotes.

The phrase "many waters" does not appear in *View of the Hebrews*.

H. The Americas an uninhabited land

Contrary to Ethan Smith, the Book of Mormon makes no claim that America was uninhabited when Lehi arrived. In fact, the text argues precisely the opposite conclusion, as they were

preceded by the Jaredites and encounter Coriantumr, who clearly got there before they did. (Perhaps it was uninhabited when the Jaredites got there; I can't find a definitive statement on that subject one way or the other, but I may have missed it.) But if we're arguing for parallels, we probably ought to focus on the proposed Israeli ancestry of the Indians, which has no bearing on the Jaredites, who were not of the House of Israel.

I. Settlers journey northward

Yes, some settlers do tend to do that. How Joseph Smith would have imagined settlers going north without *View of the Hebrews*, I'll never know.

The word "northward" appears only once in *View of the Hebrews* on page 51: "Thence northward, on the shore of the said sea, as far as the point due west of Mount Lebanon." He's talking about the boundaries of Abraham's territory with no mention of settlers.

The word "north" appears 68 times, mostly in reference to the Lost Tribes who, according to the Bible, will come forth "out of the land of the North," which would suggest their journey was or will be in a direction other than north. If there's a direct mention of a specific northward trek by any settlers in *View of the Hebrews*, I couldn't find it. And in the Book of Mormon, settlers travel in every direction. I don't see how this is a parallel of any significance, even if it were accurate, which it doesn't seem to be.

And why does this matter, exactly? Would it help if all settlers referenced in the Book of Mormon only went south?

J. Encounter a valley of a great river

This seems to be the only reference in *View of the Hebrews* that might apply.

"Other tribes assure us that their remote fathers, on their way to this country, 'came to a great river which they could not pass; when God dried up the river that they might pass over.' – page 106

No valleys are mentioned in connection with any rivers, great or otherwise.

Ethan Smith uses the tradition referenced on page 106 to describe his speculation that God must have allowed the Indians to cross the "Beering's Straits" by drying up rivers all over the place. This is markedly different from the Book of Mormon's River of Laman and Valley of Lemuel, as the river was both crossable and un-dried up.

K. A unity of race (Hebrew) settle the land and are the ancestral origin of American Indians

View of the Hebrews and the Book of Mormon differ dramatically on this point. Ethan Smith can't stop yapping about the Ten Tribes, and how they came out of the north countries across the Bering Strait to escape Roman oppression. The Book of Mormon ignores the Ten Tribes as possible ancestors of the Indians, instead focusing on the non-lost tribes of Joseph and Judah in describing the Lehites and the Mulekites, respectively. Then, for good measure, it adds a group – the Jaredites – that are utterly un-Hebrew and dominate the land well before the House of Israel even comes along.

So much of *View of the Hebrews* is devoted to tying the fate of the Lost Tribes to the history of the Indians that Joseph Smith would have had to discard just about everything Ethan Smith wrote when producing the Book of Mormon, including all of the supposed evidences of Hebraism among the Indians that Ethan Smith cites, not a single one of which makes its way into the Book of Mormon. Why plagiarize a text when you ignore its central premise and all supporting evidences? In fact, how can that be said to be plagiarism at all?

L. Hebrew the origin of Indian language

Sort of. The Jaredites didn't speak Hebrew, and the Mulekites had all but forgotten it, and the Nephites kept records in Reformed Egyptian. Again, since Ethan Smith's theories tied the Indians to Israel, this, too, is just another subset of the original charge.

M. Egyptian hieroglyphics

What about them? The word "hieroglyphics" does not appear in either *View of the Hebrews* or the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon claims that the Lehites wrote in "Reformed Egyptian," which are presumed to be hieroglyphics, but *View of the Hebrews* has nothing approaching a comparable reference. It makes no claims that the Indians wrote anything in Egyptian. It does claim, without any supporting material, that there appears to be some Egyptian influence in ancient American art. The Book of Mormon doesn't mention art at all.

