

## CHAPTER 1

### **Joseph Smith, George Washington, and the mantle of greatness.**

The greatness of a historical figure is largely subjective, and based on how accurate the history, the magnitude of their influence, and who is asked. Washington has certainly earned his place among great men even though he grew tobacco and owned slaves. Joseph Smith is no exception.

Devoted followers of Smith and the religion he founded can point to his many accomplishments as evidence of greatness. He produced new volumes of scripture, the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*. He was first Prophet, Seer, and Revelator of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints established in 1830. The church he started presently claims over 11,000,000 members, even though a substantial portion do not participate. Smith was also mayor of Nauvoo, Illinois and General of the militia known as the Nauvoo Legion. He also had aspirations to be president of the United States and submitted his name for candidacy.

Smith's detractors would not consider him great but rather a con man and charlatan. His religious competitors considered adding to existing Scripture heresy and they had no tolerance for someone displaying such audacity. When Smith's followers settled in various towns and cities they became a substantial voting block, usually adhering to the edicts of Mormon leadership. This did not engender the Saints to the locals. Joseph Smith often cried persecution for his religious beliefs but his woes were more likely due to political forces.

The seven volume *History of the Church* documents several instances of Smith quoting the Constitution of the United States and also many words of the Founding Fathers. He was conversant in the Constitution, revolutionary writing, and principles of liberty. Cynics and skeptics would like to believe he was only endeavoring to be free in order to engage in polygamy, operating bogus banks and collecting tithing funds.

Smith and his Church were certainly granted Constitutional rights but it failed to protect them from mob action. Smith was eventually murdered and earned his place among the faithful as a martyr.

If Joseph Smith set out to be great he accomplished his goal in the eyes of his followers. His adherents, though, would be quick to say he was merely a servant of God and did not seek to aggrandize himself.

Whether Smith was actually great or not remains with those who are asked.

It is fair to say he appreciated great men based on his reverence for their writing. It is also fair to ask if he was motivated to be remembered as one of them.

Consider his words in relation to mob violence,

“If mobs come upon you any more here, dung your gardens with them. We don’t want any excitement, but after we have done all, we will rise up, Washington like, and break off the hellish yoke that oppresses us, and we will not be mobbed.”

*History of the Church*  
Vol. 5, pg. 469

Church apologists often downplay Smith’s aspirations to the presidency of the United States stating his only motive was redress of grievance available through no other means. Considering his role as General of the Nauvoo Legion, mayor, and prophet, it lends suspicion to his motives.

An oft-cited phrase in Church literature is that Joseph Smith has done more for the salvation of mankind than any other man, save Jesus himself. Quite a claim to make and keep Smith a humble servant at the same time.

Asking if he wanted to be “Washington like” is not out of the question.

### **The Canada Letter**

During a cold and miserable November of 1775 Benedict Arnold led a group of men on an expedition to Quebec. They carried a trunk load of manifestoes to be distributed among the populace. (1) The manifesto was penned by General George Washington and is as follows,

“Friends and Brethren:

The unnatural Contest between the English Colonies, and Great Britain has now risen to such a height, that Arms alone must decide it.

The Colonies, confiding in the Justice of their Cause and the purity of their intentions, have reluctantly appealed to that Being, in whose hands are all Human Events: He has hitherto smiled upon their virtuous Efforts: The Hand of Tyranny has been arrested in its Ravages, and the British Arms, which have shone with so much Splendor in every part of the Globe, are now tarnished with disgrace and disappointment. Generals of approved experience, who boasted of subduing this great Continent, find themselves circumscribed within the limits of a single City and its Suburbs, suffering all the shame and distress of a Siege. While the Freeborn Sons of America, animated by the genuine principles of Liberty and Love of their Country, with increasing Union, Firmness and discipline, repel every attack and despise every Danger.

