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## The Career of the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** A rehearsal of primary events connected with the Book of Mormon, including Joseph Smith's work with the gold plates, the conversion of several individuals (including Thomas B. Marsh, Willard Richards, Parley P. Pratt, and Sidney Rigdon) through the power of the book, and a discussion of the various translations of the Book of Mormon into foreign languages.

# The Career of the Book of Mormon

*By Andrew Benson, Assistant Church Historian*

It was early in the spring of 1820 that the Father and the Son in a glorious vision appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith who on that occasion was told of the condition of the religious world and commanded to wait awhile and prepare himself to receive further light and instruction. Three years and a half passed away, when Joseph (now approaching his 18th birthday), having retired to rest in his father's house in the township of Manchester, Ontario (now Wayne) county, New York, was visited during the night of Sept. 21, 1823, by a heavenly messenger, namely, the Angel Moroni, who, while in mortality, 1400 years before, was a Nephite Prophet, the last of a line of prophets and historians who had written the history of their people on metallic plates. Moroni and his father, Mormon, had made an abridgement of the Nephite history upon golden plates which were deposited by Moroni, about 400 years after the birth of the Savior, in a hill called by the Nephites, Cumorah, and now known in western New York as "Mormon Hill." This hill is situated about four miles south of the town of Palmyra, New York, or about two and one half miles from the Smith home in Manchester township. During the Prophet's interview with the Angel Moroni in the night mentioned the Prophet was told to proceed to that hill the next day, Sept. 22nd, 1823, which he did and there again he met the same angel, after having already discovered the box in which the plates containing the records of the Nephites had laid hidden about 1400 years. While the angel imparted much additional information to the Prophet on this occasion, he forbade the youth to take possession of the plates at that time, but instructed him to visit the hill again on the same day the following year, and thus continue year after year until the plates should be delivered into his hands. Thus passed away four years, during which the Prophet was in constant training for the great work lying before him, and finally, on the 22nd of September, 1827, he was permitted to remove the plates from the hill, being commanded to take very good care of them. Together with the plates Joseph had obtained an instrument called the Urim and Thummim which enabled him to translate, like the seers of old, and he was therefore instructed to translate the engravings found upon the plates into the English language. As soon as it became known that Joseph had obtained the plates, persecution arose against him,

and he found it necessary, in order to escape mob violence, to remove with his wife to Harmony, Penn., about one hundred miles distant, and some time after his arrival in that place he commenced the translation of the Book of Mormon, assisted by Oliver Cowdery as scribe. The translation was finished in Fayette, Seneca county, New York, and the printing done in Egbert Grandin's printing office in Palmyra, N. Y., in the latter part of 1829 and the beginning of 1830, the book, in an edition of 3,000 copies, being issued from the press in March, 1830. According to Church history, the translation of the sacred volume was done in Harmony, Penn., and in Fayette, New York, and not in Manchester, New York, as sometimes stated, but it is likely that some of the proof-reading took place in the Smith home in Manchester, which is only one and one-half mile from the town of Palmyra.

Almost immediately after the printing of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church in April, 1830, Elders commenced to preach the restored Gospel, or, as it is sometimes called, "the fulness of the Gospel," as recorded in the Book of Mormon, and when the elders went out to testify of its restoration they almost invariably carried with them copies of the Book of Mormon. It is not known that these elders of the Church used any other important literature in their propaganda than the Book of Mormon for a number of years, or until 1837, when Parley P. Pratt wrote and had issued from the press his *Voice of Warning*. One of the very first missionaries of the Church was Samuel H. Smith, a brother of the Prophet Joseph, who in the summer of 1830 visited several localities in the State of New York, carrying copies of the Book of Mormon with him. He was, as a rule, rejected by the people and suffered much persecution, but a copy of the Book of Mormon which he left at the home of a Methodist preacher named John P. Greene, and which was read by that gentleman and later by others, caused the conversion to "Mormonism" of such men as Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball and many others who afterwards figured prominently in the Church. Even while the Book of Mormon was in the hands of the printer in Palmyra, Thos. B. Marsh, afterwards one of the Twelve Apostles, was converted to "Mormonism" by reading proof sheets of the first sixteen pages of the book. Mr. Marsh was moved, by the spirit, to make a journey westward from Boston, Mass., where he resided, during which he met Martin Harris at the printing office in Palmyra and later also Oliver Cowdery, from whom he received further information in regard to the great Latter-day work, and soon became a strong believer in the divinity of the Book of Mormon.