N. Lost Indian records

You expand that to say that this has reference to "yellow leaves" buried in a hill that B.H. Roberts supposedly speculated might be made of gold. Yet the phrase "yellow leaves" does not appear in *View of the Hebrews*.

You're likely referencing the four folded pieces of parchment, yellowed with age, dug out of an Indian grave that supposedly had a handful of Bible verses on them written in Hebrew, as mentioned on page 220 of *View of the Hebrews*. No reference to "Lost Indian records" on this parchment, unless you consider Deuteronomy to be a "lost Indian record."

If B.H. Roberts or anyone else believes this old paper, which is described as being wrinkled and getting torn in half, might be made out of gold, that would be truly bizarre, as would presuming that this served as any kind of inspiration for the golden plates. Not only are they wholly dissimilar in form, they are also wholly dissimilar in function. Ethan Smith posits that the scraps of paper were discarded because the Indians could no longer read them and considered them worthless, while the golden plates recorded an intergenerational history and were buried specifically to preserve the history for future generations.



O. Breastplate, Urim & Thummim

Behold the sum total of references to the Breastplate, Urim and Thummim in *View of the Hebrews*:

“Before the Indian Archimagus officiates in making the supposed holy fire for the yearly atonement for sin, the sagan (waiter of the high priest) clothes him with a white ephod, which is a waist coat without sleeves. In resemblance of the Urim and Thum-inim, the American Archimagus wears a breast plate made of a white conch-shell with two holes bored in the middle of it, through which he puts the ends of an otter skin strap, and fastens a buck horn white button to the outside of each, as if in imitation of the precious stones of the Urim.” – page 173

None of this bears any resemblance to how the Urim and Thummim are referenced in the Book of Mormon itself or in its translation process, although I’m betting Joseph Smith could really have used some of those otter skin straps.

P. A man standing on a wall warning the people saying, “Wo, wo to this city...to this people” while subsequently being attacked.

The implication is that this was where Joseph lifted dialogue for Samuel the Lamanite, who never said the words you quote. The closest I can find is “Yea, wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent” in Helaman 15:3. It’s got “wo,” “people” and some familiar prepositions in it, but it’s not close enough to constitute plagiarism, especially since its part of a much larger speech that has no antecedent in *View of the Hebrews*. And it’s obvious that 99.9999% of the dialogue in the Book of Mormon didn’t come from *View of the Hebrews* if this is the best example of supposedly plagiarized dialogue you can find.

The two men crying “wo” are quite different figures, too. Samuel was a prophet in the New World under attack on a wall and miraculously protected, while the *View of the Hebrews* guy was an old, frail dude who wandered the streets of Jerusalem and stayed off the walls for seven years while repeating the quote you provide ad nauseum – unlike in the case of Samuel, this single phrase constituted the entirety of his comments, which is probably why he was largely dismissed as a harmless quack. Yet when Jerusalem was under siege in 70 AD, “he ascended the walls, and in a voice still more tremendous than ever, he exclaimed, ‘Wo, wo to this city, this temple, and this people!’ And he then added, (for the first time for the seven years,) ‘Wo, wo to myself!’ The words were no sooner uttered, than a stone from a Roman machine without the walls, struck him dead on the spot!”

Looks more like an accident than an attack.

Q. Prophets, spiritually gifted men transmit generational records

Not at all, at least in the *View of the Hebrews* case. Ethan Smith doesn’t identify a single person among the Indian population as a prophet, except perhaps Quetzalcoatl, a rather special case that we’ll address when he shows up later in your list. Traditional Christians like Ethan Smith believe that there have been no prophets after Christ, and *View of the Hebrews* explicitly states on page 127 that “We are to expect no new revelation from heaven.” E. Smith’s essay covers a time period solely after 70 AD, so it makes sense that he doesn’t name

any new prophets at all – maybe that’s why you add the qualifier “spiritually gifted men,” which is so broad a label as to be a meaningless distinction. Of course, the Book of Mormon is dripping with prophets before, during, and after the time of Christ.

