



Type: Magazine Article

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## Book of Mormon Language: Hebrew—Egyptian

Author(s): Frederic Clift

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (January 1905)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 168-176

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**Abstract:** This article takes a stance defending the proposition that the Book of Mormon was written in Egyptian. Hints that neighboring alphabets, such as Hebrew, Arabic, Chaldean, and Assyriac are also found in the Book of Mormon. Charles Anthon's comments to Martin Harris regarding the Book of Mormon characters are also mentioned.

# BOOK OF MORMON LANGUAGE.

HEBREW—EGYPTIAN.

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BY DR. FREDERIC CLIFT, OF THE BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.

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The missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announce to the world that the plates of the Book of Mormon, as received and translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith, were engraved in Hebrew-Egyptian characters.\* The statement often calls forth a smile of incredulity, and frequently a query as to how Lehi and his companions, residents of Jerusalem, came to write

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\* Regarding the author's statement that the Book of Mormon was engraved in Hebrew-Egyptian characters: It is clear that Nephi wrote his part of the Book of Mormon in Egyptian characters (I Nephi, 1: 2.) It is also clear that Mormon and Moroni wrote their part of the record in the Egyptian characters (Mormon 9: 32.) While it is true that the statement is made that the Egyptian characters were altered by the Nephites, we are scarcely warranted in concluding that these alterations were produced by intermingling the Egyptian with Hebrew characters, but were constituted by changes in the formation of some of the Egyptian letters. The foundation of this Egyptian literature among the Nephites was the Jewish scriptures on the brass plates written in Egyptian characters (Mosiah 1: 3, 4.) So that, considering all things, one must rather incline to the opinion that the fact that the Nephite records were written in the Egyptian, comes from the circumstance of Lehi's being an Egyptian scholar, and that the Hebrew scriptures he carried with him into the wilderness were also written in Egyptian characters, than to the theory that Judea was a border land between Assyria and Egypt, and hence possessed a mixed language made up of Hebrew-Egyptian-Arabic, etc.—EDITORS.

their history in a language which was not that of the Hebrews. Enquirers, of course, do not accept Nephi's statement: "I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews, and the language of the Egyptians" (I Nephi, 1: 2), and call for proof from the Bible, the Stick of Judah.

At this time, when so many are studying *New Witnesses for God*, it is perhaps appropriate to consider the evidence confirmatory of Nephi's statement. In the interview between Martin Harris and Professor Anthon, a celebrated linguist, the latter stated that the characters presented to him by Martin Harris, being portions of a transcript taken from the plates of the Book of Mormon, were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac and Arabic, and that they were true characters (see Manual, 1903-4, pages 45-51.) Professor Anthon thus unwittingly associates the transcript with the four languages in use amongst the Hebrews, at the time when Lehi left Jerusalem. At the moment when Professor Anthon made this statement to Martin Harris, and admitted by his own letters to have been so made, he was wholly ignorant as to where the transcripts came from, or their history. As soon as the professor was told that the plates had been given by an angel of God to a man, *then* living, he, like the majority of the men of the world at that time, repudiated the idea of new revelation, and withdrew the certificate he had given; but he could not withdraw the fact that he had expressed his opinion as to their being genuine, and that they were in the character and language common to the Hebrew people at the time named—700 to 600, B. C.

This should be sufficient confirmation of Nephi's statement, but inquiry into the conditions surrounding the Hebrew people must satisfy an honest investigator that it was perfectly natural that Lehi should use, and that the Book of Mormon should be the first to give, and in fact today gives, the only rational explanation or reason for the American Indian being in possession of Egyptian and Semetic words, symbols and written characters.

It is said, "Conquering kings their titles give;" it might be said, "Conquering kings their language give." The accompanying diagram shows that the Hebrews invariably absorbed the language of their conquerors. In the providence of God, the scriptures were thus translated into the controlling language of the day; and as a

result, a true knowledge of Jehovah was thus communicated to Assyrians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Greeks, and later to the Latin, Anglo-Saxon and heathen, races. When the Assyrians overran that portion of Palestine belonging to the ten tribes of Israel, we find that the five books of Moses were translated into the Assyrian dialect, and they form what is known today as the Samaritan Pentateuch. So, too, Judea, having been overrun by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Arabians and neighboring nations, we find the Jewish people adopting their language, and that about 500, B. C., Ezra compiled the Jewish sacred writings in Chaldaic, whilst even today the Synagogue services of the Jews, in the city of Frankfort-on-the-Main, are held in that language.

