



Type: Magazine Article

A Divine Key to Knowledge

Author(s): William J. Critchlow, Jr.

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 63, No. 6 (June 1960), pp. 405–406

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

Abstract: Skeptics and critics of the Book of Mormon who must see to believe may not find the answer in seeing. The true testimony comes from reading its sacred pages.

A DIVINE KEY TO KNOWLEDGE

William J. Critchlow, Jr.

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

"What music must our Father have provided for His saints in Heaven, when He afforded us such music here on earth."

I borrowed that from Izaak Walton to express my appreciation for the music of this great choir. If music were the language of angels, I have heard angels speak this morning.

About one hundred forty years ago, an early American historian directed a youth, Joseph Smith, to a hidden deposit of golden plates upon which was engraved a history of the early inhabitants of the Americas. The engravings, subsequently translated by Joseph Smith by the gift and power of God, comprise the Book of Mormon. The historian was Moroni—a resurrected prophet.

In an interview with a prospective young missionary, I quite routinely asked:

"Do you believe Joseph Smith was a prophet of God?"

"Sir," he said, "I know Joseph Smith was a prophet of God."

"What is your feeling about the Book of Mormon?"

"I know the Book of Mormon is true," he replied.

His quick emphatic reply prompted me to say, "How can you be so positive about it?"

His response again was emphatic, impressive, and brief. Three short words conveyed it: "I've read it."

There are undoubtedly many of you members of the Church listening to me at this moment who could similarly testify to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon because *you've read it*.

One scholarly man told me that he could not bring himself to read the Book of Mormon because of the fantastic story concerning its origin.

"Let me see those golden plates—seeing is believing—" he said.

"Perhaps," I admitted, hastening to explain that Joseph Smith returned them to the Angel Moroni who had told him that a sealed part or section of the plates would be translated at a future time when the world was better prepared to receive its message.

"Well," he smiled as he answered facetiously, "when Moroni returns them for translation, give me a ring. I'd like to ask him a few questions."

I suppose there are critics and skeptics whose attitudes toward the Book of Mormon are reflected in this man's philosophy—"seeing is believing." I suppose, too, that some of our young missionaries have wished that Moroni had left the plates with Joseph Smith so that he could have deposited them in some public place, a museum perhaps, where investigators might come to see for themselves and thus be convinced, since seeing is believing.

I wonder! And my wondering inclines me to doubt—even question the idea that—"seeing is believing"—particularly in its application to the golden plates.

Were any of our early missionaries or others ever able to support "seeing is believing" with evidence that the people who saw the papyri scrolls with the Egyptian mummies readily accepted Joseph Smith's translation of one of the scrolls as divinely inspired? The book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price constitutes this translation. Those mummies and scrolls were exhibited over a period of two years, throughout towns and cities east of the Appalachian Mountains. For another nine years they were in Joseph Smith's possession, and after his death they reportedly reposed in museums; first, in St. Louis and later in Chicago, where they were supposedly destroyed in the great fire of 1871. Thousands of people must have seen them. No one, so far as I am able to determine, ever questioned their genuineness, but how many, because they felt "seeing is believing," accepted Joseph Smith's translation as the handiwork of God and petitioned for membership in his (God's) Church? Very, very few—I'm sure. What reason have we then to suspect that seeing the Book of Mormon plates would be different? Were they available for inspection people seeing them may admit that golden plates exist, and that there are engravings upon them—which scholars cannot translate, but would that knowledge silence the attacks of skeptics who surely would impute them to be spurious? Would it abate the endless disputations about their origin, the angel, and the translation by the gift and power of God? Again, I wonder. The more I ponder the suggestion that "seeing is believing" the more convinced I am that the Lord's way was best—he kept the plates. He said to his prophet Isaiah: "For my

thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9.)

Yes, the Lord's way was best.

(1) His way—keeping the plates—safely preserves them against the time when the world is ready for a translation of the part thereof which is sealed. Joseph Smith was not permitted to translate this sealed part because the hearts of the people were not susceptible to the divine truth contained therein. Concerning it, the historian-prophet Moroni wrote:

" . . . there never were greater things made manifest than those which . . . the Lord hath commanded me to write them; . . . And he commanded me that I should seal them up; and he also hath commanded that I should seal up the interpretation thereof; . . . until the day that they [the Gentiles] shall repent of their iniquity, and become clean before the Lord." (Ether 4:4-6.)

In fancy let's assume that the plates had been deposited with the mummies and the Egyptian scrolls in the Chicago museum. Both would then have been destroyed by fire. Joseph Smith never did find time to translate the second scroll which he said contained the writings of Joseph, grandson of Abraham. Its contents are seemingly lost to the world. So, without the Lord's intervention, "the greater things made manifest" in the sealed portion of the gold plates may have been similarly lost to the world. Surely God's "ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." I am grateful that the Lord kept the plates. Sometime, I hope to read the "greater things" sealed therein.