As for the idea that these V of H dudes with spiritual gifts are “transmit[ting] generational records,” that’s just nonsense. Any records that Ethan Smith imagines being kept are also imagined as being thrown away or left behind in Jerusalem, because he posited that the Indians considered them worthless. Ethan Smith repeatedly laments the fact that no such records survive and that all the information we have about them comes from unwritten and unreliable oral histories.

R. The Gospel preached in the Americas

View of the Hebrews references the preaching of the gospel in the Americas on page 187, which I quote at length here:

It seems the Spanish missionaries found such traces of resemblance between some of the rites of the religion of the natives of Mexico, and the religion which they wished to introduce, that our author says, “They persuaded them that the gospel had in very remote times, been already preached in America. And they investigated its traces in the Aztec ritual, with the same ardour which the learned who in our days engage in the study of Sanscrit, display in discussing the analogy between the Greek mythology and that of the Ganges and the Burrampooter.” It is a noted fact that there is a far greater analogy between much of the religion of the Indians, and Christianity, than between that of any other heathen nation on earth and Christianity.

In the Book of Mormon, the actual preaching of the gospel in the Americas is recorded firsthand by the people preaching it on page after page after page. Yet Ethan Smith never records the actual preaching of the gospel; he merely looks for parallels in Native American history and ritual and explores them at length. Those supposed parallels make up the bulk of Ethan Smith’s text, but the Book of Mormon completely ignores all of them. Many critics of the Book of Mormon claim that it is actually far too Christian, as it entirely lacks the Native American flavor that would have been there had Joseph been trying to manufacture a history of the Indians consistent with Ethan Smith’s premises.

And, again, note the style and subject of the above quoted paragraph. None of it has any corollary in the Book of Mormon.

S. Quotes whole chapters of Isaiah

And yet only 8.3% of the Isaiah verses quoted in *View of the Hebrews* are also included in the Book of Mormon. This is silly, anyway, as Joseph already had a Bible. If he wanted to plagiarize Isaiah, why did he need to use V of H as a middleman?

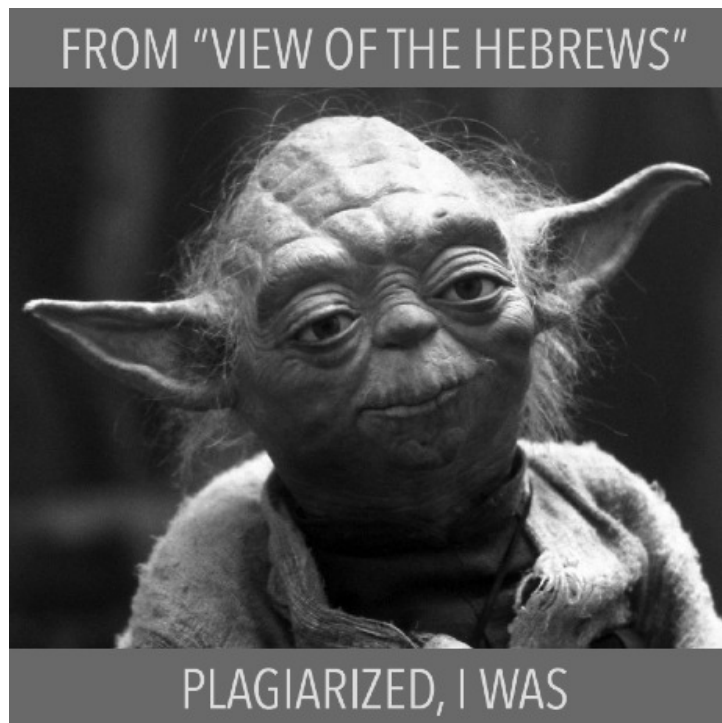
View of the Hebrews quotes a lot of stuff besides Isaiah, too, specifically Deuteronomy 30; Jeremiah 16, 23, 30-31, 35-37; Zephaniah 3; Amos 9; Hosea and Joel. Why didn’t any of those passages make their way into the Book of Mormon?

