

Title Page

Title Page

The Book of Mormon. An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi.

Comments

The title of The Book of Mormon consists of a title and a subtitle. They were written on the same line in the printer’s manuscript, but the compositor set them separately. It is possible that the compositor set them separately because he was used to the common style of titles which consisted of a title and a longer explanatory subtitle.

As with the rest of the text of the Book of Mormon, there is very little punctuation on the printer’s manuscript for the title page. In particular, there is no spacing, no line difference, and no separating line between “taken from the plates of Nephi” and what was set as the first line of the text itself. Although the compositor often typeset phrases with “wherefore” as the beginning of sentences, the structural function of such phrases was to come as an explanation. Therefore, it is most probable that Moroni’s intent was to have the subtitle as the first line of the text.

That would make the beginning of the text: “An account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi—wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites.” Although this might have been typeset as a longer subtitle, it makes more sense as the beginning of the text proper. In the naming of books from the large plates, the name rarely has a subtitle.

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Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites—Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile—Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of

God unto the interpretation thereof—Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

Comments

As noted in the comments on the title, the first sentence of this current paragraph was probably intended as a continuation of the sentence that is currently typeset as a subtitle. The purpose of the title page is to declare what the book is, and what it is intended to do.

Moroni declares that it is written first to the Lamanites, and secondarily to the Jew and Gentile. Mormon makes it very clear in Mormon 8 that the Lamanites are his primary focus. Where the Lamanites had been the scourge of the Nephites for most of the text, in the end Mormon sees them as the inheritors of the blessings of Israel.

Moroni notes that the text was written by the spirit of prophecy. This phrase indicates that it was written under inspiration, although the text does contain various prophecies. Those that were in Mormon's work (and excluding the prophecies in the small plates) were most specifically about the text being of future worth to the Lamanites who were the remnant of his seed.

Moroni also notes that they were sealed up, and hid up, unto the Lord. This was for the protection of the physical record itself. The sealing of the whole record was one of intelligibility. There would be none who could read the text save if were through the gift and power of God. The idea that they could only be read through the gift of God appears twice. There was no other way that the future generations would be able to have The Book of Mormon.

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An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven—

Comments

Moroni was writing the title page for his father's book. However, he had also created an important text that Mormon had indicated that the future audience should have. Thus, Moroni notes that in addition to the Book of Mormon which abridged the plates of Nephi, there was also an abridgment taken from the book of Ether. Perhaps it is important that Moroni says that it is an abridgment taken from the book of Ether rather than an abridgement of the book of Ether. As with his father's work, there was a purpose behind what Moroni preserved of the book of Ether, and that purpose was more focused than simply providing a copy of the text of the book of Ether.

In our current edition, this sentence is set as the beginning of the paragraph. However, the next sentence begins with “which is to show,” which declares the purpose. That purpose might have also applied to the abridgment of the book of Ether, but it reads much better as the purpose of Mormon’s book. Therefore, this sentence should probably be considered as an aside. It is inserted in the text to recognize Moroni’s contribution, but the rest is a description of the purpose of the whole of the Book of Mormon.

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Which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations—And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.

Translated by Joseph Smith, Jun.

Comments

The purposes of the Book of Mormon are religious. It uses history as the framework for its essential message, but the purpose is not to recount history. Most particularly, it is written “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.” The importance of that particular sentence is first that it includes both the Jew and the Gentile as the target. The beginning of the paragraph had noted that it was to the remnant of the house of Israel, which was the phrase including the future Lamanites.

The second item of note is that it declares that Jesus Christ is the Eternal God. This is precisely what Nephite theology understood. Jesus Christ was the mortal embodiment of Jehovah, and Jehovah is the God of Israel. They were to be considered as the same person, but referring to different realms of existence.

Also important is the declaration that Jesus Christ is manifest to all nations. Jesus Christ himself appeared to the Nephites. Through revelation and experience with the resurrected Christ, the Nephites knew that his mortal ministry was in the Old World. Christ told them he would visit yet others. Thus, the Book of Mormon stands as the only testament that Christ would be physically manifest to other nations. His atonement was manifest to all nations and peoples.

The final statement addresses the reader. The reader is not to focus on any faults in the text, but rather their relationship to God as defined by the principles taught in the book.

The last sentence on the Title Page notes that Joseph Smith was the translator. The original title page had him as the author, not translator. That was the result of copyright laws that required that the author be listed. It was later changed to the more accurate designation of translator.