

Sunday School Lesson #2: Differences in the Sermons on the Mount

Submitted by Michael Kelley 2006-07

Lesson # 2 Differences in Teaching Methods: Critics of the Book of Mormon have accused Joseph Smith of plagiarism because the Sermon on the Mount in the Book of Mormon is the same as from the Bible. This accusation falls short for two reasons: First if God is an unchanging God then it stands to reason that He would teach the same precepts to the Nephites as He had to the Jews. Second is that closer examination of the two Sermons on the Mount reveals that the two books teach the same doctrines... however there are many remarkable and subtle differences that the critics failed to notice. These differences a copycat surely would have missed or not have considered, especially from an unlearned farm boy such as Joseph Smith. In this multi-part lesson I will go over many of these differences in depth with the scripture differences highlighted in ***Bold Italics*** for better contrast. It is not my intent to gloss over the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount but due to these teachings being repeatedly taught in other forums I instead wish to focus on these unique differences. This lesson deals with the different Oral versus Written-teaching methods that a side-by-side comparison reveals.

<p>Matthew 5:21 Ye have heard that it <i>was</i> said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:</p> <p>Matt 5:27 <i>Ye have heard that it was said</i> by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:</p> <p>Matt. 5:31 It hath been <i>said</i>, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:</p> <p>Matt. 5:33 Again, <i>ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time</i>, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:</p> <p>Matt. 5:38 <i>Ye have heard that it hath been said</i>, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:</p> <p>Matt. 5:43 <i>Ye have heard that it hath been said</i>, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.</p>	<p>3 Nephi 5:69 Ye have heard that it <i>hath been</i> said by them of old time, <i>and it is also written before you</i>, that thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment <i>of God</i>.</p> <p>3 Nephi 5: 76 <i>Behold, it is written</i> by them of old time, that thou shalt not commit adultery;</p> <p>3 Nephi 5:79 It hath been <i>written, that</i> whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.</p> <p>3 Nephi 5:81 <i>And again it is written</i>, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.</p> <p>3 Nephi 5:84 <i>And behold, it is written</i>, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.</p> <p>3 Nephi 5:89 <i>And behold, it is written also, that</i> thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy;</p>
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Repeatedly the words “it hath been said” occur in the Bible while “it is written” occur in the Book of Mormon passages. This seems to indicate the Jews relied more on oral teaching methods whereas the Nephites relied more on written methods of teaching in addition to preaching. The Nephites must have gained this because of the importance the brass and gold plates had in preserving their language and religion:

1 Nephi 1:82-83 And behold it is wisdom in God that we should obtain these **records**, that we might preserve unto our children the language of our fathers; 83 And also that we may preserve unto them the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets, which have been delivered unto them by the Spirit and power of God, since the world began, even down unto this present time.

In Lesson #1 covering Paul's weakness it seems among the Jews that the weakness that they struggled with was with speaking the word, whereas with the Nephites it was their difficulty in writing. This mirrors the differences in the Sermons on the Mount with their differing teaching traditions.

1Nephi 5:229-231 Nevertheless, I do not **write** anything upon plates, save it be that I think it be sacred. 230 And now, if I err, even did they err of old. 231 Not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the **weakness** which is in me, **according to the flesh**, I would excuse myself.

Ether 5:26 Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we can not write them; wherefore, when we write, we behold our **weakness**, and stumble because of the **placing of our words**; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall **mock at our words**.

Exodus 4:10 And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but **I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue**.

2Corr. 10:9-10 That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. 10 For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his **bodily presence is weak**, and his **speech contemptible**.

As mentioned in lesson #1 God often used men with weaknesses in speech or writing as great leaders. The following are some excerpts from an article I found online about stutterers from the journalist Albert Morris, www.scotsman.com:

...The heartless sometimes mock the tongue-twisted but, for those whose attempts at delivering words to the pithead are about as difficult as scaling Everest in shorts and open-toed sandals, a stutter can be a teeth-gritting embarrassment...

...Stutterers are in illustrious company. Moses, "slow of tongue and speech" and living a stressful early life in a series of rushes, probably stammered. The Roman emperor Claudius was verbally challenged and George VI had a speech impediment that made his kingly pronouncements a painfully embarrassing experience. Winston Churchill had a slight, childhood stammer. Lewis Carroll was utterly stuttered at times... Sir Isaac Newton had a stammer of some gravity, while Charles Darwin also had speech problems.

I can well imagine how difficult it was for Moses or Paul to minister God's word to an often-antagonistic audience while struggling with an embarrassing infirmity of the flesh such as a speech impediment. Even President George Bush commented on the weakness of his speech during the past Republican convention, a weakness that his opponents like to criticize and poke fun at. Following lessons will cover other fascinating cultural differences between the Sermons on the Mount that will reveal the same unchanging God yet highlight the different cultures between the Nephites and the Jewish peoples.