

# MORMON SCRIPTURE

## The Book of Mormon

By Marvin W. Cowan

In a previous article on “Moroni and the Book of Mormon” we mentioned that Joseph Smith’s story of how and when he learned of the Book of Mormon has been changed. Was it Nephi who revealed the gold plates to him as some of Smith’s earlier reports stated? Or was it Moroni as the official story now reports in the Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith—History 1:27-54? And did the “heavenly messenger” first visit Smith on September 22, 1822 as recorded in his diary or was it September 21, 1823 as the official story now says? While some may shrug these and other questions off as trivial, they do raise serious questions about Joseph Smith as well as the Book of Mormon itself. Smith’s own activities can often be verified or disproved by other documents from his time period because he lived when many other records were kept. But testing the validity of the story in the Book of Mormon must be done in other ways.

With the exception of the book of Ether in the Book of Mormon, the rest of the Book of Mormon story takes place between 600 B. C. and 421 A. D. It is supposed to be a sacred history of ancient Israelites who left Jerusalem and came to the promised land of America and became the ancestors of the American Indians. Many other writers before and during Smith’s lifetime claimed that American Indians were descendants of the Israelites, like Ethan Smith did in his book, *View of the Hebrews*. While the idea that Indians were descendants of Israelites was quite popular during Smith’s lifetime, there is no evidence to support it in either Israel or America. The Bureau of American Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution claims that the ancestors of the American Indians came from eastern, central and northeastern Asia, not Israel. Therefore, American Indians and Israelites aren’t even from the same ethnic or racial background. Thus, can the Book of Mormon be a real history of real Israelites who came to America and became real Indians?

Internally there are also many problems with the Book of Mormon. For example, while in Jerusalem around 600 B.C., Lehi prophesied more specific things about Jesus Christ than all Old Testament prophets put together (1 Nephi 10:3-11), yet Lehi isn’t even mentioned in the Bible! Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were all living at that time so it is strange that none of them nor any historical record even mentioned Lehi as a great prophet then! Nor are there any historical records anywhere that mention even one of the events or individuals found in the Book of Mormon. That is strange since historical records in Israel and the Middle East do support some of the Biblical accounts during that same time period and some even earlier than that!

Mormons often chide Christians because they don’t have the original manuscripts of the New Testament that were written by Peter, Paul and the other writers. Even though we may not have those manuscripts, we do have thousands of copies in the original language that have given us a very reliable Bible. But Mormons claim that we can’t have an accurate or reliable translation of the Bible without the manuscripts that came from the hands of the original writers. That is an interesting claim from those who say that they “know that the Book of Mormon is true because they have received a testimony that it is!” But when Mormons are asked how they know the Book of Mormon is true, the most common answer is that they had a feeling (such as a burning in their bosom) that it is true! Many testify of such

experiences when they have never even read the Book of Mormon through once! That is hardly reliable proof that it is what it claims to be. When Mormons are asked if they have the original documents for the Book of Mormon, they often act a bit confused by the question. Some respond saying that the LDS Church has a copy of the original manuscript that was written when Joseph Smith dictated the translation in English. But that is not the original document! When pressed, LDS will admit that they do not have the original gold plates that Smith claimed he translated “because the angel Moroni took them back.” So, even though Mormons often chide Christians about not having the original manuscripts of the New Testament, they don’t have the original “gold plates” for the Book of Mormon either!

Mormons have a much worse problem than Christians because they don’t even have one single copy of the Book of Mormon in the original “Reformed Egyptian” language! In spite of that, LDS leaders have made thousands of changes in Smith’s translation of the Book of Mormon without any original documents available! The Book of Mormon indicates that millions of people in the Americas spoke and wrote in the “Reformed Egyptian” language, yet not one single written document of any kind in that language has been found in any of the excavated archaeological sites anywhere in North, Central or South America! Nor did the American Indians speak that language when Columbus and the other explorers arrived in America! Did every bit of the “Reformed Egyptian” language in America just vanish except for what was written on the gold plates that Smith translated? In spite of these problems, LDS claim that it is the Bible that is questionable, not the Book of Mormon! Joseph Smith even said, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and that a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 194).

Because the Book of Mormon is so crucial to Mormonism, we will discuss it further next time. For those who would like to read more on this subject, I would suggest *The Creation of the Book of Mormon* by LaMar Petersen, published by Freethinker Press, SLC, UT in 1998.