

# The Liahona

## Miracles by Small Means

### Chapter 11

## CHAPTER 11

# The World of Joseph Smith

## How Was the Word “Compass” Defined?

Chapter 11: How was the term "compass" defined in Joseph Smith's world? From my perspective, if the translation of the Book of Mormon involved Joseph Smith studying things out in his mind, as implied in D&C 9:8, and if the words Joseph spoke to his scribe as he translated represented Joseph's own best vocabulary thinking, then chances are that the meaning of the words that Joseph used (other than proper names) came from Joseph's world and times. Thus by examining this world, one might gain some perspective on what Joseph meant when he used the term "compass" to define the Liahona



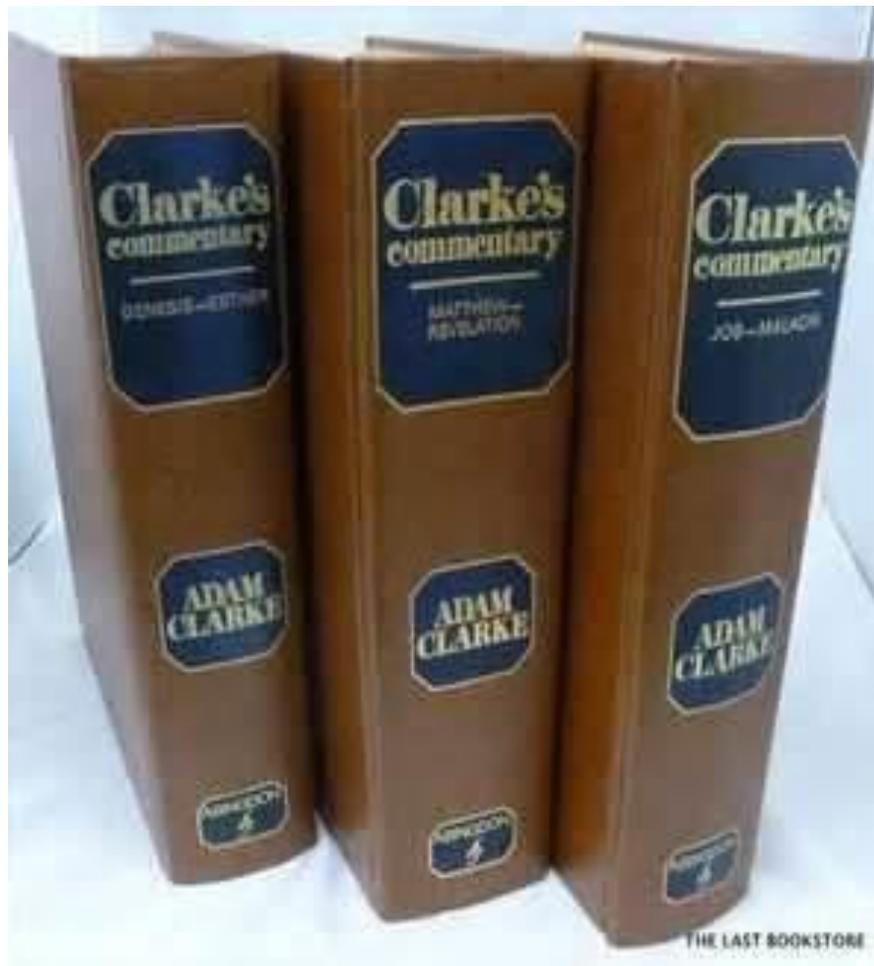
## King James Bible with Apocrypha

One of the main sources for the meaning of words in Joseph Smith's time was the bible. The King James Bible with Apocrypha seemed to be the most popular. Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith wrote that the Smith family regularly read from the Bible.



