

Why are the words *adieu*, *bible*, and *baptize* in the Book of Mormon? These words weren't known in Book of Mormon times.

Edward J. Brandt, associate director, Salt Lake Institute of Religion. A similar question could be asked about the Bible: Why, for example, is the word *book*, which comes from Old English and was not known in Old Testament times, found in the Old Testament?

The answer to both questions is simply that the Book of Mormon and the King James Version of the Bible are translations from ancient languages through the function of translators, who diligently endeavored to convey the intended meaning of the original writers.

The challenge faced by translators is a very difficult one. As Elder John A. Widtsoe wrote, “To convert the ideas recorded in Hebrew or Greek [or any language] into another language is not an easy task. The translator at best is only an interpreter of the text.” (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, 3 vols., arr. G. Homer Durham, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960, p. 119.)

The language of the Book of Mormon plates was an altered Hebrew, expressed in “reformed Egyptian” characters. (See Morm. 9:32–33.) Although the Prophet Joseph Smith acted under the powers and gifts of God to receive and translate the anciently recorded message, he could transmit the meaning of what he received only through his own expression.

Speaking of the revelations given through the Prophet after the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the Lord said, “These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, *after the manner of their language*, that they might come to understanding.” (D&C 1:24; italics added. See also 2 Ne. 31:3; Ether 12:39.) This same principle had governed the Prophet’s translation of the Book of Mormon. Much of the translation is quite literal, reflecting Semitic idiom and structure. However, the choice of words came through the manner of the language of Joseph Smith, so that we might have understanding. This is why words not known in Book of Mormon times are found in the translated text.

The word *adieu* is defined in a dictionary of Joseph Smith’s day as “a farewell; an expression of kind wishes at the parting of friends.” (Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828.) While the word is of French origin, it had found common usage in early nineteenth century New England.

The earliest known document relating to Church history is a recently discovered letter written in 1829 by the Prophet’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith, to her sister-in-law Mary Smith Pierce. (See *Ensign*, Oct. 1982, pp. 70–73.) In the letter, she enthusiastically shares news of her son’s work in translating an ancient record and tells something of the nature of its contents. Then, after telling of the happenings of the family, she concludes with “I must now bid the[e] farewell then adieu Lucy Smith.”

This suggests the possible common use in the Smith family of the word *adieu*. When the Prophet received the concept or idea of a farewell at the conclusion of the portion of the record known as the book of Jacob, he used an expression he felt would convey the message to our understanding: “Brethren, adieu.” (Jacob 7:27.)

The various forms of the word *baptize* are found 145 times in the Book of Mormon. It comes from the Greek *baptizein*, meaning “to immerse” or “to dip.” The Hebrew *rachts*, “to wash” or “to bathe,” or other ancient expressions such as “the burial,” “the anointing,” and even “to go down in water” do not convey the full meaning that the historical Christian term *baptize* does. The ordinance of baptism was one of the “plain and precious things” lost or tampered with in the ancient records. (See 1 Ne. 13:26–36; Moses 6:59–60, 64; JST, Gen. 17:3–7.) In order that this generation might understand the significance of this important ordinance, the Prophet used the word *baptize* in the translation.

The word *Bible* is used eleven times in the Book of Mormon, all within four verses of one chapter. It comes from the Greek *biblion*, meaning “books,” and other similar ancient roots. In Joseph Smith’s time, as well as today, it was the title or synonym for the Hebrew and Greek scriptural record.

The primary word for a record or book in the ancient Hebrew is *Sepher*. It is translated 185 times in the Old Testament as “book,” which, as mentioned earlier, comes from Old English. Thus, in the Bible we read of the “book of the generations” (Gen. 5:1), “book of the covenant” (Ex. 24:7), “book of the law” (Josh. 1:8), “book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel” (1 Kgs. 14:19), and “a roll of a book” (Jer. 36:2). Even though the word *book* was not known in Old Testament times, it was used in the translation to communicate an idea best understood by the use of that expression.

The word *book* is found seventy-eight times in the Book of Mormon, and the noun *record* is used ninety-eight times. In some instances, these words are used to describe what we know as the Bible—the “book” brought by the “Gentiles” to this land was “a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord” (1 Ne. 13:20–23); and “the book which thou beheld proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew” (1 Ne. 14:23). The fact that Joseph Smith used the word *Bible* at one point should not be surprising; he undoubtedly wanted to make sure there would be no misunderstanding about which specific record was being referred to.

“And because my words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.

“But thus saith the Lord God: O fools, they shall have a Bible; and it shall proceed forth from the Jews, mine ancient covenant people. And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them? ...

“Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews?

“Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.” (2 Ne. 29:3–4, 6, 10.)

The intent of the message in the ancient record is clear, because it is after the manner of our language so we might understand.