Another case is that of Willard Richards, afterwards one of the Twelve Apostles, and later a counselor to President Brig-

ham Young. While practicing medicine near Boston, a copy of the Book of Mormon accidentally fell into his hands. He opened the book without regard to place, and totally ignorant of its contents, and before reading half a page of it, he declared: "God or the devil has had a hand in that book, for man never wrote it." He read it twice through in about ten days, and so firm was his conviction of the truth that he immediately commenced settling his accounts, selling his medicine and freeing himself from every encumbrance that he might go to Kirtland, Ohio, seven hundred miles west (the nearest point he could hear of the Saints) and give the work a thorough investigation, firmly believing that if the "doctrine was true" God had some greater work for him to do than peddle pills. Parley P. Pratt, another prominent character who also became one of the Apostles of the Church, was led by the Spirit of the Lord to travel from his home in the state of Ohio several hundred miles eastward to a place where he obtained a copy of the Book of Mormon, and as soon as he had read it he was convinced of its authenticity and almost immediately proceeded to the place where the Saints were located and requested baptism. After being ordained an elder, he was sent on a mission to the Lamanites, and in October, 1830, traveled westward to Kirtland, Ohio, where he met his former fellow-laborer in the Campbellite denomination, Sidney Rigdon, to whom he presented a copy of the Book of Mormon. Mr. Rigdon seemed at first unwilling to read the book, but finally promised to do so for the sake of his former association with Parley P. Pratt. By reading the book Mr. Rigdon became a convert to "Mormonism." This circumstance is important in view of the false accusation repeatedly made that Sidney Rigdon was an associate of the Prophet Joseph Smith in producing the Book of Mormon.

Numerous instances might be cited where the reading of the Book of Mormon by sincere and truth-seeking persons led them to embrace the gospel. In the course of time, tracts, periodicals, etc., were published in the interest of the Church, and the Book of Mormon then ceased to be the only literary production used by the elders; but in opening up new missions in different parts of the world one of the first steps usually taken by the elders, in many instances, was the translating of the Book of Mormon into the language of the people where missionary work was to be carried on. Thus, after the first elders had been sent to Scandinavia, Apostle Erastus Snow, assisted by Peter O. Hansen, caused an edition of the Book of Mormon to be published in the Danish language. Elder Peter O. Hansen, while residing in Nauvoo, Ill., had translated the Book of Mormon into Danish and this somewhat imperfect translation was revised and made the basis for the first edition of the book

(2000 copies) published in Copenhagen, by Erastus Snow in 1851, under the title *Mormons Bog*. A second edition (3000 copies) was published by Hector G. Haight in 1858, a third edition (2000 copies) by Niels Wilhelmsen in 1881, a fourth edition (3000 copies) by Anton L. Schanky, in 1902, and a fifth edition (10,000 copies) by Andrew Jenson in 1911, thus making 20,000 copies altogether in the Danish-Norwegian language.

A French edition of the Book of Mormon (*Le Livre de Mormon*) was translated from the English by John Taylor and Curtis E. Bolton. It was stereotyped and published in Paris, in 1852. The French Book of Mormon has been circulated freely in France, the Channel Islands and Belgium.

The Book of Mormon in German (*Das Buch Mormon*) was translated from English by John Taylor and George Parker Dykes, stereotyped by John Taylor and the first edition published in Hamburg, Germany, in 1852. A second edition was issued a few years later, a third in Bern, Switzerland, in 1873, where also a fourth edition was published in 1886; and in 1893, the book was stereotyped and re-printed at the *Deseret News* office, in Salt Lake City, Utah, divided into chapters and verses, like the English edition of 1879, by Elder Frederick W. Schoenfeldt.

An edition of the Book of Mormon in the Italian language (*Il Libro de Mormon*) was published in London, in 1852, by Apostle Lorenzo Snow.

A Welsh edition of the book (*Llyfr Mormon*) translated by John Davis was published in 1852 at Myrthyr Tydfil, Wales, but as most of the people in Wales were generally fairly well acquainted with English it seems that no second edition of the Book of Mormon in Welsh was ever issued.

After the Hawaiian Mission had been opened by Hiram Clark, George Q. Cannon and others, in 1850, and the work of propaganda had been successfully commenced among the natives, Elder George Q. Cannon, who became very proficient in the Hawaiian language, commenced a translation of the Book of Mormon in that tongue (*Ka Buke a Mormon*) and the first edition of the translation was published in San Francisco, California, in 1855. A second edition was published in Salt Lake City a few years ago.