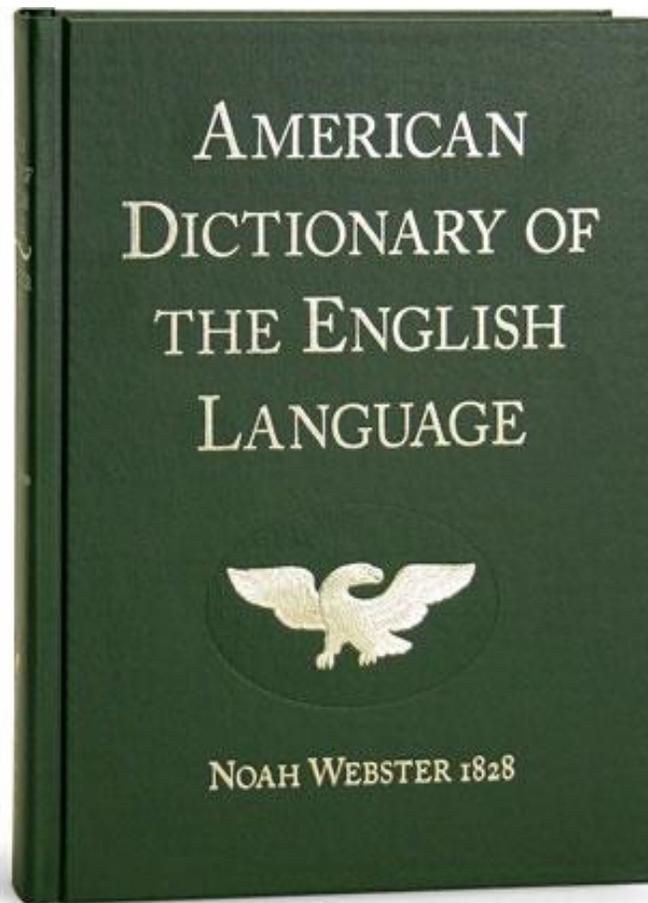
Adam Clarke

Also associated with the meaning of bible verses were bible commentaries. One of the principal commentators of the time was Adam Clarke, a highly respected British theologian and bible scholar.



## Bible Commentary

Adam Clarke's Bible Commentary series, which began to be published in 1810, seemed to be the most popular of bible commentaries.



Webster's 1828 Dictionary

Perhaps the main source for the meaning of words in Joseph's time was Webster's 1828 Dictionary. Interestingly, this dictionary used Bible verses as part of its word definitions. Keep this in mind as I treat the following definitions given for the noun "compass."



“God set a compass upon the face of the depth” (earth)

(Proverbs 8:27)

## #1: EXTENT or LIMIT

*Definition #1 for the noun "compass" is an extent or limit or boundary*

1 Maccabees 14:48 notes that QUOTE tables of brass [were] set up within the compass of the sanctuary

In Proverbs 8:27 we find that QUOTE God set a compass upon the face of the depth

Adam Clarke notes in his bible commentary that the Proverbs passage about setting a compass upon the face of the depth of the earth might refer to the law of gravitation producing the rounded or circular form of the earth resulting from relative equidistant boundary points on the earth's surface radiating from the earth's center (or the depth of the earth).



“We Fetched a compass [from Syracuse] and came to Rhegium”  
(Acts 28:12)

## #2: CIRCULAR COURSE

*Definition #2 for the term "compass" is a circular course*

In Acts 28:13, describing a journey by ship, it reads that they tarried at the coastal town of Syracuse, and QUOTE "from thence we fetched a compass and came to Rhegium." You can see by the map the circular course that they followed.



“On top of the base was a round compass of half a cubit high”

(1 Kings 7:35)

## ROUND or CIRCULAR OBJECT

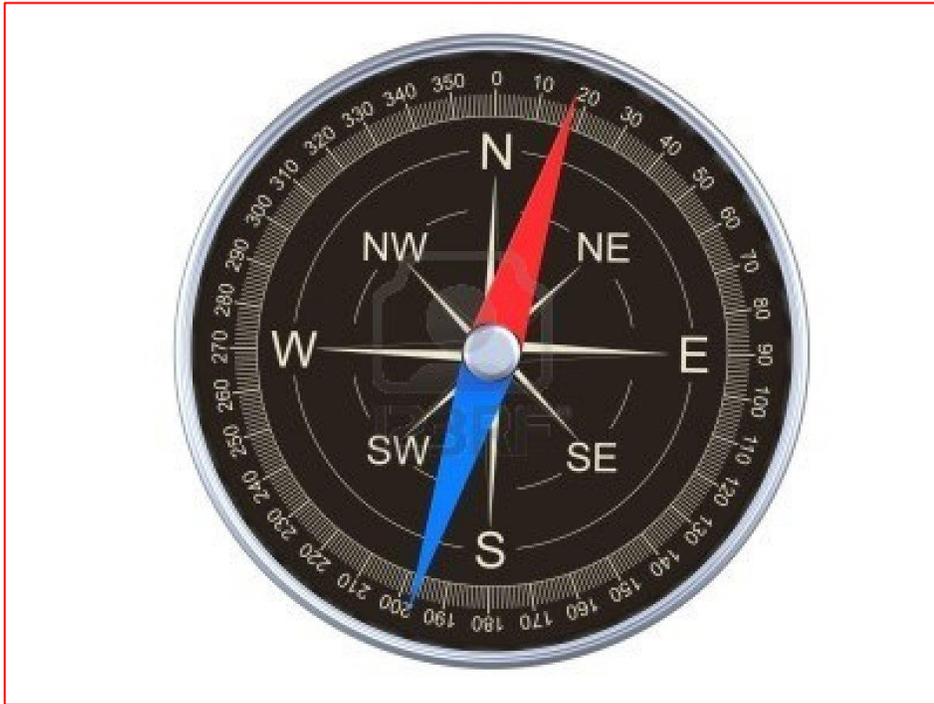
An extension of the previous definition of a circular course would apply to a circular object. For example, 1 Kings, verse 35 is describing a column. It reads QUOTE "And in the top of the base there was a round compass of a half a cubit high. Here the term "compass" could be defined as a circular band or ball. I would note that while a ball is a circular object, a circular object (such as a circular band) is not always a ball.



