

The Book of Mormon

Its Origin, Nature and Purpose

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and published by the
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter Day Saints**

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*** (All Bible references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.)**

The Book of Mormon is a sacred and secular history of two great American civilizations.

Origin

The first civilization originated in a colony which emigrated from the Tower of Babel at the time of the confusion of tongues, about 2800 B.C. This first colony traveled westward and crossed the Atlantic from western Europe and landed on the eastern coast of Central America. (See Genesis 11:8-9).

The second and later colony left the city of Jerusalem about 600 B.C., preceding the destruction of that city and the deportation of its inhabitants by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. This colony, after extensive journeyings, crossed the Pacific Ocean and landed, it is believed, on the western shore of Central America.

The Book of Mormon is an abridgement of the history of these two civilizations. It derives its name from a prophet of the later, second civilization, named Mormon, who made an abridgement of the record of his people. The Book of Mormon is a translation of Mormon's abridgement. It includes a brief outline of the history of the earlier Jaredite people who came from the Tower of Babel, an abridgement made by Moroni, the son of Mormon, taken from the Jaredite record found during the period of the second civilization.

Joseph Smith, instrumental under God in restoring the church after the New Testament pattern, stated that by angelic administration and other spiritual direction he was instructed that the records of the two peoples named were inscribed upon plates of gold which were contained in a cemented stone box located in a hill near the city of Manchester, in the state of New York, that in due time the plates were delivered into his custody and that he translated the record from them by the gift and power of God. An instrument found with the plates, called the Urim and Thummim, used by ancient seers in Bible times, was used in the translation. The Book of Mormon was printed in 1829.

Three witnesses, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdrey, and Martin Harris, made written statements to the effect that an angel appeared to them, holding the plates, and declared that they contained a true record, and that the translation was correct. These witnesses affirmed their testimony throughout their entire lives.

Eight other witnesses testified that they saw and handled the plates.

Joseph Smith in his history records that upon completion of the work of translation, the plates were delivered into the hands of the angel from whom he received them.

Nature of the Book

The first colony was led by divine direction under the administration of two men, Jared and his brother - only known to us as “the brother of Jared,” the spiritual seer, the other apparently a civil co-leader, both acting under inspirational instruction. As these men became aged, a son of Jared was chosen to be king - this against the counsel of the aged leaders but by their sufferance, who warned against rule of kings.

They brought records of the creation and fall of man and of the flood, hence were informed concerning the patriarchal period of their progenitors. They taught the religion delivered to the fathers - including the promised Messiah and his redemption. The record in this and in other respects is in harmony with the history in the Bible concerning the antiquity of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that primitive revelation that preceded the law of Moses.

The earlier colony developed into a great, flourishing civilization. It experienced periods of spiritual unity, progress, and general advancement during adherence to the teaching of its original religion. It declined and became weakened and divided by wickedness, wars, and contentions similar to the vicissitudes of nations in general, until as a result of irreconcilable antagonisms and continuing wars, it became extinct about the time of the early development of the second colony.

The first or Jaredite nation made great advancement in arts and sciences.

The second or Nephite record makes up the larger part of the Book of Mormon narrative. Like the history of the first colony, it's leading tone is distinctly religious. As stated, it is a history of peoples who were called out and separated from the main currents of Gentile civilization and given the mission, as part of the family of Israel, of receiving, holding, and teaching the oracles of God - of preserving and transmitting them to the world. The second colony in its early period was led by a succession of prophet-kings, successors to the first leader, Nephi, son of Lehi. They took with them from Jerusalem the five books of Moses and the books of the prophets, including the book of Isaiah. They were warned of the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jews; they were led by distinct and marvelous manifestations of divine power, by which their course was charted. They crossed the Pacific Ocean and landed upon the western continent upon what was declared also to them to be “a choice land above all other lands.”