T. Good and bad are a necessary opposition

That's the message of Star Wars, too. Should we assume George Lucas also lifted it from *View of the Hebrews*?

U. Pride denounced

So did *View of the Hebrews* lift that from Greek mythology? Because the denunciation of pride is a common theme in world literature since the beginning of the written word. In fact, I think even the Bible has a thing or two to say about it.



V. Polygamy denounced

The word “polygamy” does not appear in either text. The Book of Mormon has Jacob Chapter 2, which accurately fits this description, but the nearest I can find to a denunciation of polygamy in *View of the Hebrews* is on page 104, where 19th Century missionaries visit a Delaware Indian chief and record their conversation.

“Long time ago, (he added) it was a good custom among his people to take but one wife, and that for life. But now they had become so foolish, and so wicked, that they would take a number of wives at a time; and turn them away at pleasure!”

This looks to be as much a denunciation of divorce as polygamy, and the context of this is quite different in both texts. This is the expression of one modern Indian chief's personal opinion of ancient history, not a sweeping prophetic declaration of the will of the Lord. This chief's opinion is not cited to define doctrine but rather to illustrate parallels in Indian and Christian traditions.

W. Sacred towers and high places

View of the Hebrews used the word “tower” fifteen times, all in reference to military towers in Jerusalem at the time of the 70 A.D. siege – nothing “sacred” about them. The “sacred towers” in the Book of Mormon – King Benjamin's tower and the Zoramite tower of Rameumptom – have no antecedent in *View of the Hebrews*.

However, I must concede that both books, as well as pretty much every book ever written with any geographical information whatsoever, make reference to high places.

X. Messiah visits the Americas

Okay, this one's a little too much fun.



It is impossible to review the history of ancient America without encountering the legend of Quetzalcoatl, who by most accounts was actually a winged serpent and not a white-bearded man. The irony is that the Book of Mormon not only doesn't mention him at all; it makes no attempt at all to tie Christ's visit to any of the Quetzalcoatl legends. Jesus in the Book of Mormon acts pretty much the same way as Jesus of the New Testament and not like any winged serpent. Why would a plagiarizing Joseph Smith leave the Quetzalcoatl legend entirely untouched?

You say *View of the Hebrews* mentions "Quetzalcoatl, the white bearded 'Mexican Messiah.'" Why don't you say "Jesus" instead?

Because Ethan Smith thought Quetzalcoatl was Moses. *Moses*, of all people!

Tying the serpent on a stick to the iconography of Quetzalcoatl, he sees the ancient legends as reference to Moses and not Christ. So should we assume Jesus the Messiah for everyone except Mexicans, because Moses gets "Mexican Messiah" duty?

Y. Idolatry and human sacrifice

There's one reference to human sacrifice in *View of the Hebrews*, found on page 101. Here it is:

This may account for the degeneracy of some Indians far to the west, reported in the journals of Mr. Giddings, in his exploring tour. He informs, "They differ greatly in their ideas of the Great Spirit; one supposes that he dwells in a buffalo, another in a wolf, another in a bear. another in a bird, another in a rattlesnake. On great occasions, such as when they go to war, and when they return, (he adds) they sacrifice a dog, and have a dance. On these occasions they formerly sacrificed a prisoner taken in the war; but through the benevolent exertions of a trader among them, they have abandoned the practice of human sacrifice.

All we know about human sacrifice in *View of the Hebrews* is that one tribe stopped doing it at some point. The Book of Mormon doesn't have a lot to say about human sacrifice, either, but what it does say is entirely dissimilar to the passage here. References to idolatry are also scarce in the Book of Mormon.

The point with this item, and with many others, is that Ethan Smith is commenting and speculating on historical events in ancient America, and the Book of Mormon claims to be recounting historical events in ancient America. By most accounts, idolatry and human sacrifice were historical events in ancient America, so we should not be surprised to find independent references to them in both works.

