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The Book of Mormon

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Abstract: Retells the story of the angel Moroni showing the gold plates to Joseph Smith. The recent discovery of gold plates and steel represent external evidences of the truthfulness of the book.

The Book of Mormon

Conference Address by President A. W. Ivins

It is always an important period to the Church when the sixth of April approaches—the day upon which the Church in 1830 was organized. Three years hence a century will have passed since that important event occurred. Never before did it appear of greater importance to me than at the present time. Looking over this congregation of women, I think of a meeting that was held in this city a little more than a year ago in which a large number of very wise men who met together found comfort in the fact that the bulwarks of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were crumbling, that it was evident to them that the time was not far distant when the structure would collapse and when the “Mormon” people, as they are termed, would become Christianized. They complimented the women of the Church by saying that the men no longer believed in Joseph Smith as a prophet of the Lord, with a direct message to the people of the world, that they did not recognize the present presiding authorities of the Church as being the mouthpieces of the Lord, that the men did not pay tithing at this time, and had it not been for the women and children, they said, the Church would have been bankrupt several years ago, because they alone were tithe-payers, and since it chanced just at that time that the returns from the tithing were greater than ever before in its history, I thought that was a real compliment to the women and children. It appears to be a strange thing that now, after the doctrines of the Church have been before the world for a century, when the history of the Church and its accomplishments are so well known to all people, that the attitude shown by these men could possibly be taken. One of two things was evident to me—that it was either the result of inexcusable ignorance or a wilful desire on their part to misrepresent the truth to those who were not familiar with its condition. However that may be, I am not going to undertake to discuss it at length.

This afternoon at four o'clock (and we will endeavor if we can to conclude this meeting a few minutes before that time in order that you may be out on the grounds) a monument will be unveiled just to the east of us here, in commemoration of the publication to the world of the Book of Mormon, and particularly of the three men who saw the plates and bore witness to their truth, stating that an angel from God had shown the plates to them and that the voice of the Lord had commanded them that they should bear this witness. These men, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris, will be perpetuated in bronze upon this monument. Our minds naturally revert to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. We see in it the fulfilment of the words of the prophets uttered hundreds of years ago, for

they referred to it in detail, giving the manner of its coming forth, its reception by the world. That which the book would be expected to accomplish was told in detail by Isaiah, by Jeremiah, and others of the ancient prophets. So that if such a book has not come forth or if it has and does not contain the fulness of the everlasting gospel, or if it is not the book which was to be written for Ephraim and the people of Israel, his companions—then we must look forward to the coming forth of some other book because the unchanging decree of the Lord was that such a book should come forth, that it should come out of the earth, that it should come at a time when “darkness would cover the earth and gross darkness, the minds of the people,” that it should be put with the other book to which Ezekiel refers, which is the book of Judah, the Bible, and that part of Israel which should remain with him at the time of the dispersion of the ten tribes would be numbered with the seed of Judah. The Bible and the Book of Mormon (the stick of Judah and the stick of Ephraim) are to become one in the hands of the Lord, for the purpose of convincing all people, Jew and Gentile, atheist, infidel and so-called Christian, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, that his is the only name under heaven by which mankind can be brought back into the presence of our Father and crowned there with glory, immortality and eternal life. These are some of the reflections that come to us when we think of the Book of Mormon.

I would like to read a few paragraphs here from the story which the Prophet himself tells in his own words, because no one has ever told the story in words which appeal to me as do these that I am about to read. The Prophet had already received his first vision and the work which he was to accomplish had been outlined, but no authority had been given him to act, and he had consequently waited—waited patiently and wondered why some further manifestation did not come that he might better understand what he was to do. He tells us that he was thinking of this, contemplating it seriously, when he retired to his bedroom for the night. There he kneeled in earnest prayer to the Lord that some manifestation might be given to him by which he would know that he was still in His favor. And he says: “While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.

“He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist, so, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on

but this robe, as it was open, so that I could see into his bosom.

"Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him, I was afraid; but the fear soon left me.

"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 Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.

"He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants;

"Also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted 'seers' in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book."

That account has always appealed to me as one of truth. There is nothing of posing, nothing to magnify the individual, just a simple narrative told by an honest young man. It was a very remarkable thing to say of this boy who was almost entirely unknown, scarcely known even to his neighbors, to say that his name would be known throughout all the world, that among some people it would be held in honor, and among others, in reproach, and yet like all other things which the Lord says, it has become a fact. These plates, after several years, were entrusted to Joseph Smith and he continues here as follows: "On the 5th day of April, 1829, Oliver Cowdery came to my house, until which time I had never seen him. He stated to me that having been teaching school in the neighborhood where my father resided, and my father being one of those who sent to the school, he went to board for a season at his house, and while there the family related to him the circumstance of my having received the plates, and accordingly he had come to make inquiries of me. Two days after the arrival of Mr. Cowdery (being the 7th of April) I commenced to translate the Book of Mormon, and he began to write for me." (Not much chance for fraud here, because the men were strangers.)