They kept the law of Moses, its precepts and ritual, but with the understanding that it was to be observed, as the New Testament indicates, as a preparatory system to be followed by the higher or gospel covenant to be instituted at the coming and sacrificial atonement of the Christ. This they fully understood, and like Isaiah and other evangelical men of Bible history, they rose to great heights of spiritual understanding and experience.

They held the Melchisedec and the Aaronic priesthood as received from their fathers, and under administration of righteous men attained high degrees of spiritual and moral progress in religious unity and peace. At such times they became united in all lines of common effort and enjoyed great happiness in spiritual communion and brotherhood. Under such influences, they advanced in moral, social, political and economic co-operation, by which they accomplished the building of great cities and other constructive enterprises, including knowledge and use of numerous branches of arts and sciences. They had knowledge of astronomy, and were skilled in mechanic arts. As stated by archaeologists, much of their

architecture and other building could have been accomplished only by a co-operative people. Many massive and finely constructed ruins remain as testimonials of the skill and attainments of ancient American peoples.

Their religious-financial-material system included a conception of unity of the spiritual and the material. It was that observed in the times of the patriarch, as stated concerning Enoch, Abraham, Melchisedec, and under the law of Moses. To them material wealth was a stewardship under Almighty God, "Possessor of all things." Wealth as part of life was subject to law given by the Creator regulating its use. It included the giving of tithes and offerings and consecration of surplus wealth, administered for the common good. It combined the spiritual and the material as parts of the great whole. Of one of their most prosperous periods, we read:

And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year [that is, after the birth of Christ and a few years after his appearance to the Nephites], the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another; and they had all things common among them, therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. - IV Nephi 1: 3, 4.

In this their course was similar to that of the early New Testament disciples, narrated in Acts 2: 42-45.

In the beginning of the Nephite colony, Lehi, father of the colony, was warned of the destruction of Jerusalem, and left that city attended by his wife, his four sons, Laman Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi, and also Ishmael and his family. As is the case in most families, both good and evil characteristics appeared: The two younger sons were reasonable, obedient, devoted to God; the two older sons were rebellious, unbelieving, contentious; they constantly murmured, rebelled, and transmitted to their posterity a spirit of opposition and wickedness that resulted in division of the colony. Under the leadership of Nephi, his people were obliged to depart from their first seat of location, to preserve them from the determined overlordship of the warring Lamanites, the other division so named.

The history is largely a record of periods of advancement and decline, similar to that of nations in general; of spiritual and general prosperity in unity of the Nephites when faithful to their religious obligations; of disunion, strife, war, retrogression, calamity, and suffering when forgetful of and disobedient to the truths revealed to their fathers and leaders. In such conditions of rising and falling they were admonished and warned by the voice of inspiration through prophets, similarly as was the Israel of the Eastern Hemisphere. The history includes accounts of great conflicts between Nephites and Lamanites, the latter having relapsed into idleness and savagery. The Lamanites, according to the record, had been cursed with darkness of skin so they would not be enticing to the Nephites; they continued to menace and war against the Nephites.

Moral Religious, Social Principles

The precepts taught by inspired leaders of the Nephite people, in contrast to the traditions and evils of the decadent Lamanites, are of the highest order. These precepts stand out prominently in the narrative. The book condemns in plain and unmistakable terms all evils, including the polygamy of David, Solomon, and other kings and men of ancient times. It declares polygamy to be abominable in the sight of God, and a crime. There is no mistaking

the tone of chaste and strict morality, the purity of heart and uprightness of life demanded by the teaching standards of the Book of Mormon. It is also written in great plainness and simplicity of language, such that its meaning cannot well be misunderstood.

According to the record, the Nephite people continued for a time under the “reign of the judges,” a religio-political system seemingly similar to that of Israel preceding the days of Saul, when Israel rejected the counsel of God through Samuel and demanded a king. The book records that, with exception of some kingly successors to Nephi, the rule of the judges was instituted.