How many works about World War II have been written? If two of them mentioned Nazi atrocities against Jews, would you accuse one author of plagiarism?

Z. Hebrews divide into two classes, civilized and barbarous

View of the Hebrews speculates about this and provides no specifics, while the Book of Mormon is far more complex than that. In the initial division between Nephites and Lamanites, the Nephites are civilized and the Lamanites are barbarous. But these adjectives cannot be permanently applied to either group. At times, the Lamanites are more righteous than the Nephites, and for two hundred years there are “no manner of –ites” and everyone lives in peace. The subtleties and details of the Book of Mormon on this subject have no antecedent in *View of the Hebrews*.

AA. Civilized thrive in art, written language, metallurgy, navigation

Really? Where does the Book of Mormon mention any art? Why does the *View of the Hebrews* lament the utter loss of written language among the Indians? *View of the Hebrews* mentions navigation with regard to biblical prophecy, but it makes no claims that Indians were capable of it, as Ethan Smith insisted they came to America by land and not by sea. In any case, there's historical evidence of an ancient American civilization that produced art, written language, metallurgy, and – debatably – navigation. What's notable is that the treatment of identified historical facts in both records is so strikingly different.

BB. Government changes from monarchy to republic

Not at all. The government in the Book of Mormon changes from a monarchy to a “reign of the judges,” which bears little or no resemblance to a republic. The judges are only chosen by the voice of the people when one dies or resigns; otherwise, judgeships are passed down hereditarily, making this a modified monarchy more than a republic. There's no senate or congress; judges unilaterally make and enforce laws with no public input and no accountability to voters, although their judgments can be overturned by a group of “lesser judges.” Book of Mormon government is actually quite strange and quite different from American government, and it has no antecedent whatsoever in *View of the Hebrews*.

CC. Civil and ecclesiastical power is united in the same person

Which person? Are we only talking about the monarchy and not the republic, a republic that doesn't exist in the Book of Mormon? Because in monarchies, then and now, ecclesiastical authority often rests with the king. That's not a concept that either Smith would need to invent or plagiarize. Even today, Elizabeth II is the head of the Church of England. What's striking is that in the Book of Mormon, this ecclesiastical authority extends to the judges once

the monarchy is disbanded, as opposed to *View of the Hebrews*, where this is not the case.

DD. Long wars break out between the civilized and barbarous

Yes. That's also true in Mel Gibson's Meso-American-based movie "Apocalypto," which he, too, must have plagiarized from *View of the Hebrews*. The historical evidence, then and now, suggested that in ancient America, long wars broke out between the civilized and barbarous. What would be remarkable is if any book dealing with ancient history in this region would fail to mention it.

EE. Extensive military fortifications, observations, "watch towers"

Every watchtower mentioned in *View of the Hebrews* is in Jerusalem of 70 AD, not in ancient America. As for military fortification and observations – yes, both books include observations, as does every book ever written – see item DD, above. Wars tend to have these sorts of things, and the idea of war is not something Joseph Smith would have had to plagiarize from Ethan Smith.

FF. Barbarous exterminate the civilized

Not in the Book of Mormon, they don't. The Nephites who perish at the end are every bit as barbarous as the Lamanites. The complexity of who's civilized and who's barbarous defies easy categorization in the Book of Mormon. Again, no antecedent to this in *View of the Hebrews*.

