



Type: Magazine Article

The Book of Mormon

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Source: *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 64, No. 39
(25 September 1902)

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

Page(s): 612–614

Abstract: Jenson gives a brief account of what the Book of Mormon is, how Joseph Smith obtained it and translated it, and how the witnesses of the plates were chosen and who they were. He also provides a brief biography of all eleven witnesses.

absence of these, however, it seems that reasoning and patient labor might remove the cause, and leave the individual in a condition to be moved by the Spirit of God to a knowledge of things divine.

THE BOOK OF MORMON.

BY ELDER ANDREW JENSON, ASSISTANT CHURCH HISTORIAN.

THE Latter-day Saints accept the Book of Mormon as a divine record, and as a companion volume to the Bible. The idea entertained by many that the Book of Mormon is the acknowledged Bible of the Saints is absolutely erroneous. None of the different Christian sects of to-day are stronger adherents to the doctrines of the old Jewish record, including both the Old and New Testaments, than are the "Mormons." But while the Bible gives an account of the dealings of the Lord with the ancient inhabitants on the eastern hemisphere, the Book of Mormon contains a similar account of what took place during many centuries on the American continent; and its pages, like those of the Bible, are replete with doctrinal and prophetic sayings of the most choice and sacred order. It is also in perfect accord with modern science and the discovery of American antiquities; and none of the numerous attempts made by its opponents to disprove its divinity has proved successful.

The sacred volume was originally engraven upon plates of gold, principally by Mormon, a Nephite Prophet, who lived about four hundred years after the birth of the Savior. After finishing the work of his father, Moroni, the son of Mormon, hid the plates in a hill situated in that part of the country now embraced in the western part of the state of New York, near the present town of Palmyra, where the young prophet, Joseph Smith, about fourteen hundred years later, found them, as directed by the same Moroni (now a resurrected being and an angel of the Lord) who deposited them. Joseph Smith translated the records by the gift and power of God through the Urim and Thummim found with the plates, and the result was the Book of Mormon.

While Joseph Smith was yet engaged in translating, together with Oliver Cowdery as scribe, they ascertained that the plates from which they were translating should be shown by the power of God to three special witnesses, who should bear record of the divinity of the book, etc. (Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 27: 12; and Ether 5: 3, 4). Almost immediately after making this discovery, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris desired to become these special witnesses, and according to their request the Prophet Joseph enquired of the Lord, through the Urim and Thummim, and received a revelation granting them the privilege conditional upon their faith. (Doc. and Cov., Sec. 17).

A few days later Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris retired into the woods, convenient to the Whitmer residence in Fayette township, Seneca county, New York, and engaged in earnest prayer, in answer to which they saw a light of exceeding brightness above them in the air; and a few moments later an angel also stood before them. In his hand he held the plates which they had desired to see, and he turned over the leaves one by one, so that they could see them and also the engravings on them distinctly.

Immediately afterward they heard a voice "from out of the bright light" above them saying, "These have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear."

Although these three witnesses afterwards left the Church and became bitter enemies to the Prophet Joseph, they never denied their testimony in regard to the divinity of the Book of Mormon. At all times and under all circumstances, especially when asked to express themselves on the matter, they would declare in all solemnity and with great earnestness that their testimony as originally given and published in connection with the sacred volume was true in every particular.

Besides these three witnesses Joseph Smith was permitted to show the plates to eight other men, who in their testimony (which is published in the fore part of the Book of Mormon, together with that of the three witnesses) say that Joseph Smith shewed them the plates, which they "handled and hefted," and that they saw the "engravings thereon," all of which had the "appearance of ancient work and of curious workmanship." The names of these eight men are Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Junr., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Senr., Hyrum Smith and Samuel H. Smith. Five of these witnesses spent the remainder of their lives preaching the Gospel and bearing testimony to mankind of the divinity of the Book of Mormon. The three who left the Church (Jacob Whitmer, John Whitmer and Hiram Page) remained just as firm and steadfast in regard to their testimony concerning the Book of Mormon as those who continued in the Church, and died as firm believers in the work.

I subjoin biographical notes of the eleven witnesses mentioned in the foregoing, together with him who was the main instrument in the hands of the Lord to bring forth the divine record known as the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith, a son of Joseph Smith, Senr., and Lucy Mack, was born December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Windsor county, Vermont, and was martyred June 27, 1844, in Carthage, Hancock county, Illinois.