For twenty-seven years the Swedish Saints, who as a rule understood the Danish-Norwegian language to a greater or less extent, read the Danish Book of Mormon, but in the year 1878 the Book of Mormon (*Mormons Bok*) was translated from English into Swedish by August W. Carlson, and an edition of 3,000 copies published in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1878. A second edition was published a few years ago.

The Book of Mormon was translated into the Dutch lan-

guage under the title *Het Boek van Mormon*, by Jan W. F. Volker and an edition of 2,000 copies published in Amsterdam, Holland, by Elder Francis A. Brown, in 1890. A second edition (3,000 copies) revised by Elder Sylvester Q. Cannon, and Wm. J. DeBry was published in Amsterdam in 1909. To the new edition was added a comprehensive index, chronological chart and other valuable features.

The fulness of the gospel was first introduced into New Zealand in 1854, but the work among the Maoris was not commenced until 1883. The Book of Mormon was translated into the Maori language from English by Ezra F. Richards and Sandra Saunders, under the direction President Wm. Paxman, and an edition of 2,000 copies published by Wm. Paxman in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1889, at a cost of \$2,500, the title of the book being *Ko Te Pukapuka a Moromona*. A second edition of the Maori Book of Mormon was published in 1918.

A successful mission was opened in Mexico, in 1879, and the Book of Mormon was translated from English into the Spanish language by Meliton G. Trejo and James Z. Stewart, under the direction of Moses Thatcher of the Council of the Twelve. An edition of the book under the title of *Libro de Mormon* was published by the *Deseret News Co.*, of Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1886.

The Book of Mormon was translated into the Samoan language by American and native elders and published in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1903, under the title of *O le Tusi a Mamona*.

As the work progressed on the Society and Tuamotu Islands it was deemed necessary to translate the Book of Mormon into the Tahitian language, which was done by American elders, assisted by natives, and an edition of the book under the title of *Te Buka a Mormona* was published in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1904.

Under the direction of Elder Ferdinand F. Hintze the Book of Mormon was translated into the Turkish language, and published in Armenian characters in Boston, U. S. A., in 1906.

Elder Alma O. Taylor, one of the first missionaries to Japan, translated the Book of Mormon into the Japanese language and an edition, consisting of 5,000 copies, was printed and published in Tokio, Japan, in October, 1909.

Including the English edition it is seen from the foregoing that the Book of Mormon has been published in fifteen different languages and besides that it has been translated into Hindustani, Greek, old Testament Hebrew and modern Jewish (Yiddish), but not yet published in any of these languages. The manuscripts of these translations are on file at the Historian's Office awaiting further action.

After the first edition of the Book of Mormon, published

in Palmyra in 1830, had been sold, other editions were published in Kirtland, Ohio, and Nauvoo, Ill. The first edition of the book published in England was issued from the press in that country in 1841. Many other editions have since been published in the British Isles and America. At the present time it is impossible to state exactly how large the respective editions have been, but it is believed that at least half a million copies of the Book of Mormon in English have been printed and distributed among English-speaking people, principally in America and Great Britain. During the last few years it is known that about 100,000 copies of the Book of Mormon have been printed in Independence, Mo., and nearly 200,000 copies in Chicago, Ill., and owing to the great numbers published in each edition the book has retailed at less than fifty cents per copy.

The latest edition of the book, published in 1920, in Salt Lake City is by far the best and most attractive ever printed, both from a literary and mechanical point of view. Instead of single column pages this last edition is issued in double-column pages with chapter headings, chronological data, revised foot notes, references, pronouncing vocabulary and index.

The earlier editions of the book were divided into quite lengthy chapters and verses, but in 1877-1878, Elder Orson Pratt by appointment of the First Presidency subdivided the book into smaller chapters and verses and added foot notes, so that the contents of the sacred volume could be found more easily by an alphabetical index. The first edition of the book in that form was published in 1879.

A special effort is being made at the present time to introduce the Book of Mormon into the libraries of the United States and other countries, and the great desire is to place copies of the book in the homes of all people who are interested in the true gospel of Jesus Christ, and the history of the aborigines of America. The Book of Mormon is the only book that can solve the problem in regard to the origin of the American Indians, and if people generally would read the book with the same honesty of purpose and sincerity of heart that Brigham Young, Sidney Rigdon, Willard Richards, Thomas B. Marsh, John P. Greene and thousands of others did, it would soon become universal as a companion volume to the Bible in the homes of true and sincere Christians, for by a careful reading of the book the somewhat ambiguous saying of Ezekiel, where that Prophet in his 37th chapter speaks of the stick of Judah and the stick of Ephraim becoming united would assume a clear and distinct meaning, and appeal to them as a consistent reality.