GG. Discusses the United States

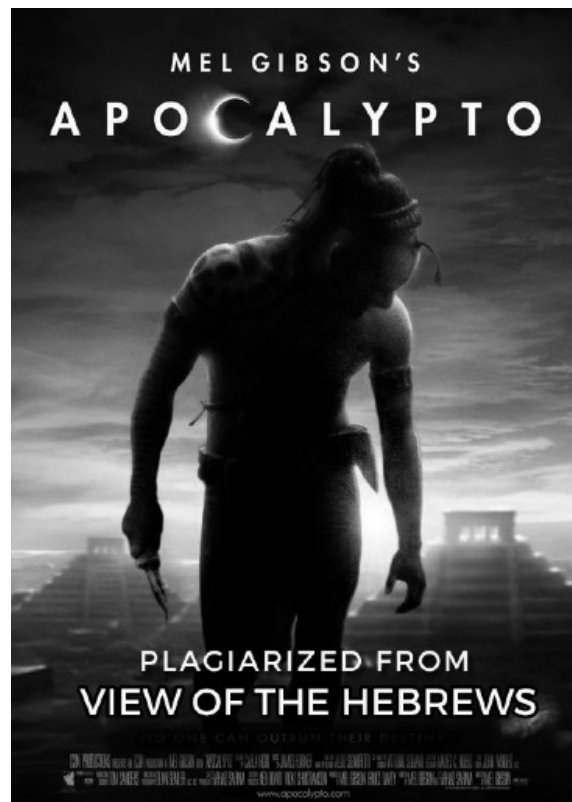
Nope. The Book of Mormon makes no reference to the United States whatsoever. In fact, it doesn't even explicitly identify its geography as being on the American continent. People, including church leaders, have interpreted many of its references to "this land" or "the land of promise" as references to the United States, but the text itself doesn't sustain that interpretation, particularly if you accept a Meso-American limited geography model.

HH. Ethan/Ether

Seriously?

This would be a good time to offer a view on *View of the Hebrews* from my favorite unofficial apologist, Hugh Nibley, once again in fiery red:

"If someone will show me how to draw a circle," cries the youthful Joseph Smith, "I will make you a fine Swiss watch!" So Joachim or Anselm or Ethan Smith or Rabelais or somebody takes a stick and draws a circle in the sand, and forthwith the adroit and wily Joseph turns out a beautiful running mechanism that tells perfect time! This is not an exaggeration. The Book of Mormon in structure and design is



every bit as complicated, involved, and ingenious as the works of a Swiss watch, and withal just as smoothly running. . . . The writer of that book brought together thousands of ideas and events and knit them together in a most marvelous unity. Yet the critics like to think they have explained the Book of Mormon completely if they can just discover where Joseph Smith *might* have got *one* of his ideas or expressions!”

Amen, Hugh! Testify, brother!

Reverend Ethan Smith was the author of *View of the Hebrews*. Ethan Smith was a pastor in Poultney, Vermont when he wrote and published the book. Oliver Cowdery – also a Poultney, Vermont resident – was a member of Ethan’s congregation during this time and before he went to New York to join his distant cousin Joseph Smith. As you know, Oliver Cowdery played an instrumental role in the production of the Book of Mormon.

Which is insignificant. Since the Book of Mormon text bears no resemblance to *View of the Hebrews*, it doesn’t matter at all whether or not Joseph or Oliver had seen it before 1830. Certainly Joseph was at least passingly familiar with the text later in life, as he cites it as evidence for the Book of Mormon’s authenticity – again, an odd thing for a supposed plagiarist of that material to do. Nobody in Joseph’s lifetime thought the two texts were similar enough to merit any accusation of plagiarism, and nobody who spends any significant time with both texts can plausibly claim that one was derived from the other.

This direct link between Joseph and Oliver and *View of the Hebrews* demonstrates that Joseph is very likely to have been aware of the theme and content of that book.

The fact that Joseph quoted from the book demonstrates that Joseph is very likely to have been aware of the theme and content of that book, at least after the Book of Mormon was published. That still doesn’t mean it was a source for the Book of Mormon, because the books are radically different in every important respect.

It gives weight to all the similarities described in the preceding comparison chart.

Since those aren’t really similarities at all, it would be impossible to add weight to them.

Apologists may point out that the Book of Mormon is not a direct, word-for-word plagiarism of *View of the Hebrews*, and indeed that is not the claim.

