

# Recognizing Satan's Counterfeits

By Dennis C. Gaunt

I was putting a couple of U.S. dollar bills into my wallet at the grocery store when one of the bills caught my eye. I thought the green color was a little lighter than the others, so I examined it closer. Then I noticed the image of President George Washington didn't look quite as sharp. Even the paper felt wrong. It was counterfeit! The clerk exchanged it for a genuine dollar bill and then turned the counterfeit bill over to the store manager.

I have thought a lot about that counterfeit dollar bill since then. I wondered how long it had been in circulation and how many people it had fooled over the years. In fact, had I not been paying attention, I might have been fooled as well. But by comparing it against the real thing and focusing on the differences instead of the similarities, I could tell it was counterfeit.

The Book of Mormon is filled with examples of spiritual counterfeiters, who followed Satan's methods of

lying and deceiving others for their own gain. By studying their tricks and tactics, we begin to notice their mistakes and errors in the same way a trained eye begins to notice the difference between genuine and counterfeit currency. The more we train our eye to identify the differences, the better prepared we will be to expose the counterfeiters of today and resist their lies.

## Gathering Intelligence about Satan's Counterfeits

Satan seeks to lead us away through his own brand of spiritual counterfeiting, and if we are not careful, we will be fooled. President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) warned: "Satan is a skilful imitator, and as genuine gospel truth is given the world in ever-increasing abundance, so he spreads the counterfeit coin of false doctrine. Beware of his spurious currency, it will purchase for you nothing but disappointment, misery and spiritual death."<sup>1</sup>

**When we are faced with spiritual counterfeits, the Book of Mormon can help us determine what's true and what's not.**

The best defense we have against being fooled by Satan's counterfeits is to be as familiar as possible with truths of the gospel. The more deeply we know the truth, the easier it will be to spot the differences when Satan presents us with his counterfeits. So when he does, we need to look for the differences and not the similarities, just like I did with my dollar bills, because that is where the lies will always be revealed.



President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught: “The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. . . . God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time.”<sup>2</sup>

Today we are at war with Satan. We, like any army, need to know

what the enemy is up to. Knowing when and where the enemy will attack, for instance, can be invaluable information. That’s why the term for acquiring such information is called “gathering intelligence.” To know our enemy is to become smarter than our enemy. The Book of Mormon can help us “gather intelligence” on Satan’s counterfeit methods.

### **Flattering Speech Is Counterfeit**

Well over half of the counterfeiters in the Book of Mormon use flattering speech and a charismatic personality to achieve their goals. For example, Sherem “had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil” (Jacob 7:4). King Noah’s wicked priests spoke

“vain and flattering words” (Mosiah 11:7), thus causing the people to engage in idolatry and other wickedness. Korihor achieved similar results in his day, “leading away the hearts of many” (Alma 30:18). Amalickiah and Gadianton both used their penchant for flattery to raise up armies of wicked followers (see Alma 46:10; Helaman 2:4).

This is not by accident. Flattery is shallow, insincere, hollow, and exaggerated. Nephi warned of those who “shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark” (2 Nephi 28:9).

Flattery is often used to deceive; it usually has an ulterior motive or hidden agenda. Flattery is all about style over substance, and it appeals to the vanity and pride of the natural man within. The Lord’s prophets, however, tell us the simple yet important truths we *need* to hear.

Flattery is the language Satan speaks. President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, explained: “[Satan’s] voice often sounds so reasonable and his message so easy to justify. It is an appealing, intriguing voice with dulcet tones. It is neither



***“[Satan’s voice] is an appealing, intriguing voice. . . . No one would listen to Satan’s voice if it sounded harsh or mean.”***

hard nor discordant. No one would listen to Satan’s voice if it sounded harsh or mean.”<sup>3</sup>

When the world presents us with an idea, philosophy, or opinion that seems to appeal solely to our vanity or pride or that simply sounds too good to be true, that ought to be a warning to us immediately. Treat those ideas as counterfeit. Compare them against the truths taught by the Lord’s prophets. Look for differences, not similarities, and the counterfeit ideas will become obvious.

### **Nehor—a Popular Counterfeiter**

Nehor freely used Satan’s method of flattery. Let’s examine him as a

case study of a spiritual counterfeiter. Nehor, whose doctrine seemed to embrace the idea of a redeemer, was a popular and charismatic preacher among the Nephites. Nehor raised up many followers by teaching that “all mankind should be saved at the last day” and “have eternal life” (Alma 1:4).

Can we see why Nehor’s message would be so attractive? He was teaching about an easy-going and relaxed God—a God who, because He loves everyone, will save everyone, no matter what. So go ahead and do what you like, because it’s all good. It’s a seductive philosophy that was embraced as much by the people of Nehor’s day (see Alma 1:5) as it is by many people

today. A free ticket to heaven is something people apparently want.

So what was the problem with Nehor's message? Let's look at the main points of his argument again:

- God created all people—true.
- God loves all people—true.
- We shouldn't be afraid of God—true.
- We should rejoice at the idea of salvation—true.

So far, there are a lot of similarities between what Nehor taught and gospel truths. But remember—just as with counterfeit money, we need to look for the differences, not the similarities. So let's look at Nehor's last point:

- God will grant everyone eternal life—false!

Now here is the important difference that tells us Nehor is a spiritual counterfeiter. Salvation from physical death *is* guaranteed to all, but salvation from spiritual death is conditional on our willing repentance. If we repent, then we can receive eternal life (see Jacob 6:11). But there is no free ride.

### Gideon and Alma Recognized the Counterfeiter

Nehor's evil was exposed the day he met Gideon, a righteous teacher in the Church of God. Gideon had

stood up to King Noah years earlier and thus had experience with spiritual counterfeiters (see Mosiah 19:4–8). Nehor “began to contend with him sharply, that he might lead away the people of the church; but [Gideon] withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God” (Alma 1:7). Gideon recognized Nehor as a counterfeiter. Once exposed, Nehor resorted to another of Satan's methods—murder. But Gideon's death was not in vain. The people brought the counterfeiter Nehor before Alma to be judged.

Alma recognized that not only was Nehor guilty of priestcraft and murder but also that if left unenforced, priestcraft among the people “would prove their entire destruction” (Alma 1:12). So Nehor was condemned to die, and suffered “an ignominious death” (Alma 1:15).

Gideon and Alma are examples for us. When we have the Spirit with us, we will see and hear “things as they really are” (Jacob 4:13). We will recognize Satan's counterfeit plans and schemes “with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night” (Moroni 7:15).

Our “counterfeit” enemy is smart, but like Gideon and Alma, we can be smarter. Just as I began to gradually recognize the differences between my



### SATAN SPREADS LIES

“Satan, our adversary, wants us to fail. He spreads lies as part of his effort to destroy our belief. He slyly suggests that the doubter, the skeptic, the cynic is sophisticated and intelligent, while those who have faith in God and His miracles are naive, blind, or brainwashed. Satan will advocate that it is cool to doubt spiritual gifts and the teachings of true prophets.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “Be Not Afraid, Only Believe,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 78.

pair of dollar bills, we can gradually train our eye as well as our mind and spirit to recognize the differences between truth and lies. As we do so, we will recognize the counterfeiters and resist their lies. ■

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#### NOTES

1. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 376.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 132.
3. James E. Faust, “The Forces That Will Save Us,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2007, 6; *Liahona*, Jan. 2007, 4.