The nature of the book favors and teaches the spirit of democracy - consent of the governed, rule by the people. It is thus in harmony with the experience, growth, and development of the best in governmental science of our own modern times, which is itself the outgrowth of struggles of our father and other peoples in their strivings against rule of monarchists and tyrants, in establishment and maintenance of liberty in freedom of government and enjoyment of common, inalienable rights.

The character of their righteous spiritual instructors and the power attending their ministries is also in evidence and very significant.

The nature of this teaching also emphasizes the institution of just laws and makes provision for just administration of law, supported by the people under the provision of enlightened public opinion in common consent. It condemns special privilege to any class; it provides for the general welfare; it teaches the commonality of all mankind; its provisions uphold the spirit of the laws of humanity in providing for equality of opportunity of all to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. There is no mistaking its outspoken statements and principles against unjust concentration of power, of wealth, of anything that would result in arbitrary use of power or privilege to the elevation of any man or group contrary to the good of the whole.

The book has no political implications; it does not favor any radical or revolutionary ideas in government or economics. On the contrary, it teaches and insists upon spirituality and morality, justice and truth, as against materialism and selfishness. The book represents God and Christ as Creator and Redeemer, with man dependent and responsible to them, as the essential and only true concept for human welfare and perfection - a philosophy of life self-evidently true in its entirety, and emphasized and demonstrated to be sound, cosmic, and eternal. It illustrates the principles and results of obedience to that philosophy. It also makes manifest in its record of dire consequences to man when sinful, disobedient, and forgetful of God and obligation, that there is no success, happiness, nor anything but failure and suffering when one is disobedient to his Creator and his system of government.

Christ Appears to the Nephites

After periods of advancement and decline following extensive physical disaster and destruction of their cities at the time of the crucifixion, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, after his resurrection, appeared to the remaining righteous portion of the Nephite people. He taught them the identical principles that he had imparted to the Jews in Palestine; he recited predictions of the prophets concerning his coming, crucifixion, and redemption of the race; he ministered in gracious bestowment of blessing and manifold evidences of his divinity, mercy, and power.

According to the account, he taught and instituted the gospel organization as described in the

New Testament with its principles of faith in God and Christ, repentance and obedience, baptism for remission of sins, laying on of hands for bestowal of the Holy Spirit, resurrection from the dead, eternal judgment, his second coming and reign on earth in the millennium. He called and ordained twelve disciples to teach and administer, and he organized his church.

For a period of approximately two hundred years following the birth and visitation of Christ great spiritual unity and peace continued among the Nephites, with the attendant evidences of blessing and power, similar to the periods of the ministries of Enoch and Melchisedec narrated in the Old Testament. But the people of the later generations began to revert to the sins common to humanity. Evils were reinstated and increased among the people until they became again divided into hostile and warring camps. Finally, in face of warning counsel and threatening disaster from the mouths of inspired prophets, they relapsed in such savagery and destructive wars that they became practically extinct; those surviving resumed the name, traditions, and customs of Lamanites.

Purpose - Another Witness

It is a principle of divine and civil law that “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (II Corinthians 13: 1). The Bible, with its history of the dealings and providences of God with man upon the eastern continent, is one witness for the truth. The Book of Mormon is another witness to the same effect. It recites the providences of God in the basic and vastly important matter of redemption, as also in general in the laws of nature, and indicates that such provisions were not limited, not confined to the Eastern world. “God so loved the *world*” (John 3: 16), not a mere portion of it, that he likewise ministered in behalf of the race in the great western continent. Being the seat of mighty civilizations, it was entitled to the partook of the ministrations of the Father of the race.

