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The Book of Mormon: Scriptures of the American Continent—Origin of the American Indians

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Abstract: This article is a brief summary of the Book of Mormon story, and Joseph Smith's translation. Modern revelation is not improbable. The Book of Mormon is "parallel volume" to the Bible, not a substitute; the two are not contradictory.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

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"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready"
(REV. 19: 7).

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THE BOOK OF MORMON.

SCRIPTURES OF THE AMERICAN CONTINENT. ORIGIN OF THE
AMERICAN INDIANS.

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THE Book of Mormon is preeminently an American book, comprising the history of the aboriginal peoples of the New World. It professes to be the modern translation of certain records, covering the period from B.C. 600 to about A.D. 420, with which is incorporated the abridgment of a yet earlier history. The original account was inscribed on thin sheets of gold, in small characters of the Reformed Egyptian style. The plates were taken from their repository on the side of a hill near Palmyra, New York. This was in September 1827; and in the early months of 1830 the English translation was published.

The Book of Mormon story deals in part with the general history of the ancient peoples, their rise and fall as nations, their wars and intrigues of state, their alternating epochs of material prosperity and adversity; but more particularly it preserves an account of the divine revelations, the prophets and prophecies with which the ancient Americans were blessed; and thus the work stands before the world as the *Scriptures of the Western Continent*.

According to the book, Lehi, an Israelitish prophet, was directed by revelation, B.C. 600, to take his family and leave Jerusalem, in time to escape the destruction or captivity incident to Nebuchadnezzar's conquest, and the assurance was given that the migrating company should be led to a land of promise, choice above all other lands. Lehi's family was joined by members of other

families. In time the travelers reached the Arabian Sea, and there they built a ship in which they were carried by wind and current to the American shore.

The colonists multiplied and prospered. After a few years, however, open disruption occurred, and the people divided into factions, known as Nephites and Lamanites. The former were named after Nephi who was a younger son of Lehi and a righteous man; and the latter derived their name from their first leader, Laman, the eldest and most rebellious of the family. In time these parties developed into powerful nations. The Lamanites maintained bitter hatred toward their brethren, and deadly hostility prevailed throughout the greater part of the period of Book of Mormon history. While the Nephites were industrious and progressive, cultivating the soil and building great cities in South, Central, and North America, the Lamanites fell into degeneracy and came to rely almost entirely on hunting and warfare for subsistence. They were cursed of the Lord with a ruddy skin, and with this somber hue of body, came darkness of mind. As the Book of Mormon plainly and circumstantially avers, the degraded posterity of the ancient Lamanites are the American Indians of to-day.

The last great conflict between the Nephites and Lamanites occurred in what is now northern New York, and the issue was the utter extermination of the Nephite nation. As the predicted destruction of his people drew near, Mormon, a Nephite historian and prophet, collated and in part abridged the voluminous historical records that had accumulated during the period of nearly ten centuries; and to his abridgment he gave his own name, hence the title, "Book of Mormon." Mormon's son, Moroni, supplemented his father's work by writings of his own; and then realizing that his death was imminent, he deposited the records in a stone box and buried the same at what was called by the Nephites the Hill Cumorah, now popularly known as "Mormon Hill," in the vicinity of Palmyra, N. Y.

The announcement of such a discovery as that of the plates of Mormon, and of such an achievement as the translation of the records into English, could not fail to attract the attention of both layman and scholar. But the announcement was treated with contempt, and vigorous denunciation. The reason for this hostile rejection is found in the fact that Joseph Smith, the translator, avowed that he had not accomplished the marvelous work by his own or other human power alone, but that the resting-place of the ancient plates had been revealed to him by an angel, who appeared in light and glory, and announced himself as that same Moroni who had sealed up and buried the inscribed plates over fourteen centuries earlier.

A further cause for the popular opposition to the Book of Mormon lay in Joseph Smith's solemn testimony that he had been

empowered to make the translation through the direct inspiration of God, and that he had been aided in the work by the use of two stones which he had found buried with the plates, and that, as the angel had explained to him, these stones constituted the Urim and Thummim, such as certain prophets of ancient Israel had, and their ability to use which had given them the distinguishing attributes of "seers."

This avowal introduced the element of the supernatural. If Joseph Smith spoke truly, miracles had not ceased, and direct revelation from God to man was of modern certainty. Such a conception was wholly opposed by theological theory and churchly dogma. And yet, why in reason should direct revelation from the heavens be more of an improbability to-day than in the centuries of long ago? Except as to the extent of the writing, is the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon any more of a marvel than the inspired reading of the mystic words by Daniel in the midst of Belshazzar's riotous feast? (See Dan. 5: 25-31.) And surely the means by which the writing was done appears far more mysterious in the case of the Chaldean king, than in the ordinary and human way of engraving the Book of Mormon plates.

The Book of Mormon is before the world. It has been distributed by millions of copies in English and other modern tongues. The claims made as to its genuineness at the time of first publication have never been altered in the least particular. Let it be understood that in no sense does the Book of Mormon profess to be a substitute for the Holy Bible, or to be in any way related thereto, except as a parallel volume of Scripture. The Bible is essentially a record of the dealings of God with His people in the East; the Book of Mormon is an embodiment of divine revelations to the people of the West. So far as the two books touch common themes they are in harmony; and in no particular are they contradictory of each other.

IN December, 1832, the Lord gave a Revelation, in which He told the saints that after the testimony of the elders of the Church would come the testimony of earthquakes and other visitations (Doc. and Cov. 88: 88-91). An American paper, not in any way connected with the Church, calls attention to the fact that during the past fifty years there have been 130,000 earthquake shocks recorded, distributed as follows: Italy, 27,672; Japan, 27,502; Greece and adjacent islands, 10,306; South America, 8,080; Mexico, 5,586; Asia Minor, Sicily, and the Pacific coasts of the United States about 4,403 each. What a remarkable fulfilment of prophecy.

WHAT we want is the single eye, that we may see what our work is; the humility to accept it, however lowly; the faith to do it for God; the perseverance to go on till death.—N. McLEOD.