“ The carpenter . . . marketh it out with the compass”  
(Isaiah 44:13)

### #3: INSTRUMENT for DRAWING CIRCLES

Definition #3 for the term "compass" refers to an instrument used for drawing circles. Most geometry or design students are familiar with this instrument.



An instrument for directing ships at sea  
Magnetic needle and card with 32 Points of direction  
**#4: MAGNETIC COMPASS**

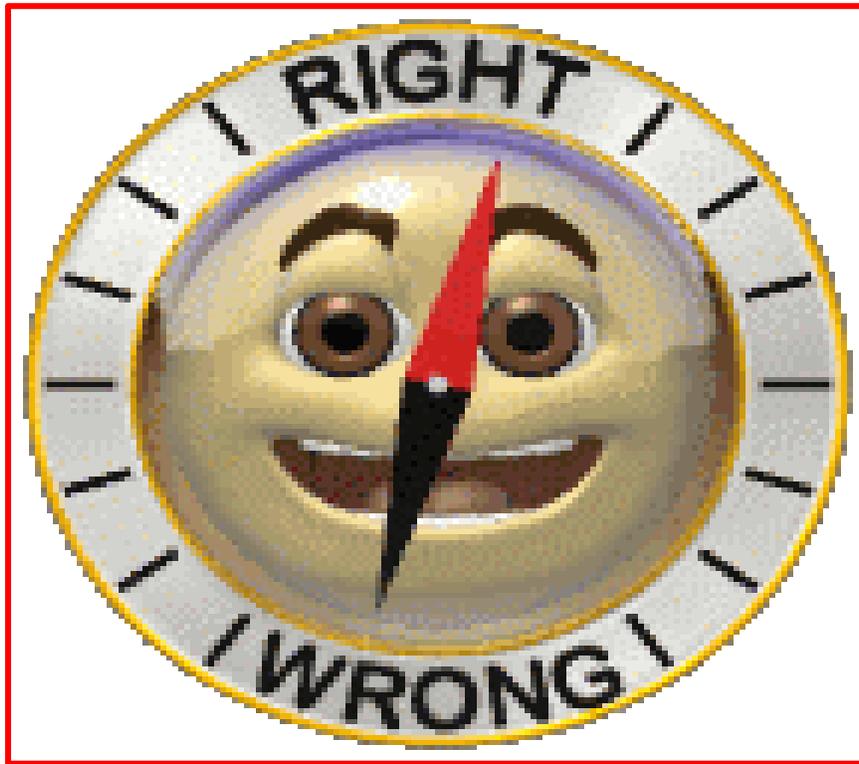
Definition #4 for the term "compass" refers to QUOTE "an instrument for directing the course of ships at sea, consisting of a circular box, and a paper card marked with 32 points of direction, and a magnetic needle."



An instrument for surveying land or directing travel  
Magnetic needle with 360 degrees + directing needle

### #5: SURVEYORS COMPASS

Definition #5, or the next pertinent definition of the term "compass" that I will address here refers to an instrument used in surveying land, or a surveyor's compass. It differs from a mariners compass in that in addition to a magnetic needle, it has a second needle or spindle that can be set to direct a line of travel or measurement. This instrument would compare favorably with the Liahona.



No Non-Magnetic Definition = Moral Compass

The last definition I will address is important because it isn't mentioned in the Webster's 1828 dictionary. There is nothing said about the use of the term "compass" as something to be used without a magnetic needle. That is, there is no definition that says, in essence, an instrument that points out a direction to go without the use of a magnetic needle: for example, a moral compass or a spiritual compass. Or, in the case of our discussion, a miraculous Liahona.