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The Book of Mormon

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Abstract: This series discusses the origin of the Book of Mormon. It includes topics such as the Hill Cumorah, Joseph Smith's first vision, the visit of the angel Moroni, the description of the gold plates, the translation and historical importance of the Book of Mormon, the testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses, Native American traditions that correspond with concepts in the Book of Mormon, legends from Tongan Islanders that are similar to those of Judaism, and the prophecy of no kings in America and its fulfillment. The first part discusses the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS'
MILLENNIAL STAR.

[ESTABLISHED 1840.]

“No man in daily life ought to be satisfied with what life now is; he ought every day to be looking forward to some of the possible improvements.”—EVERETT HALE.

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THE BOOK OF MORMON.

A discourse delivered by Elder Andrew Jenson, Assistant Church Historian, in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sept. 22, 1907.

I DESIRE no better text for the few remarks that I intend to make this afternoon than the hymn we have just listened to: “Lo, in Cumorah’s lonely hill a sacred record lies concealed.” It is inspiring and fits the occasion. I approach my subject with a prayerful heart, and trust the Lord will bless us, so that the remarks that shall be made may sink deep into our hearts, for the subject I have in mind is of vital importance, not only to this congregation, but to the whole world.

THE HILL CUMORAH.

In the western part of the State of New York, about two thousand two hundred miles east of here, stands a range of hills, extending from east to west and forming the watershed between the streams that find their way into the great Atlantic ocean, through the St. Lawrence river, and those rising on the south side that find their way into the Gulf of Mexico, through the Ohio, Mississippi and other rivers. The most elevated of a number of these hills is one which to-day is known to the inhabitants residing in that neighborhood as “Mormon Hill,” but which by an ancient people, who dwelt there many centuries ago was called the “Hill Cumorah.” Even prior to that time, in the early days of the world’s history, it was known by a still more ancient people as the Hill “Ramah.” Hence, it is a hill of historical significance. But com-

pared with our Rocky Mountains—those high elevations that are so plentiful here, and that we gaze upon every day of our lives—the Hill Cumorah is small; it is indeed a very insignificant elevation compared to our own lofty mountains.

THE ANGEL MORONI.

On the north end of “Mormon Hill,” or Cumorah, eighty years ago to-day, took place an event that, we may say, has turned the religious world upside down. On that memorable day there stood upon that hill two extraordinary personages; one of them was an angel of God, the other a farmer’s boy, only twenty-two years of age. On that same occasion the angel of the Lord, whose name was Moroni, delivered to the mortal, the young farmer boy, Joseph Smith, a record which, after being translated into English, has become universally known throughout the civilized world as the Book of Mormon. That book has been rejected by many; it has also been accepted by many. Those who accept the book (translated from the ancient record) value it more than any book that was produced in the nineteenth century. It makes a connecting link between a very early period of the world’s history and the present generation.

The two personages to whom I have referred had met before—and that, too, upon five different occasions, at least. They met first about four years prior to that date, on the night between the 21st and 22nd of September, 1823, in a farmhouse that lies about a mile and a half from the Hill Cumorah. The young man, then eighteen years of age, had on that occasion retired to rest, when this same angel, the angel Moroni, appeared to him and remained with him all night, giving him instructions and telling him of the record which should soon be delivered to him, and which was delivered to him four years later, or eighty years ago to-day. The angel told the young man, Joseph Smith, that this record contained the history of the original inhabitants of this land, including the early history of the North American Indians, and, above all, that it contained the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fulness.

JOSEPH SMITH’S FIRST VISION.

Three and a half years prior to that time, or early in the spring of 1820, the boy had been told by divine beings that the whole world had gone astray religiously, and needed more light. He was also told then that if he would be faithful and true, the Lord would reveal to him something that would give new light to the world. On the 22nd of September, 1823, as I said, 84 years ago to-day, Joseph Smith had the privilege for the first time of looking into the ancient stone box and seeing the plates that had lain concealed there for 1,400 years. But on that occasion he was not permitted to take them. On the contrary, he was told to let them remain where they were until he was better prepared for the work which would devolve upon him.

We need not go into details regarding the four years which elapsed from the time Joseph Smith first saw the plates (from which the Book of Mormon was afterwards translated) until he received them, but simply say that during that time the young prophet received much instruction from the divine messenger, whereby he became qualified for the great work which he subsequently had to perform on earth.

