

Confounding Our Language

- The second sentence of Moroni's title page introduction to the Book of Mormon recalls a time that the Jaredites came from the great tower and refers to "confounding the language".
- Confounding the language" is generally thought to be a miraculous event where all men speaking in a single tongue suddenly found themselves speaking Japanese, Swahili, Navajo and Finnish.
- The text, however, does not say "suddenly every man was speaking a new language". It was *the people* not their language who were confounded. The people were so confounded they thought they could get to Heaven by building a tower. The prayer of the brother of Jared was that the Lord "will not confound **us** that **we** may not understand **our** words".
- Emerson expresses a parallel thought. "The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language"

He's saying, Once men themselves are corrupted- once men start to have stinking thinking—it begins to be reflected in their language.

- Hugh Nibley asks this question about Jared's prayer, "How can it possibly be said that "*we* may not understand our *words*"? Words we cannot understand may be nonsense syllables or may be in some foreign language, but in either case they are not *our* words. The only way we can fail to understand our own words is to have words that are actually ours change their meaning among us."
- The word *confound* is often used to mean *confuse* but it's root meaning referred to mixing or blending.
- Language becomes confounded when words change meaning, when new meanings are mixed into the language.
- People become confounded when the philosophies of men are mingled with the word of the Lord.
- And why would Jared worry about such a thing?
Because Jared knew that the new words created by the mixing were not equivalent to the original language.
- semantic change is a big area of study: virtually our entire vocabulary is subject to words changing meaning. It's hard to find an old word that means the same thing today as it meant long ago

- Unless you are unusual, you have never been exposed to the original meanings of these English words: *nice, silly, fizzle, fathom, clue, myriad, flirt, hussy, egregious and senile*. (Nice meant silly and silly meant blessed.) (A Hussy was a housewife)
- Old English, roughly 1600 years old is completely indecipherable to most of us today yet the Book of Mormon is older still, uses words we never use in our everyday conversations yet which of us use a dictionary as a companion to our study of the book.
- I ask my ten-year-old grandson, “what are the latest cool words today?” His answer, *lit, dope, dank, swag, swol, gaines, and yeet*. If you listen to an extended conversation in young people you are almost guaranteed to hear words you have never heard before.
- Just in the last five years over 40 pronouns have been added for persons who don’t like to be referred to as he or she. *They* in this context (used as a SINGULAR pronoun) was named 2019 Word of the Year by Merriam-Webster.
- Words changing meaning is often seen as natural and innocuous. Most authors discussing semantic change do not hint a dark side to the corruption of language as Emerson does and as Book of Mormon authors do.
- Mormon taught that mixing or blending leads to incorrect traditions which leads to destruction. You might have thought that Mormon was talking about interracial marriage but listen to his words.

...”the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.” (Alma 3:8)

- Mormon is unconcerned about diluting the genes of some *Master Race* but instead about mixing ideas and traditions leading to incorrect traditions which lead to destruction. The Adversary is behind the destruction. We once taught in our temples that It is he who mixes or mingles the words of scripture with philosophies of men. And he does it to in order to obscure truth.
- Emerson explains how man, corrupted by impure motives then proceeds to corrupt language:

A man’s power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, ...depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate it without loss. (He is describing uncorrupted man) The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by ...secondary desires, the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise, — and duplicity and falsehood take (the) place of simplicity and truth....**old words are perverted to stand for things which are not**...In due time, the fraud is manifest, and words lose all power....”

- a good deal of study and research has gone into the shifting language, changes in the meaning of SECULAR words. Far less research has gone into the confounding of language in RELIGION.

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- John Gee investigated the Book of Mormon claim that discusses the removal “from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious” (1 Nephi 13:26). He documents early “lexical reinterpretation”, the changing of meanings of words that occurred in first centuries after Christ. He gave several examples of how meanings shifted from the original Greek including “trust” changed to “believe”, “agree” to changed to “confess”, and “rites” to “secret”. (Mysterion)

- The confounding of language continued throughout the centuries, always preceded first the confounding of the people. By the time Joseph saw the Lord in vision the “professors were all corrupt”, teaching “for doctrines the commandments of men” (JS-H 1:19). Much of that “corruption” was seen in the “confounding of language”.