Oliver Cowdery was born October 3, 1806, in the town of Wells, Rutland county, New York, baptized May 15, 1829, left the Church in 1838, but again became a member in 1848, and died in Richmond, Ray county, Missouri, March 3, 1850. Both as a member and as a non-member he bore a powerful testimony concerning the Book of Mormon.

David Whitmer was born in Pennsylvania, January 7, 1805, and died in Richmond, Missouri, January 25, 1888. Though he left the Church in 1838, and spent the remainder of his life (nearly fifty years) out of it, he remained steadfast in his testimony concerning the Book of Mormon, and bore witness to thousands who came to visit him during his long residence in Richmond.

Martin Harris was born in Easttown, Saratoga county, New York, May 18, 1783, and though he left the Church in an early day, he came to Utah in 1870, where he renewed his covenants by baptism and died as a member of the Church, in Clarkston, Cache county, Utah, July 10, 1875, bearing a faithful testimony to the divinity of the Book of Mormon until his last moments.

Christian Whitmer, the eldest son of Peter Whitmer, Senr., and Mary Mussel-

man, was born January 18, 1798, in Pennsylvania, and died as a faithful Elder in the Church, November 27, 1835, in Clay county, Missouri. Jacob Whitmer, a son of Peter Whitmer, Senr., and Mary Musselman, was born in Pennsylvania, January 27, 1800, and died as a non-member of the Church near Richmond, Missouri, April 21, 1856, faithful and true to his testimony concerning the Book of Mormon. Peter Whitmer, Junr., a son of Peter Whitmer, Senr., and Mary Musselman, was born in Fayette, Seneca county, New York, September 27, 1809, and died as a faithful Elder in the Church, September 22, 1836, in Clay county, Missouri. John Whitmer, a son of Peter Whitmer, Senr., and Mary Musselman, was born August 27, 1802, and died faithful and true to his testimony about the Book of Mormon, though as a non-member of the Church, July 11, 1878, in Caldwell county, Missouri.

Hiram Page was born in the State of Vermont, in the year 1800, and died as a non-member of the Church, August 12, 1852, in Ray county, Missouri; he also was faithful and consistent in his testimony to the Book of Mormon until the day of his death.

Joseph Smith, Senr., father of the Prophet Joseph Smith, was born July 12, 1771, in Topsfield, Essex county, Massachusetts, and died as the presiding Patriarch of the Church, September 14, 1840, in Nauvoo, Hancock county, Illinois. Hiram Smith, a brother of the Prophet Joseph and father to President Joseph F. Smith, was born February 9, 1800, at Tunbridge, Orange county, Vermont, and was martyred, together with his brother Joseph, June 27, 1844, at Carthage, Hancock county, Illinois. Samuel H. Smith, a son of Joseph Smith, Senr., and Lucy Mack, and a brother to the Prophet Joseph Smith, was born March 13, 1808, in Tunbridge, Orange county, Vermont, and died as a faithful Elder in the Church, July 30, 1844. Sketches of the lives of these men can be found in a work recently published in Salt Lake City, Utah, entitled "Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia."

The first American edition of the Book of Mormon in the English language, consisting of five thousand copies, was published in Palmyra, New York, in 1830; since which several editions have been published both in America and England. The first Utah edition was printed and published in Salt Lake City in 1871.

It has also been translated from the English into the Danish, Welsh, French, German, Italian, Hawaiian, Swedish, Spanish, Maori, Dutch, Hindostanee, modern Jewish, Turkish and Samoan languages. The Danish translation was published at Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1851; the Welsh, at Myrthyr, Tydvil, the French at Paris, the German at Hamburg, and the Italian at London, England, in 1852; the Hawaiian in San Francisco, California, in 1855; the Swedish at Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1878; the Spanish at Salt Lake City in 1886; the Maori at Auckland, New Zealand, in 1889; and the Dutch in Holland, in 1890. Six editions of the German and four editions of the Danish version have been printed up to the present time. The Hindostanee, modern Jewish, Turkish and Samoan translation have not yet been published.

WHEN I have gold and silver in my possession, which a thief may steal, or friends borrow, and never pay me back again, or which may take the wings of the morning, and I behold it no more, I only possess the negative of the true riches.—BRIGHAM YOUNG.