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## An Analysis of the Book of Mormon: Suggestions to the Reader

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# ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

## SUGGESTIONS TO THE READER.

BY ELDER B. H. ROBERTS

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THE reader of the Book of Mormon will do well to remember that it is a translation of a record inscribed on gold plates, which was an abridgment made from more extensive records kept by the ancient civilized peoples of America—chiefly by the people known in the Book of Mormon as Nephites. The abridgment, for the most part, is made by one Mormon, a Nephite prophet who was born 311 A.D., and slain by his enemies in the year 400 A.D. The parts which are not his abridgment are the first 157 pages (N.E.), which brings us to the “Words of Mormon,” page 158; and from page 563 (N. E.) to the end of the volume—60 pages.

This latter part of the record was made by Moroni, the son of Mormon, who was also the one who hid up the plates containing his father’s and his own abridgment, in the year 421 A.D.; and who having been raised from the dead, revealed the existence of these plates to Joseph Smith, on the 21st of September, 1823. The first 157 pages are a verbatim translation from what are known as the “smaller plates” of Nephi—we will explain.

The first Nephi, who left Jerusalem with the small company of colonists led out from that city by his father, Lehi, 600 B.C., and who afterwards became the leader, prophet, and their first king on the American continent, made two sets of plates on which he purposed engraving the history of his people. On the larger of these two sets of plates, he engraved an account of his father’s life, travels, prophecies, etc., together with his genealogy; and upon them also he recorded a full history of the wars and contentions of his people, as also their travels, and an account of the cities they founded and colonies they established. These larger plates were preserved in the care of succeeding kings; and, in a word, upon them was written a full history of the rise and fall of the nations which existed in America from the landing of this colony from Jerusalem to 400 A.D., a period of nearly 1000 years.

It is quite evident that as these plates were transmitted from king to king, or from one ruling judge of the republic to another, or given into the possession of a prophet, that they each recorded the historical events of his own day, and gave to such account his own name—hence Mormon found in these “larger plates” of Nephi—the Book of Mosiah, the Book of Alma, the Book of Heleman, etc.

Furthermore, it happened that there were colonies from time to time that drifted off into distant parts of the land, and became lost for a season to the main body of the people; and there were missionary expeditions formed for the conversion of the Lamanites; and these parties, whether missionary or colonial, generally kept records, and when these colonists or missionary parties were found, or returned to the main body of the people, their records

were incorporated within the main record, being kept by the historian—hence there was, sometimes, a book within a book, and the current of events was interrupted to record the history of these detached portions of the people, or some important missionary expedition.

Mormon, when abridging these plates of Nephi, gave to each particular division of his abridgment the name of the book from which he had taken his account of the events recorded—hence the Book of Mosiah, Alma, Helaman and III and IV Nephi in his abridgment. He also, in some instances at least, followed the subdivision we have alluded to, hence we have the record of Zenif within the Book of Mosiah (page 181, N.E.); the account of the church founded by the first Alma (page 213); and the account of the missionary expeditions of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites within the Book of Alma (page 283).

Again we caution the reader to remember that the Book of Mormon is, for the most part, an abridgment from the “larger plates” of Nephi; but it is quite evident that Mormon frequently came to passages upon the plates of Nephi which pleased him so well that he transcribed them upon the plates containing his abridgment, *verbatim*. An example of this will be found beginning on page 163, in the second line of the 9th paragraph, and ending with page 169—the words of King Benjamin to his people. The words of King Benjamin are also renewed on page 170, in the second line of the 4th paragraph, and continue to the close of the chapter. There are many such passages throughout Mormon’s abridgment.

In addition to this, Mormon frequently introduces remarks of his own by way of comment, warning, prophecy or admonition, and since there is nothing in the text, either quotation-marks or a change of type to indicate where these comments, or what we might call annotations, begin or end, they are liable to confuse the reader—a difficulty that we hope will be obviated by this caution. So much for Mormon’s abridgment. Now, to consider the part of the work done by his son Moroni. This is from page 563 to the end of the volume. He closes up the record of his father, Mormon, and then gives us an abridgment of the twenty-four plates of Esther which were found in North America by the people of Limhi, in the 2nd century B.C.; and then concludes his work with notes on the manner of ordaining priests and teachers, administering the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, baptism, spiritual gifts, together with a sermon and some letters of his father’s. In his abridgment of the record of the Jaredites, the peculiarity of mixing up his comments, admonitions and prophecies with his narrative, is even more marked than in the abridgment of Mormon, therefore the reader will need to be doubly on his guard.

We have already said that the first 157 pages of the Book of Mormon was not a part of Mormon’s abridgment. Those pages are a *verbatim* translation of the “smaller plates” of Nephi, and became connected with Mormon’s abridgment in this manner: Mormon had abridged the “larger plates” of Nephi as far as the reign of King Benjamin, and in searching through the records which had been delivered to him, he found these “smaller plates” of Nephi. They contained a brief history of events connected with the departure of Lehi and his colony from Jerusalem to their landing in America, and

thence down to the reign of this King Benjamin—covering a period of about 400 years. These plates were made by Nephi, that upon them might be engraven an account of the ministry of the servants of God, among his people, together with their prophecies and teachings. They contain, in other words, an ecclesiastical history of the Nephites, while the “larger plates” of Nephi contained a political, or secular history of the same people. (See 1 Nephi, ix chapter; also xix, 1—5).