The stated purpose of the Book of Mormon (in its introduction) is universal: to witness to the world the truth and divinity of Jesus Christ, and his mission of salvation through the gospel he taught. Its witness for Jew and Gentile. The house of Israel rejected its Messiah, and in consequence was rejected, scattered, and the government overthrown. The gospel refused by them was then preached to the Gentiles. Israel has ever since remained in unbelief in Christ. Bible prophecy frequently declares their restoration in the latter days to divine favor, the gathering of Israel and their permanent establishment in their ancient homeland of Palestine. The sealed book, the Book of Mormon, is predicted in Bible prophecy and by its own declarations to be a confirming, additional revelation from God of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ, and of the covenants made with their fathers. It repeatedly predicts regathering, restoration, and other manifold blessings to Israel. The God of Israel is to make a “new covenant” with that people - not the old Mosaic covenant, but another and later one, by which they are to be reinstated as a nation in their holy land. (See also Jeremiah 31: 34 ; Ezekiel 20: 33-38, and other Bible predictions to the same effect.) The Book of Mormon interprets Old Testament prophecy to that effect, as it recites predictions of its inspired men, It claims to be part of the new covenant to Israel.

It claims to be the sealed book of Isaiah, chapter 29, which it quotes and interprets. It recites that as a result of its revelation, Israel would come to understanding of the Christ message of salvation; that they would no longer fear but be secure and greatly blessed by divine favor; that the coming forth of its record would be followed by physical blessing upon Palestine to its redemption from sterility to fertility, and thus made capable of maintaining that nation as in

ancient times. It is a fact that since the appearance of the book that land has been favored. The Book of Mormon was published in 1830. In 1948 the State of Israel was founded. The Jews are now permitted to return and establish cities and industrial and agricultural units. Many Jews, according to predictions of the book, are beginning to believe in Christ. Proponents of the book state that with such predictions fulfilled it is now too late for any similar fulfillment by another record.

The book declares also that the remnants of the former inhabitants of ancient America will, by means of the coming to light of the record of their fathers, be converted to the faith and share in the covenants made with their progenitors. It indicates their emergence from primitive conditions to enlightenment. It declares that the Gentile nations occupying their lands would favor their emancipation from degenerate conditions. This is part of the purpose of the book.

The Gospel of Saint John contains a statement of Jesus Christ quoted by believers in the divinity of the Book of Mormon. It reads: "*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*" (10: 16) Citing also that Christ declared these words: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15: 24), they believe that since Jesus Christ, according to the record, never appeared to the Gentiles, and "salvation is of the Jews," or Israel (John 4: 22), the promise concerning "other sheep" was realized by the appearance of Christ to the Nephites.

Outline of Evidence

The second colony were descendants of Joseph, son of Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob, blessing the sons of Joseph, predicted great spiritual favor to be bestowed upon them. They were to become a multitude of nations. Because of that, the entire house of Israel was to be blessed in them: "In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh" [sons of Joseph] (Genesis 48: 20). The posterity of Joseph was to emigrate beyond the bounds of Palestine, the inheritance of Jacob's progenitors, "unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills" - a far distant land. There they were to enjoy the special blessing from God (Genesis 49: 26)

Moses, blessing the twelve tribes, predicted Joseph's occupancy and possession of a special land, "his land," rich in material resources, where he was to be the recipient of special favor in revelation of the divine will. He was to be also a means of ultimately gathering Israel (Deuteronomy 33).

"From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering" (Zephaniah 3: 10). Beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, west from Palestine, lies America, the western continent. The offering was to be brought in the times of Israel's restoration, in the latter times.

Isaiah 18 salutes "the land shadowing with [that is, in the form of] wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia." In the land so described, God is to lift up "an ensign" to the nations and gather Israel, at the time of harvest, in the latter days, etc. America is here again located; it is identified, being winglike in form, a form unlike that of any other continent.

Ezekiel writes of two "sticks" or records in scroll form - one written for Judah (the Bible), the other written for Joseph and all the house of Israel his companions. The two records thus

named are to be joined together in the latter times as a means of gathering and converting Israel (Ezekiel 37: 16, 17)

A “sealed” book or record, accounted as a “strange thing,” was to be brought forth and translated through the power of God by an unlearned man. The book was to be part of “a marvelous work and a wonder” in a time when men largely have lost the inspiration of divine power. It was to come forth just preceding the restoration of Palestine to fertility and the regathering of Israel. It was also to be a means of bringing Israel into favor and communion with God and unto knowledge of their Messiah, Jesus the Christ (Isaiah 29).