Again, there was constant intercommunication between Jerusalem and the country lying southwest of that city and Egypt, but in addition to this, the kings of Egypt, at different periods, not only obtained supremacy over the kings of Judah, but made Palestine the battle ground, in their conflicts with the kings of the further East. Thus the Hebrews, being between the hammer and the anvil, applied first to one and then to another of their rival neighbors for aid. In 970, B. C., Shishak, king of Egypt, captured Jerusalem, and reduced Judah to tribute, and omitting the various struggles during the intervening years, we find that in 608, B. C., only a few years before Lehi left Jerusalem, Necho, king of Egypt, having slain the "good Josiah," king of Judah, and deposed his son and successor, placed Jehoiakim on the throne. Four years later, the Babylonian prince, Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the Egyptians at Carmenish, and brought the Jews under Chaldean authority. Men, as a rule, gravitate to the country whose language they speak; and, as a result, after the death of Gedaliah, the Jews sought refuge in Egypt. Digressing for a moment, we find from II Maccabees 2, that Jeremiah was one of these refugees, and that when he "came thither he found a hollow cave wherein he laid the tabernacle and the ark and the altar of incense, \* \* \* saying, as for that place it shall be unknown until the time that God gathers his people again together, and receives them unto mercy. Then shall the Lord show them these things, and the glory of the Lord shall appear." Objection is taken to the Book of Mormon that it is unreasonable to suppose that the Lord would cause the history of his

people on *this continent* to be buried in the earth and brought forth in these latter-days. Is it more inconsistent than that the Lord will in due time bring forth the Ark of the Covenant from its hiding place in a cave, preserved from rust and decay, as the plates were?

Again, Jerusalem was only some two hundred miles from the Nile, the center of Egyptian power. It is a fact that a border language is always a mixed one—thus Alsace and Lorraine formed German territory, then became French, and are now again German. Each nation impressed their language upon the inhabitants, and as a result, the language of these provinces is a mixed one, the more highly educated speaking both. And so we may believe it was in the borderland of Judah and Egypt. The language was to some extent affected, just as our Anglo-Saxon was affected by the Norman-French; and it must be admitted that after the captivity, it was considerably affected by the intercourse of the Jews with foreign nations. Even our Savior's Galilean dialect was a provincial form of Hebrew. When Lehi, therefore, who was one of the more highly educated, (I Nephi 1. 1.) and contemporary with Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel and other prophets of the Lord, received warning of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, and instructions from God to set forth on his journey to this continent of America, he, led by divine power (I Nephi, 2: 4, 5) "departed into the wilderness \* \* \* \* and he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red sea;" *viz*, the borders of Egypt. The actions of Lehi and his sons show their acquaintance with the wilderness, or country which lay between Jerusalem and Egypt, and their knowledge of the language cannot but be presumed. In this same chapter of Nephi, we find that the records which they took with them "did contain the five books of Moses, and also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah." These records, written in Hebrew, with admixture of the four dialects mentioned by Professor Anthon, comprise our Bible, the Stick of Judah, practically the Old Testament history down to 600, B. C., as now accepted by Jew and Christian alike.

A few years later, Ezra began his compilation of the Stick of

Judah, whilst Nephi began the history of his people—the Stick of Joseph—each being added to until, in 1830, the two sticks became one in the hands of Joseph the Ephraimite, in accordance with the prophecy of Ezekiel.

Professor Anthon's statement that the Book of Mormon transcripts showed characteristics of four ancient languages: Chaldaic, Assyriac, Egyptian and Arabic, is shown to be both reasonable and correct, from the following:

1. The Hebrew language was Semetic in origin, and was brought from Ur of the Chaldees. The seventy years captivity of the Jews in Babylon or Chaldea made the Chaldean language a prevailing one, as shown by Ezra's compilation of the Stick of Judah in that dialect, and the use of it in some of their synagogues.