- Then the restoration restored authority, keys and knowledge, to be sure, but also pure language and correct meanings. Consider a few examples:

- As part of the restoration Joseph restored the meaning of many words whose meaning had become confounded: Church, God, the Second Comforter, heaven, spirit world, spirit prison, hell, Eternal, prophet, seer, revelator, apostle, spirit, soul, intelligence, creation and many, many more. No sooner than Joseph corrected words that had been confounded than men moved again to mess them up.

- Jesse W. Crosby relayed this recollection, “when (Joseph) ventured to give his opinion on any subject of importance his words were often garbled and their meaning twisted and then given out as the word of the Lord because they came from him.”

- the “garbling of words” and “twisting meaning” is a pretty fair definition of “confounding of language”.

- In secular language the constant flux of words may be seen as benign, confusing at times, yet somewhat entertaining. In scripture, however, confounding language can be a matter of life and death as Alma points out:

Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will WREST them it shall be to your own destruction. (Alma 13:20)

-that’s the 2nd BOM scripture I’ve quoted that uses “destruction” tied to confounding the language

- Doesn't that seem like wild hyperbole? How could wresting the word lead to destruction?
- WREST is a word we don't use everyday. Definition #3 in my dictionary says wrest means to "distort the meaning or interpretation of (something) to suit one's own interests or views." Other definitions use the word "force". *Wresting the scriptures* is forcing a meaning out of them not intended by the writers.
- Isn't Alma being overly dramatic here? How could we possibly force or distort the meaning of the scriptures to our destruction?
- to answer that all we need to do is look at the revelations where the Lord warns the LDS
- We could teach doctrines which are vain (2 Nephi 28:9) and therefore ineffective, imagining that "at last we will be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Nephi 28: 8)
- We could teach more or less than Christ taught and establish it (our additions and subtractions) as His doctrine. He warned about that in 3 Nephi 11:40.
- for example, expanding the requirements for baptism beyond His word.
- We could teach less than Christ taught and establish it as His doctrine (3 Nephi 11:40). All scriptural references to Mysteries, for example, are positive. Oliver was commanded to seek for wisdom and the mysteries (D&C 6:7,11). Nephi had a great desire to know the mysteries (1 Nephi 2:16).
- whether we declare more or less than he declared, In either case "the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them" (3 Nephi 11:40).
- We could act in opposition to Christ by defining His church to be more or less than he defines it. He defined His church as those "repent and come unto Him". He warned about "declaring more or less than that" in D&C 10:67-68.
- We could covenant with an everlasting covenant and then lose our savor (which means "value" in this context). (D&C 101:39, 103:9-10). For such are cast out and trodden under foot of men." The former two societies that received this same salt warning have long ago been destroyed.
- ♦The list of religious words that as a people we have confounded reads like a Dictionary of Christianity.
- ♦We use words like "testimony", "perfect", "peculiar", "keys", "Oracles", "prophet", "revelation", in ways that distort their original meanings. Revelation for example originally meant to pull back the veil (re-Vele) not to receive an impression or

insight. Testimony was given only of that seen, heard or witnessed- not as we use the term today as a synonym for believe.

- ◆ We have garbled the meaning of many words and twisted their meanings which keep us separated from God and confounded.

- ◆ It is too late for us to pray that the Lord will not confound our language. Many writers, speakers, scholars and bloggers point out the weakness of our language, the drift that has occurred in the meaning of our words. They try to un-confound our language and hope to return us to a language which is pure but that will require much more than the weak attempts of men, it will require the Lord. For all who will receive instruction from Him, Zephaniah prophesied:

- ◆ For then will I turn to the people a **pure language**, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent. (Zephaniah 3:9). That will occur in the Day of the Lord which I pray will soon be upon us.

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