

Moroni and The Book of Mormon

By Marvin W. Cowan

Joseph Smith claimed that he was visited in 1820 by God the Father and Jesus and told not to join any of the churches because they were all wrong. That is called the “First Vision” because it was the first of several heavenly visitations he said he had. In Latter Day Saint’s scripture called *The Pearl of Great Price*, “Joseph Smith-History” 1:29-54, Smith said a resurrected messenger named Moroni visited him three times on the night of September 21, 1823 and once the next day, repeating the same message each time as he quoted from Malachi, Isaiah, Joel, and Acts. Moroni also predicted that the generation living on earth in 1823 would experience great judgments and desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence.

Smith said that Moroni was the last of the early inhabitants on the American continent to write his people’s history on gold plates. Just before he died in 421 A D, Moroni hid the gold plates in a hill near where the Smiths lived in Manchester, NY in 1823. The plates contained the fulness of the everlasting gospel and was scripture for the early Americans much like the Bible was for the Israelites. Moroni told Smith that with the plates were two stones, called the Urim and Thummim, which God had prepared for the purpose of translating the Reformed Egyptian writing on them into English. He also told Smith to meet him at the location of the plates on September 22nd each year for the next four years after which he could begin translating them into *The Book of Mormon*.

Smith’s story of Moroni’s visits is as flawed as his First Vision story. In his personal 1832-34 diary on page 4, Smith wrote that the heavenly messenger who told him about the gold plates appeared to him three times on the night of September 22, 1822 and once the next day. That is one year and one day earlier than the account in the current edition of *The Pearl of Great Price*. Smith said he met this messenger several times over the next few years, so he should have known his name quite well. But, in Nauvoo, IL, on April 15, 1842, in the Mormon newspaper *Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, page 753, Smith was writing about the one who revealed the gold plates to him when he said, “He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Nephi” (not Moroni). One month earlier on March 15, 1842 in the same paper Joseph Smith wrote, “This paper commences my editorial career, I alone am responsible for it” (vol. 3, page 710).

Others who were close to Smith also said the messenger’s name was Nephi. Parley P. Pratt was one of the original Twelve Apostles and the editor of the LDS newspaper called *The Millennial Star*, which was published in Liverpool, England. In the August 1, 1842 issue, Pratt said twice that the angel who revealed the gold plates was Nephi (vol. 3, pages 53 & 71). The first edition of *The Pearl of Great Price*, published in Liverpool in 1851, also said that the angel’s name was Nephi on page 41. No one knew Joseph Smith better than his mother, Lucy Smith, who wrote *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* which was published in 1853 in Liverpool. On page 79 she also said the angel’s name was Nephi. No one was with Joseph in any of the meetings he claimed he had with the angel, so the only information available about those visits came from him.

Mormons believe that *The Book of Mormon* came from the gold plates and contains “the fulness of the everlasting gospel,” while they only “believe the Bible to be the word of

God as far as it is translated correctly” (8th Article of Faith). Yet, Moroni (or Nephi) quoted only from the King James translation of the Bible, and did not use *The Book of Mormon* in his messages to Smith! Even more strange is the fact that none of the unique Mormon doctrines that are essential to their salvation and exaltation are found in *The Book of Mormon*! We will discuss more about the contents of *The Book of Mormon* in a future article. Moroni’s (or Nephi’s) prediction of great judgments and desolations by “famine, sword and pestilence” on the generation of people living in 1823 should also raise questions since the people living then didn’t suffer such things any more than any other generation. So, what was the point of that prophecy? Can an angel sent from God give false prophecy?

The apostle Paul warned that “Satan himself is transformed as an angel of light” (II Cor. 11:14). Therefore, just because someone claims an angel gave them a message, doesn’t prove that it came from God. Paul declared that the gospel is about Christ dying for our sins (I Cor. 15:1-3). And, he also warned, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). Not even an angel has the right to change the true gospel! But what Mormonism calls “the gospel” is not what Paul preached! Paul declared that the gospel “is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). In what “gospel” are you trusting?

For more historical information about Moroni and *The Book of Mormon*, we suggest *The Creation of The Book of Mormon* by LaMar Petersen, published by Freethinker Press in Salt Lake City, UT in 1998. Our next article will discuss the origin of LDS priesthood.