2. Joseph, the son of Patriarch Jacob, became governor of Egypt and having married a daughter of an Egyptian priest, he and his descendants necessarily spoke and used the Egyptian language. So, too, when Moses brought the Hebrews out of Egypt, they had adopted many of the characteristics of that country, and their subsequent intercourse and the authority exercised over them by Egyptian kings, made the knowledge and use of the Egyptian language a necessity.

3. The Samaritan Pentateuch shows conclusively that Assyrian characteristics have been absorbed into the Hebrew language.

4. Although not so self-evident, the fact that the Arabs were near neighbors of the Jews on the east and south is sufficient to justify us in accepting Professor Anthon's statement that the transcripts contained Arabic characters.

The conditions existing prior to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem continued until Ptolemy Soter, king of Egypt, took possession of Syria, captured Jerusalem, and transported ten thousand Jews to Egypt, who, with others, are described in John 8: 35, as "the dispersed among the Gentiles." They adopted the Greek language, and this led to a Greek version of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint. The Jews of this period, like the Christians of later date, split up into sects, the most prominent being the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. The Pharisees were of the poorer class, and, like the Catholics of today in the Christian world, were strict observers of the law and the manners, customs and language of their fathers. Whilst the Sadducees

were of the wealthier and more highly educated class, they patronized Greek manners, and introduced a rationalized paganism into the Jewish worship. This introduction of Greek paganism conduced to the apostasy which so blinded the eyes of the Jews that they did not recognize "the Christ" as their Messiah, and is analogous to the introduction of Latin paganism into the Christian church, which brought about the general apostasy from the Gospel of Christ, and the necessity for a new revelation by an angel to the Prophet Joseph Smith, through whom the Sticks of Judah and Joseph have become one.

#### THE SCRIPTURES.

The language of the nation controlling the destinies of Palestine is found reflected in the Scriptures of that period. Hebrew, the language of the Jews, was introduced from Ur of the Chaldees by Abraham—2126 B. C. It is a Semitic language, and is related to the Syriac, Chaldee, Assyrian, Phœnician, Arabic and Ethiopic dialects. The Egyptian language had Semitic analogies and received a considerable infusion of Semitic words.

The foundation of all Scripture is the Pentateuch (pente, "five," and "teuchos," a volume). The five books of Moses contain the earliest revelation from God.

#### THE PENTATEUCH.

The first five books of the Bible—written by Moses in Hebrew—about 1450 B. C.

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##### SAMARITAN PENTATEUCH

Used by the colonists imported to take the land from which the Israelites had been deported to Assyria.

It comprised the 5 books of Moses, and was written in Hebrew characters but in the Assyrian dialect.

King of Assyria controlled the country and gave the language to the book.—About 700 B. C.

##### HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Included not only the five books of Moses, but also the history of the whole house of Israel—the twelve tribes—down to first year of King Zedekiah, 599 B. C.

They were written in Hebrew with admixture of Egyptian and other dialects.

Palestine was the battle ground of Egyptian and eastern kings, and Judea from time to time came under Egyptian control. As an instance, "The king of Egypt (Necho) made Eliakim \* \* \* king over Judah and Jerusalem and turned his name to Jehoiakim."—II Chron. xxxvi: 4.

Jerusalem was a border city—various dialects, including Egyptian, were in use among the people.

In 975 B. C. the Hebrew nation, as foretold in prophecy, was divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. "Then I cut asunder mine other staff. \* \* \* that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel."—Zech. xi: 14. "So Israel rebelled against the house of David. \* \* \* There was none that followed the house of David but the tribe of Judah only."—I Kings xii: 19, 20.

The Prophet Ezekiel also foretold that the Scriptures would run in two distinct channels. "Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick and write upon it. For Judah \* \* \* Then take another stick and write upon it, for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim."—Ezekiel xxxvii: 16.

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STICK OF JUDAH.

