

Why is the phrase “and it came to pass” so prevalent in the Book of Mormon?

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“Mark Twain once joked that if Joseph Smith had left out the many instances of “and it came to pass” from the Book of Mormon, the book would have been only a pamphlet.

(Roughing It, Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Co., 1901, p. 133.)

There are, however, some very good reasons behind the usage of the phrase—reasons that further attest the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

The English translation of the Hebrew word *wayehi* (often used to connect two ideas or events), “and it came to pass,” appears some 727 times in the King James Version of the Old Testament. The expression is rarely found in Hebrew poetic, literary, or prophetic writings. Most often, it appears in the Old Testament narratives, such as the books by Moses recounting the history of the children of Israel.

As in the Old Testament, the expression in the Book of Mormon (where it appears some 1,404 times) occurs in the narrative selections and is clearly missing in the more literary parts, such as the psalm of Nephi (see [2 Ne. 4:20–25](#)); the direct speeches of King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma, and Jesus Christ; and the several epistles.

But why does the phrase “and it came to pass” appear in the Book of Mormon so much more often, page for page, than it does in the Old Testament? The answer is twofold. First, the Book of Mormon contains much more narrative, chapter for chapter, than the Bible. Second, but equally important, the translators of the King James Version did not always render *wayehi* as “and it came to pass.” Instead, they were at liberty to draw from a multitude of similar expressions like “and it happened,” “and ... became,” or “and ... was.”

Wayehi is found about 1,204 times in the Hebrew Bible, but it was translated only 727 times as “and it came to pass” in the King James Version. Joseph Smith did not introduce such variety into the translation of the Book of Mormon. He retained the precision of “and it came to pass,” which better performs the transitional function of the Hebrew word.

The Prophet Joseph Smith may not have used the phrase at all—or at least not consistently—in the Book of Mormon had he created that record. The discriminating use of the Hebraic phrase in the Book of Mormon is further evidence that the record is what it says it is—a translation from a language (reformed Egyptian) with ties to the Hebrew language.” (See [Morm. 9:32–33](#).) (*Ensign*, Dec. 1992)