Above all we rejoice that our Enemies have been deceived with Regard to you: They have persuaded themselves, they have even dared to say, that the Canadians were not capable of distinguishing between the Blessings of Liberty and the Wretchedness of Slavery; that gratifying the Vanity of a little Circle of Nobility would blind the Eyes of the people of Canada. By such Artifices they hoped to bend you to their Views; but they have been deceived: Instead of finding in you that poverty of Soul, and baseness of Spirit, they see with a Chagrin equal to our Joy, that you are enlightened, generous, and Virtuous; that you will not renounce your own Rights, or serve as Instruments to deprive your Fellow subjects of theirs. Come then, my Brethren, Unite with us in an indissoluble Union. Let us run

together to the same Goal. We have taken up Arms in Defence of our Liberty, our Property; our Wives and our Children: We are determined to preserve them or die. We look forward with pleasure to that day not far remote (we hope) when the Inhabitants of America shall have one Sentiment and the full Enjoyment of the blessings of a Free Government.

Incited by these Motives and encouraged by the advice of many Friends of Liberty among you, the Great American Congress have sent an Army into your Province, under the command of General Schuyler; not to plunder but to protect you; to animate and bring forth into Action those sentiments of Freedom you have declared, and which the Tools of despotism would extinguish through the whole Creation. To co-operate with this design and to frustrate those cruel and perfidious Schemes, which would deluge our Frontier with the Blood of Women and Children, I have detached Colonel Arnold into your Country, with a part of the Army under my Command. I have enjoined upon him, and am certain that he will consider himself, and act as in the Country of his Patrons and best Friends. Necessaries and Accommodations of every kind which you may furnish, he will thankfully receive, and render the full Value. I invite you as Friends and Brethren, to provide him with such supplies as your Country affords; and I pledge myself not only for your safety and security, but for ample Compensation. Let no Man desert his habitation. Let no Man flee as before an Enemy.

The cause of America and of liberty is the cause of every virtuous American Citizen. Whatever may be his Religion or his descent, the United Colonies know no distinction, but such as Slavery, Corruption and Arbitrary Domination may create. Come then ye generous Citizens, range yourselves under the Standard of general Liberty, against which all the force and Artifice of Tyranny

will never be able to prevail. I am, etc.” (2)

This letter, when analyzed closely, has phrases and concepts that are strikingly identical to verbiage found in the *Book of Mormon*.

Washington calls upon many themes and sentiments common to Revolutionary literature. Compare Washington’s usage to the same in Smith’s *Book of Mormon*.

### **Washington**

### ***Book of Mormon***

“We have taken up Arms in defence of our Liberty, our Property; our Wives and our Children...”

“...their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children...”

Alma 48:10

“...they have taken up arms to defend themselves, and their wives, and their children, and their lands...”

Alma 35:13

There are more comparisons to follow but first a few questions must be addressed. Initially it would be easy to assume that Smith simply borrowed from Washington. However, it would be unlikely that Joseph Smith would have had one of the manifestoes in his possession. It is also possible that Washington was not using original language.

The Founders were prone to quote Bible verse. It could be that both Washington and Smith were borrowing from another source, making it premature to assume Smith was borrowing directly from Washington.

In a published sermon from June 3, 1793 a minister by the name of Peter Thatcher uses the phrase,

“...they fight for their wives, their children, their liberty, and their all.” (3)

The *Book of Mormon* reads almost exactly as Thatcher,

“...they were fighting for their homes and their liberties,  
their wives and their children, and their all...” Alma  
43:45

A similar Bible verse can be found in Nehemiah 4:14,

“...fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters,  
your wives, and your houses.”

It is possible that Washington, Thatcher, and Smith were referencing the same Bible verse. Note that if they were paraphrasing, the three are actually closer to each other than they are to the Bible source.

**Washington**, “...our Liberty, our Property; our Wives and our Children.”

**Thatcher**, “...they fight for their wives, their children, their liberty, and their all.”

**Alma 43:45** “...they were fighting for their homes and their liberties,  
*BoM* their wives and their children, and their all...”