David the Psalmist predicted blessing upon the land of Jacob and restoration from their captivity. At that time “truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (Psalm 85: 11)

Prominent in the traditions and archaeology of ancient America are numerous indications of appearance of Quetzalcoatl, a white and bearded personage, who visited and taught their fathers.

Indian legends indicate that pre-Columbian peoples of America had traditions of the creation, the temptation of the mother of the human family by a serpent, the cross as a religious symbol, the fall, and the flood. The book predicted discovery and occupation of America by Gentile nations; that the present great nation of the United States would be established; that this nation would be favored by providence and be delivered from the domination of other nations, if serving God; that this land would be a land of liberty, and that kings would not be permitted to be raised up unto the Gentiles; that they would have the record of the Jews, the Bible, as the ground of religious belief; but that should the nation decline in unrighteousness and forget the God who had led and blessed them, it would, like the ancient nations, be visited by divine judgments and calamities, including internecine wars and become extinct - “if they do not serve the God of the land, which is Jesus Christ.”

Additional Purpose

The purpose of the book is thus revealed. In this connection attention is called to the growth of unbelief, materialism, and modernism in the present age. Many are the men of skeptical mind who claim there are conflicts and irreconcilable antagonism in the history written by the authors of the four Gospels, and their influence is such as to vitiate in the public mind the ground of the faith of the fathers. This is of great interest considered in connection with the purpose of the Book of Mormon.

Apart from the skepticism in the minds of many laymen, there have arisen schools of clergymen who have adopted the ideas of modernism, humanism, and so forth. Such men, while affirming Christ to be the greatest teacher and example of moral excellence, the highest product of nature in the family of humanity, reject altogether belief in the supernatural. They regard the story of creation, of the fall, of the flood, and all the history of the miraculous in the Bible as Hebrew folklore; and therewith they reject the virgin birth and divinity of Christ and the miracles of the New Testament. They deny the doctrine of the resurrection; some also deny personal survival after death.

Where did such men get their conceptions of the moral ideals and sublime character and teaching of Jesus? Certainly from the New Testament record, written by the men who were eyewitnesses “of all that Jesus began both to do and teach; ...to whom also he shewed himself

alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1: 1, 3)

That record recites the life and teaching of Jesus; of one who transcends and outranks all other personalities known to the history of the race; a life that the illiterate and the learned among his apostles and other believers could not possibly have conceived or imagined. In so doing, the sacred record proves Jesus to be divine, the Son of God in deed and in truth. Besides all this spiritual testimony, manifestation of miraculous power in confirmation of the written word was and is vouchsafed to the believer.

The purpose of the Book of Mormon is to affirm and confirm the divinity of Jesus the Christ, the Savior of the world; also it is to be a means of bringing Jew and Gentile to faith in Christ, to present additional and unimpeachable evidence to support and vindicate the divinity of the word of God and its power to save, to refute the unbelief and learned skepticism, the materialism and blind disbelief of the age, by witnessing to the existence of God and Christ and the power of the gospel to save the race. As stated, the account of the appearance of Christ upon the western continent and his teaching in that appearance is in general harmony with the account of his appearance and teaching on the eastern continent as recorded in the Gospels of the New Testament.

The Book of Mormon, preserved and brought forth by the providence of God, bears additional and timely evidence of the divine origin of the Bible in its record of the dispensations of divine manifestation as recorded in that record. The book is thus of great value to this generation in attesting and in vindication the truth of Holy Scripture. It is outstanding and significant in its timely appearance and witness to this generation.

If you have any questions regarding the Book of Mormon or would like a copy sent to you, please feel free to contact us at www.Philippineministries.org and we would enjoy the opportunity to share with you about the book that stands as a second witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.