Indeed! Because that would be a ridiculous claim. So would a claim that Joseph borrowed anything at all from *View of the Hebrews* beyond the idea that Indians are Israelites, which was an idea that did not originate with either Ethan or Joseph Smith. And the case made by *View of the Hebrews* in support of that idea bears no resemblance whatsoever to the one made in the Book of Mormon.

Rather, the similarities should give any reader pause that two books so similar in theme and content would coincidentally be connected by Oliver Cowdery.

Except they are wildly divergent in theme and not even remotely similar in content. So what should really give your readers pause is that you, personally, have clearly never read *View of the Hebrews*.

I find that remarkable, and not in a good way.

You are no longer “just asking questions.” You have now chosen to devote your entire life to tearing down the faith of Latter-day Saints based on unexamined arguments that you have not bothered to investigate yourself. You have neglected firsthand study of essential primary sources and just taken whatever nasty anti-Mormon accusations come your way and thrown them up against the wall in the hopes that they stick.

That’s not just vicious; it’s lazy.

Given the amount of money you’re pulling in and the number of families you’re splitting apart, you have a profound duty to genuinely know what you’re talking about. If you had actually read *View of the Hebrews*, you would realize just how pathetically weak these arguments are. You would also realize that you are destroying testimonies with bad information and woefully misrepresenting B.H. Roberts’s work.

Speaking of which:

LDS General Authority and scholar Elder B.H. Roberts privately researched the link between the Book of Mormon and the *View of the Hebrews*, Joseph’s father having the same dream in 1811 as Lehi’s dream, and other sources that were available to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and others before the publication of the Book of Mormon. Elder Roberts’ private research was meant only for the eyes of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve and was never intended to be available to the public. However, Roberts’ work was later published in 1985 as *Studies of the Book of Mormon*. Based upon his research, Elder B.H. Roberts came to the following conclusion on the *View of the Hebrews*:

No, he didn’t.

I know I haven’t posted what that supposed conclusion is yet, but it’s important to point out that you are ignoring B.H. Roberts’s own direct, firsthand explanation as to how that “conclusion” is to be interpreted. In a letter to his fellow church leaders with reference to the report he prepared, Roberts said, “Let me say once and for all, so as to avoid what might otherwise call for repeated explanation, that what is herein set forth ***does not represent any conclusions of mine.***” [Emphasis added. Strongly.]

The entire report, including the quote you provide, is written in the voice of a straw man critic he created, and these aren’t arguments he, himself, agreed with in real life. What I’m about to quote from your letter, therefore, is not actually BH Roberts’s conclusion, and you are irresponsible for stating that it is.

“Did Ethan Smith’s View of the Hebrews furnish structural material for Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon? It has been pointed out in these pages that there are many things in the former book that might well have suggested many major things in the other. Not a few things merely, one or two, or a half dozen, but many; and it is this fact of many things of similarity and the cumulative force of them that makes them so serious a menace to Joseph Smith’s story of the Book of Mormon’s origin.”

– B.H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, p.240

This statement was supposed to be interpreted as a “devil’s advocate” brief to present the best possible argument a critic of the Book of Mormon could make. I’m not sure his heart was in it, as the arguments listed above are really flimsy.

Roberts was a fierce defender of the historicity and divine nature of the Book of Mormon until the end of his life. To cite him without offering that context is to defame a good and faithful man and attribute opinions to him that were often diametrically opposed to what he actually believed.

While this does not prove that the Book of Mormon was plagiarized from the View of the Hebrews...

Of course it doesn’t. It doesn’t even assert that. Didn’t you, just a few paragraphs ago, concede that Joseph Smith did not take text from *View of the Hebrews*?

... it does demonstrate that key elements of the story of the Book of Mormon – i.e. Native Americans as Hebrew descendants, ancient records of natives preserved, scattering and gathering of Israel, Hebrew origin of Native American language, etc. pre-dated the Book of Mormon and were already among the ideas circulating among New England protestant Americans.