Mormon was particularly well pleased with the contents of these “smaller plates” of Nephi, because upon them had been engraven so many prophecies concerning the coming and mission of the Messiah; and instead of condensing their history into an abridgment, he took the plates and attached them to the abridgment of Nephi’s “larger plates.” “And this I do for a wise purpose,” says Mormon, “for thus it whispereth me according to the Spirit of the Lord which is in me.” (Words of Mormon, page 159, N. E.). Nephi, also, in speaking of these “smaller plates,” says, “the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not” (1 Nephi ix, 5). What that wise purpose was we shall see in a moment.

By Mormon attaching these “smaller plates” of Nephi to his own abridgment of Nephi’s “larger plates,” it will be seen there was a double line of history of the Nephites for about 400 years, and the wisdom of this arrangement is seen in the following: When Joseph Smith had translated the first part of Mormon’s abridgment—amounting to 116 pages of manuscript, he listened to the importunities of Martin Harris, who was giving him some assistance in the work of translating, and who desired to show that portion of the work to his friends. The result was the manuscript was stolen from him; the records were taken from Joseph, and he lost his power to translate for a season. After a time, however, he was permitted to go on with the work, but the Lord made it known to him that it was the design of those into whose hands the manuscript had fallen to wait until he had translated that part again, and then by changing the manuscript in their possession would bring it forth and claim that he could not translate the same record twice alike; and thus they would seek to overthrow the work of God.

But the heavenly messenger commanded Joseph Smith not to translate again the part he had already translated, but instead thereof he should translate the “smaller plates” of Nephi, and that account should take the place of Mormon’s abridgment up to the latter days of the reign of King Benjamin. Thus it is that we have the “words of Mormon,” beginning on page 158, explaining how the “smaller plates” of Nephi came into his possession and attached to the plates containing the record he himself was making, and connecting the historical narrative of the “smaller plates” of Nephi with his own abridgment of Nephi’s “larger plates.” The “words of Mormon,” interrupting as they do the history of the Nephites, have caused no little confusion in the minds of unthoughtful readers; but after it is understood that they are merely the link connecting the ecclesiastical history engraven on the “smaller plates” of Nephi to Mormon’s abridgment, and that they take the place of the first part of Mormon’s record, the difficulty will disappear.

One thing I cannot forbear to mention, and that is, in the parts of the Book of Mormon translated from the “smaller plates” of Nephi, we find none of

these comments or annotations mixed up with the record that we have already spoken of as being peculiar to the abridgment made by Mormon—a circumstance, I take it, which proves the Book of Mormon to be consistent with the account given of the original records from which it was translated. There will be found, however, in this translation direct from the “smaller plates” of Nephi, as also in Mormon’s abridgment, extracts from the old Jewish Scriptures—especially from the writings of Isaiah—this is accounted for by the fact that when Lehi’s colony left Jerusalem, they took with them copies of the books of Moses and the writings of the prophets, and a record of the Jews down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, all of which were engraven on plates of brass (see 1 Nephi v, 10—13), and the Nephite historians transcribed passages from these sacred records into their own writings.

One suggestion more I would make to the readers of the Book of Mormon, and that is that they read it prayerfully, with a real desire to know if it is of God. If they will peruse it with that desire in their hearts, I am sanguine that the Spirit of God which searches all things, yea, the deep things of God, will bear witness to their understanding that the book is of divine origin, and they will have a witness from God of its truth. Such a promise, in fact, is contained within the book itself. When Moroni—into whose keeping the plates of the Book of Mormon were given—was closing up the sacred record previous to hiding it up unto the Lord until the time should come for it to be revealed as a witness for God, he engraved the following passage on the plates as words of counsel to those into whose hands the record should fall:—

“And when ye shall receive these things (*i.e.*, the things written in the Book of Mormon), I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, He will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost; and by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things (Moroni x., 4. 5).

Here, then, is a means by which every person into whose hands the Book of Mormon falls may find out for himself, not from human testimony, not from the deductions of logic, but through the power of the Holy Ghost, whether the Book of Mormon is of divine origin or not. This test must be final, either for or against it, to every individual who complies with the conditions enjoined by Moroni. Those conditions are, that they into whose hands the record falls shall inquire of God with a sincere heart, with real intent, and having faith in Christ; and to those who so proceed he promises without equivocation that they shall receive a manifestation of its truth by the power of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, if these directions are complied with faithfully and honestly, and the manifestation follows not, then they may know it is not of God. If the manifestation comes, of course the divine origin of the book is confirmed, for the Holy Ghost would not confirm by any manifestation of its power an imposition. Therefore, reader, whoever you may be, undertake the reading of the Book of Mormon with a prayerful heart, and you will find in it a new volume of Scripture to you, a treasury of sacred knowledge able to make you wise unto salvation.