**Alma 48:10** “...their liberty, their lands, their wives,  
*BoM* and their children.”

**Alma 43:9** “...their lands, and their houses, and their wives,  
*BoM* and their children...”

**Nehemiah 4:14** “...fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”

Thatcher has another similarity to Washington and Smith.

**Washington**, “We are determined to preserve them or die.”

**Thatcher**, “...and will determine to conquer or die.”

**Alma 56:17**, “...they were determined to conquer in this place  
*BoM* or die.”

Thatcher was founder and trustee of the Massachusetts Historical Society. He was valued as an orator by patriots and organized costal defenses. It is likely he was well versed in Revolutionary writing as evidenced by the parallels mentioned above.

Another conclusion can be made that this kind of verbiage was in common use and of no particular significance, nullifying the accusation that Smith was lifting from a particular source. Even so, with the few parallels already mentioned, it is hard to imagine ancient Americans using the exact same phrases. It is a stretch to say that since these ancient Americans were supposedly Hebrew it explains how they all sound like Nehemiah. Mormon apologists may find it rational but further analysis will make the position more tenuous.

Additionally, other questions arise. If Smith was translating then what was the original unacceptable verbiage requiring the change into common vernacular? Conveniently for the Church there is no original document to check against. No group of language experts can be assembled to compare the translation and render an opinion on the original meaning. No plates or symbols exist to analyze.

In the absence of physical evidence skeptics are left to draw conclusions from other sources. Until the Church can produce gold plates and a full text of characters the *Book of Mormon* will be scrutinized and dissected as a work of fiction.

Further comparison to Washington's Canada Letter will illustrate the secularity of the *Book of Mormon*.

### **Washington**

"Friends and Brethren..."

Mosiah 4:4

"...the Blessings of Liberty..."

46:13

"...a Free Government."

### ***Book of Mormon***

"My friends and my brethren..."

"...the blessings of liberty..."  
Alma

"...a free government..."  
Alma

46:35

“...the Justice of their Cause...”      “...the justice of the cause...”  
Alma

46:29

“...the Standard of general Liberty...”      “...the standard of liberty...”  
Alma

46:36

Note how the patriotic sentiments of Washington can be found in the same chapter of Alma. This is not evidence in itself that the Canada letter is the source. For instance, the *Declaration of Independence* uses the same salutation, “...friends and brethren...”, along with other parallels.

**Declaration**

**Book of Mormon**

“...friends and brethren...”      “...my friends and my brethren...”

Mosiah 4:4

“...a free people...”      “...a free people...”      Alma  
21:21

“...the powers of the earth...”      “...the powers of the earth...”  
3 Nephi

28:39

“...the works of death...”      “...the work of death...”      Alma  
43:37

“...insurrections amongst us...”      “...insurrections among you...”  
Alma

60:27

“...their Creator...”      “...their Creator...”      Omni  
1:17

The *Constitution of the United States* also contains the phrase, “... the Blessings of Liberty...”, as does Washington and the *Book of Mormon*.

As this research progresses it will be shown that much of the Revolutionary sentiment is used interchangeably between the



## Founders and the *Book of Mormon*.

The *Book of Mormon* attempts to document great battles and conflict. Heroic men such as Moroni, Mormon, and Helaman are pitted against despotic kings and “king men”. The righteous Nephites are ruled in a more Democratic government while the Lamanites prefer nobility and the benefits of cronyism. Some within the Nephite ranks are sympathetic to the installment of a monarch.

This is not far from the theme of the Revolution. Coupled with exact verbiage the argument is strengthened that the *Book of Mormon* was resourced from available ideas.

Consider George Washington rallying the Canadians to, “...range yourselves under the Standard of general Liberty...” Likewise, the Nephite general Moroni has his own standard of liberty.

In the *Book of Mormon* story line an individual named Amalickiah wants to be king of the Nephites and attempts successfully to draw away citizens into his camp. Moroni, motivated by righteous indignation, moves to stop the faction. He rends his cloak and writes upon it,

“...In memory of our God, our religion, our freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children – and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.”