Where is that in dispute? That’s a widely accepted historical fact. Latter-day Saints have long conceded that the concept of Indians as Israelites was widely discussed prior to the Book of Mormon. What’s remarkable is how little the Book of Mormon coincides with the common theories of the time or with any of the theories advanced in *View of the Hebrews*.

With these ideas already existing and the previously cited issues with KJV plagiarism, errors, anachronisms, geography problems, and more issues to come, is it unreasonable to question Joseph Smith’s story of the Book of Mormon origins as Church Historian B.H. Roberts did?

Again, he didn’t, at least not in the way you’re characterizing it. But no, it is never unreasonable to ask questions. What’s unreasonable is to ignore substantive answers and refuse to listen to all points of view, which is what you have purposely done for half a decade.

Richard Bushman puts this all together. From *Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 96-98:

But for readers of Ethan Smith, the *Book of Mormon* was a disappointment. It was not a treatise about the origins of the Indians, regardless of what early Mormons said. The *Book of Mormon* never used the word “Indian.” The book had a different form and purpose than the earlier works on Indian origins. The assembling of anthropological evidence was the central endeavor of *View of the Hebrews* and the books that preceded it. Ethan Smith and his predecessors looked for signs of a deteriorating Jewish culture in Indian society, ticking off instances such as similarities in sacrifices and feasts. The *Book of Mormon* gave almost no attention to Old Testament parallels; its prophets taught pure Christianity. *View of the Hebrews* was an anthropological treatise, combining scripture and empirical evidence to propound a theory. The *Book of Mormon* was a narrative, not a treatise. Anyone

looking for a scientific investigation of Indian origins in its pages would have found ancient American Christianity instead.

And:

When other authors delved into Indian origins, they were explicit about recognizable Indian practices and the location of particular tribes. Solomon Spaulding's romance had characters traveling through a recognizable landscape from the east coast to the "Owaho" river formed by the confluence of two great rivers. There they met a people called "Kentucks" and another called "Delewans." A reader going through Spaulding's pages could readily locate Indian places on a modern map. Mounds in his manuscript reminded readers of modern remains. Readers easily oriented themselves in time and place on an Indian landscape.

The *Book of Mormon* deposited its people on some unknown shore - not even definitely identified as America - and had them live out their history in a remote place in a distant time, using names that had no connections to modern Indians... Once here, the *Book of Mormon* people are not given an Indian character. None of the trademark Indian items appear in the *Book of Mormon's* pages. In his parody of the Book of Mormon, Cole dressed his characters in blankets and moccasins. They traveled in bark canoes and suffered from smallpox. Spaulding's Indians lived in wigwams and raised corn, beans, and squash. The *Book of Mormon* contains none of the identifying words like squash, pools, wampum, peace pipes, tepees, braids, feathers, and no canoes, moccasins, or corn. Burial mounds, supposedly a stimulus for investigation of the Indians, receive only the slightest mention. Nephites and Lamanites fought with bows and arrows, but also with swords, cimeters, slings, and shields, more like classical warriors than Native Americans... The *Book of Mormon* seems more focused on its own Christian message than on Indian anthropology. The book refuses to argue its own theory.

And:

All the efforts to situate the *Book of Mormon* in the nineteenth century are frustrated by contradictions like these. The book elusively slides off the point on one crucial issue after another. Mormons talked up the *Book of Mormon* as an explanation of Indian origins, but the book does little to identify its peoples with Indian culture. The Lamanites are both a cursed and a chosen people. The Indians, targets of prejudice, are also the true possessors of the lands whom the Gentiles must join or perish. The text repeatedly trespasses standard categories.

Now that's genuine scholarship. In contrast, your shallow criticisms of the Book of Mormon barely scratch the surface of any of this, Jeremy. You're affecting people's lives now. You really, really have to do better than this.

UPDATE: Additional information and analysis can be found at cesletter.org/voh

UPDATE FROM JIM: That link doesn't work.