JEWISH SCRIPTURES.

Ezra's compilation, with addition of writings of later prophets.

In Hebrew - Chaldaic characters --King of Persia controlled the country and gave language to the Book.—About 445 B. C.

SEPTUAGINT VERSION.

A Hebrew-Greek translation of Ezra's compiled Jewish scriptures. This was made by direction of Ptolemy Philadelphus for his library at Alexandria, and was used by the "Jews of the Dispersion," who had adopted the Greek language.—Made about 285 B. C. Christ and his Apostles quoted from this translation.

NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES.

Apostolic writings in Hebrew-Greek—originals all lost—From 31 to 97 A. D.

LATIN OR VULGATE VERSION.

A Latin translation of the Old and New Testaments made by St. Jerome.

STICK OF JOSEPH.

BOOK OF MORMON.

I Nephi 5: 10-13, shows Lehi had Hebrew scriptures and records down to the first year of King Zedekiah.

Lehi and his descendants used, and the Book of Mormon plates were written in, Hebrew-Egyptian characters.—I Nephi i: 2. Book of Mormon, ix: 32.

Nephi's records commence in 599 B. C., eleven years before the Babylonian captivity.

BOOK OF MORMON.

Records, abridgment and Mormon's own record,—599 B. C. to 400 A. D.

BOOK OF MORONI.

Moroni completes record of Mormon and includes history of the Jared-



The Roman Catholic Bibles are translations from this version—385 A. D.

WYOLIFFE'S VERSION.

This, the first English translation, was made in 1384 A. D. from the Latin Vulgate.

TYNDALE'S VERSION.

This was the first English translation made direct from the Hebrew-Greek scriptures. It was the foundation of what is known as the "Great Bible" of Henry VIII.—1525-1535 A. D.

GENEVAN OR CALVINISTIC BIBLE

With doctrinal marginal notes.—1560 A. D.

BISHOP'S BIBLE

With Episcopalian bias.—1568 A. D.

KING JAMES OR AUTHORIZED VERSION.

This Bible is the one in general use today. A compromise translation. Puritans would not accept Bishops' Bible, and James, in the interest of Episcopal church, would not accept the Calvinistic marginal notes in Genevan Bible. This compromise is responsible for many erroneous doctrines.—1611 A. D. See IMP. ERA, vol. vii, page 654.

REVISED VERSION.

Revision by English and American committees. These had access to manuscripts and documents discovered since the authorized version of King James. Members of the committee were appointed from conflicting sects, and like the King James, it is a compromise translation, disputed points being settled by vote of the members.—1880-1885 A. D.

AMERICAN STANDARD REVISION, 1901.

A further revision by the American

ites. Also adds his own personal records—About 421 A. D.

BOOK OF MORMON.

Translation by the Prophet Joseph Smith. "Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the records by the gift and power of God." *Joseph Smith*—1827-1830 A. D.

Committee. See IMP. ERA, vol. vii,  
page 774.

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Sticks of Judah and Joseph become one in the hand of Ephraim, when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized—6th April, 1830, and accepted both books as containing divine revelations from God.—Ezekiel, xxxvii: 17.

Provo, Utah.

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### LONGFELLOW'S PSALM OF LIFE.

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The *Psalm of Life*, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, is reprinted in the ERA in response to a request from some elders in Holland. It will interest the reader to know that Mr. Longfellow said of this poem: "I kept it some time in manuscript, unwilling to show it to any one, it being a voice from my inmost heart, at a time when I was rallying from depression." Before it was published in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, October, 1838, it was read by the poet to his college class at the close of a lecture on Goethe. Its title, though used now exclusively for this poem, was originally, in the poet's mind, a generic one. He notes from time to time that he has written a psalm, a psalm of death, or another psalm of life. The "psalmist" is thus the poet himself. When printed in the *Knickerbocker* it bore as a motto the lines from Crashaw:—

"Life that shall send  
A challenge to its end,  
And when it comes say. Welcome, friend."

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Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream!—  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,  
Is our destined end or way;  
But to act, that each tomorrow  
Finds us farther than today.