Alma

46:12

Moroni then dedicates the land as,

“...the land of liberty.”

Alma

46:17

(In 1831, Samuel F. Smith, in his hymn *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*, immortalized the phrase “sweet land of liberty”.)

In Alma 46:13 Moroni calls his flag the “title of liberty” and prays to God for “the blessings of liberty” to remain with his people. He then rides throughout the land waving his banner and rallying the citizens against Amalickiah and dissension.

“...he caused the title of liberty to be hoisted upon every tower which was in all the land...and thus Moroni planted the standard of liberty among the Nephites.”

Alma 46:36

In similar fashion, Liberty Poles flying a *Liberty* flag emerged in the colonies and provided a rallying spot. The British Regulars hacked them down when discovered.

*"...we march'd into the town after taking possession of a hill with a Liberty Pole in it and a flag flying which was cut down". Lt. John Barker, 4th Regt., Diary, 1775*

*"... we entered the town of Concord, where we cut down what they called their Liberty Pole." Private Soldier's Letter, 20 Aug. 1775*

*"We then retreated from the Hill near the Liberty Pole." Rev. William Emerson, Diary, 1775*

*"... we retreated in order, over the top of the hill to the liberty pole erected on the heighth opposite the meetinghouse..." Thaddeus Blood, Concord Militia (4)*

George Washington took advantage of an establishment known as the Liberty Pole Tavern during troop movements. The *Sons of Liberty* stood guard over Liberty Poles.

Writing on flags petitioning God is part of Revolutionary history.

In 1775 the banner that flew over Fort Moultrie displayed a crescent on a blue field with the word "Liberty" printed in white. When this flag was shot down by enemy muskets a brave sergeant named Jasper nailed it back to the staff at the risk of his life.

In Taunton, MA a flag was unfurled in 1774 which carried the British Jack in the canton and was combined with a solid red field with the words, "Liberty and Union" printed on it.

The "Pine Tree Flag" which flew over the troops at Bunker Hill in 1775 displayed a pine tree, symbol of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was a white flag with a top and bottom stripe of blue that showed a green pine tree with the words "Liberty Tree-An Appeal to God". (5)

Is it likely that history is repeating itself in the ancient Americas? Is it a coincidence that Moroni and American patriots both write pleas to God on flags? Or is it more reasonable to conclude that scenes such as these were the inspiration of *Book of Mormon* accounts. Are characters such as Moroni modeled after Washington?

Washington and Moroni both receive their commands as young men, are considered faithful Christians, robust in stature, wear cloaks, brandish swords, and ride horses. They battle dissension within and enemies without. Supplies and resolve from their respective governments are usually lacking.

In spite of Washington's greatness and eloquence, the Canada expedition failed. Arnold was wounded and Montgomery was killed.

If Joseph Smith was inspired by scenes and accounts such as those above then the most likely source would be published histories containing the information. The following chapters itemize histories and documents that would have been easily available to Smith or any of his associates. His scribe during most of the work was an itinerant school teacher named Oliver Cowdery. It stands to reason that if Smith was uneducated then Cowdery was not, and Oliver could certainly provide substantial information to build the story.

## Notes to Chapter 1

*Arnold's March from Cambridge to Quebec*, Justin H. Smith, Heritage Books, pg. 91. (reprint edition)

*George Washington, a Collection*, W. B. Allen editor, Liberty Fund, pg. 46.

*A Sermon, Preached Before the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company*, June 3, 1793, Peter Thatcher, D. D. Political Sermons

of the American Founding Era, Liberty Fund, Vol. 2, pg. 1135.

Quotes internet source, HYPERLINK "http://www.concordma.com/magazine/novdec01/libertypole.html" [www.concordma.com/magazine/novdec01/libertypole.html](http://www.concordma.com/magazine/novdec01/libertypole.html)

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