(2) His way—keeping the plates—complied with and satisfied his own divine law of witnesses which is "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." (2 Corinthians 13:1.) He gave this law to Moses for the children of Israel; (Deut. 17:6.) He taught this law to his disciples when he walked with them on earth (Matt. 18:15-16); he inspired his servant Paul to teach this law to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 13:1); and he literally conformed to this law in this last dispensation by supplying twelve witnesses of the golden plates, Joseph Smith and eleven others.

(3) His way—keeping the plates—satisfies adequately the civil laws of the land with respect to witnesses. Twelve witnesses in any civil court comprise a jury whose verdict should completely satisfy the demands of civil law. The jury's verdict was: "The plates exist—we saw them." This evidence is incontrovertible.

Listen for a moment to the witnesses:

"Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we . . .

have seen the plates . . . , and we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; . . . And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; . . . And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God . . . brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; . . ." So spoke three of them.

Eight others spoke as follows:

"Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That Joseph Smith, Jun., . . . has shown unto us the plates . . . which have the appearance of gold; . . . and we also saw the engravings thereon, . . . And this we bear record with words of soberness, that . . . we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. . . ."

I have deleted from these testimonies, in the interest of brevity, many interesting statements which every investigator of the work should read. They may be found on one of the preface pages of the Book of Mormon.

None of the witnesses ever denied his testimony. Each to his last breath and some with their last breath declared in substance, "I saw the plates—the work is true." Two of the twelve witnesses sealed their testimonies with their blood; five were excommunicated from the Church; two others withdrew from the Church; but despite disaffection toward the Church, enmity toward the Prophet, adversity, and persecution, not one of them ever denied his testimony.

(4) His way—keeping the plates—left to the world, in lieu of the plates, which man could not read, a true translation thereof which man can read, because it is now translated into twenty-four languages. It is the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith translated it by the gift and power of God.

The intrinsic value of the plates is not their gold content, but is their message content. The Lord left that message to the world.

It is said, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." So is the proof of the Book of Mormon in the reading. The young missionary who said, "I know the Book of Mormon is true because I've read it," is not unlike thousands of you who are listening to me, who, too, can testify that you know it is true because you've read it.

And when you read it, you discovered a key which unlocked for you a source of evidence which proved beyond the shadow of a doubt the divine source of its origin.

This key was your reward for reading the book, from cover to cover, for only those who pursue their reading to the closing pages will find it. This is the key:

"And when ye shall receive these things, 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 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." (Moroni 10:4.)

This promise is not unlike a promise made by our Lord and Master nineteen hundred years ago when he stood upon a mount in Galilee and spoke:

"Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matt. 7:7.)

Another time he said: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. (James 1:5.)

Joseph Smith, the youth, did "ask," and he did "seek" and he did "knock" and there was "opened unto" him—golden plates—delivered by one Moroni, an early American historian-prophet; which Joseph translated by the gift and power of God. And now by this same power or by the power of the Holy Ghost, he (God) has specifically promised all who will read the book "with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ," to "manifest the truth of it unto you."

(5) God's way—keeping the plates—provided a precious key—a divine key which if used as many of you have used it, will unlock the door to:

—Knowledge that the "Book of Mormon is true." So said the young missionary. I add my witness.

—Knowledge that the Bible contains the word of God—the Book of Mormon is its witness.

—Knowledge that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.

—Knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God—the Book of Mormon is his witness.

I believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, that he was visited by one Moroni an early American historian-prophet who directed him to a hidden deposit of golden plates. The engravings thereon he [Joseph Smith], translated by the gift and power of God and thus produced the Book of Mormon.

This is my humble testimony. I bear it gladly, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

GARDEN GALLERY

by Barbara Yerbury Filan

An artist paints a flower;
I can't.
Yet I, too, create beauty;
I plant.

TEACH HONOR

Mark E. Petersen
of the Council of the Twelve

On a recent trip, I was a guest in the home of a little boy about six or seven years of age. He was looking through his older brother's Boy Scout *Handbook*. He had turned to the section on tracking, where Scouts are taught to follow footprints of animals. He told me that he expects that this coming summer he will be out tracking, following footprints.

I looked beyond the footprints of animals to the footprints of human beings, and wondered whose foot tracks he would follow as he grew up. I wondered if they would be good tracks or bad tracks, and if the people who would make those tracks would be uplifting or degrading in their influence on him.

I picked up his book and turned to the section where I read the Boy Scout oath. You remember the first few words are, "On my honor I will do my best. . . ." As he grows up, what will this little boy learn about honor or dishonor? Who will teach him? Or does it really matter? How important is honor, anyway? Is it something sacred? Is it sacred to you? Is it sacred to very many Americans?

In my opinion, America needs a re-birth of honor more than it needs any other one thing. It needs honor more than it needs its atom bombs and nuclear submarines. Put weapons in the hands of dishonorable men and what have you?

America needs honor more than it needs wealth and prosperity. Put wealth in the hands of dishonorable men, and what have you?

America needs honor even more than it needs professions of religious piety.