One of the marvelous things—one of the wonders, is that the following year this book had been translated, prepared for the printer, and was published to the world, A like achievement I feel certain cannot be found in the world. This is a book of more than five hundred pages. It is a book which treats of the past, the present and the future. It is a book in which the history of the

past is told, in which the story of the present—the very day in which we live (notwithstanding the fact that it was published a hundred years ago) are outlined. It is a book which deals with the future in such plainness that any person who reads it with a prayerful heart may know the destiny of the world in which we live, and it was all done in a year. It takes time to write books, and particularly books of this kind where the writer makes so many definite declarations of facts.

Another one of the marvelous things which was also predicted by one of the ancient prophets, was that it was taken to a learned man who examined a copy of some of the characters and the translation thereof, and he certified that the translation was correct. When he asked to see the original plates, and was told that they could not be shown to him, he asked for the certificate and destroyed it, saying that he could not read a sealed book, thus fulfilling the words of the prophet. The prophet then predicted that it would then be delivered to one who was unlearned, and he would say, "I cannot read it, for I am unlearned." This book was not written in English but in reformed Egyptian characters. Then the Lord said, "Behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder among this people, and the wisdom of their wise men shall be hid and the understanding of the prudent confounded," all of which has been fulfilled literally.

Now, I cannot take time to tell you all about the Book of Mormon. But this record has been before the world for a hundred years. It has been criticized by the wise men in the world. It has been ridiculed by the ignorant. It is a sufficient testimony of its truth and I am justified in saying that not a single error has ever been pointed out in it. No man can say where it is wrong in any detail, but on the contrary, as the time passes, we hear of many things which corroborate the truth of the things written in it. It has been ridiculed because the prophet declared that these inscriptions were upon plates of gold. Two or three years ago a book was published entitled *The Goldsmith's Art Among the Ancient Americans*, in which the writer, Saville, than whom there is no greater authority in the country, calls attention to the remarkable and expert workmanship in gold that these Indians did at the time of the Conquest, and that was a thousand years after this record closed, and when they had degenerated into a less civilized people, and he goes on and on and tells of hundreds and hundreds of articles made of beaten gold, and finally comes to a place where some Catholic father relates that a certain man bought from the Mexican Indians certain plates of beaten gold which were covered with hieroglyphics which they had been able to translate which had been handed down by their forefathers.

Just in January of this year, one of our foremost scientists, who is excavating a great city in Panama just north of the canal—a city which before had not been discovered—where wonderful developments are being made, reports the finding of a chisel

made of steel. People have laughed at the Book of Mormon because Nephi said he taught his people to work in iron and steel. I have been waiting fifty years for some one to find in the excavations a little piece of iron or steel. They are among the most perishable of all hard metals. Gold does not tarnish—it remains clear and bright. It is one of the softest metals and can be readily written upon; it is one of the most durable and one of the most malleable metals, and can be beaten into sheets thinner than the thinnest tissue paper which we are able to make. Last year, in the opening of one of the great mounds which are in Ohio, they found what the archaeologists call a pearl burial. What did Joseph Smith know about pearls being used by the Indians when he interpreted the account as it had been written a thousand years before in this book, the fact that the people became rich and that they clothed themselves with all manner of fine apparel, such as costly pearls? I have the reports of this, showing what was found in one of these great burial mounds where the remains of three persons had been interred.

I shall not continue my remarks. This has come to me because of the fact that this monument here, which is a memorial to the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon and the three men who bore witness of its truth, as we have said, is to be unveiled this afternoon. There are wonderful things that could be told to you.

Men go around the country telling you that the Church is crumbling, that you are becoming Christianized. Do not be deceived by the sophistry of these men who pretend to be representatives of Christ, our Lord, but speak without authority and without truth. They will flatter you and compliment you. They are opposed to the truth, and no influence that the mind can conceive of will be overlooked in an effort to draw people away from the Church, to introduce the customs of the world, and some of these customs have come among us, we very greatly regret. There never has been a time when people have not withdrawn from the Church, but they are fewer today than they have been at any other period in its history, so far as we are able to determine. Reports of the growth of the Church are extremely gratifying and so there is nothing to justify the statements that these men have used in an endeavor to bring about the destruction of the Church, and their efforts are not, as they say, about to be crowned with success. They will not be, for the Lord, our God, has said that the gospel has been established for the last time—the time when the Lord will bring together all things in one, and consummate his work, when the people will be prepared for the coming of Christ, our Lord, and will reign in power and majesty upon the earth, and that time is very near of realization.

I do not know what the Church would do without these good women to help to keep the men in proper training and order and faith, as they do. God bless you, is my prayer. Amen.