There are a few items here that may be of interest to us, and which may serve to refresh our minds on some points pertaining to the ushering in of the latter-day gospel dispensation. Joseph's own story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is very brief. In speaking of the box in which the plates had lain so long, he says that it was originally made by laying stones together in some kind of cement. In the bottom of the box were placed two stones cross-wise, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things which he found with them.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLATES.

Orson Pratt, in his "Remarkable Visions," says: "These records were engraved on plates which had the appearance of gold. Each plate was not far from seven to eight inches in width and length, being not quite as thick as common tin. They were filled on both sides with engravings in Egyptian characters, and bound together in a volume as the leaves in a book, and fastened at one edge with three rings running through the whole. This volume was something near six inches in thickness. * * * The characters or letters upon the unsealed part were small and beautifully engraved. The whole book exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction as well as much skill in the art of engraving."

Joseph, the prophet, true to the commandment that the angel had given him, went to work and translated the records. I will not dwell upon the history of the translation, because it has been given to you so often, and you can read it in Church history, but there is something else connected with it that I desire to draw your attention to.

A few days ago, through the assistance of a missionary friend on his way to Europe, I came in possession of a newspaper that was published in Palmyra, New York, and bears the date of Friday, April 16th, 1830. It was called the *Wayne Sentinel*, and was published by E. B. Grandin, the same man who printed the Book of Mormon. In this old newspaper, which I consider quite a valuable relic, I found the Book of Mormon advertised for sale, by Mr. Grandin. The advertisement is almost a verbatim copy of the title page of the Book of Mormon, and reads as follows:

"THE BOOK OF MORMON."

"An account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates, taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, written to the Lamanites, which are a remnant of the House of Israel, and also to Jew and gentile; written by way of command-

ment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation. Written, and sealed up and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed; to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof; sealed by the hand of Moroni and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by the way of the gentiles, the interpretation thereof by the gift of God; an abridgment taken from the Book of Ether.

“Also, which is a record of the people of Jared, which were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people when they were building a tower to get to heaven. Which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel how great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever; and also to the convincing of the Jew and the gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting Himself unto all nations. And now if there be fault, it be the mistake of men; wherefore condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ. By Joseph Smith, Junior, author and proprietor.

“The above work, containing about six hundred pages, large Duodecimo, is now for sale, wholesale and retail, at the Palmyra book store of E. B. Grandin.

“Palmyra, March 26, 1830.”

This gives us an important date. It proves that the Book of Mormon was published to the world about three weeks, at least, before the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized. We lack quite a number of important dates in regard to early Church history; hence, we are thankful for anything of this kind we can obtain, and this old relic of a newspaper gives us a date that I may say we have long hunted for.

VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS.

I cannot say now how many copies of the Book of Mormon have been printed, but I have tried to make an estimate. I am not far from the truth when I say that about half a million copies, if not more, of the Book of Mormon have been published. The great bulk of these have, of course, been printed in the English language, in America and Great Britain, but editions have also been published in at least thirteen other languages. For instance, I find that the English translation undertaken by the Prophet Joseph Smith between 1827 and 1830 (when the first edition of the Book of Mormon was published in Palmyra), has been translated into the French, Danish, German, Italian, Welsh, Hawaiian, Swedish, Dutch, Maori, Spanish, Samoan, Tahitian, Turkish and Japanese languages. I find, further, that the book was published in Danish-Norwegian in 1851, and has since seen three other editions in that language—four altogether. Editions in French, Italian, Welsh and German were published in 1852; six editions in the latter language have been published altogether up to date. The Hawaiian edition was published in 1855 by George Q. Cannon, in California, and lately we have had another edition in that language. The Swedish edition was published in 1878, and this year another edition has been published in the Swedish language, the first edition having been sold out several years ago. The Book of Mormon in the Maori language was published in 1888, that in the Dutch or Hollandish language in 1890, the Spanish in 1894, the Samoan in

1904, the Tahitian in 1904, and the Turkish in 1906. The Japanese edition is now about ready to print. The book has also been translated into Hindoostanee and modern Jewish, but it has not yet been published in these languages.

OPPOSITION ENGENDERED.

The Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, or the gospel in its purity, and is destined to go forth to all nations. Its message concerns every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; and that accounts for the fact that it has been translated into so many languages. The assertion was made a few months ago by one of our leading men that the Book of Mormon has been translated into more languages than any other book in the world, save the Bible. I have tried to prove or disprove that assertion, but up to the present I have not been able to do either, but I believe the assertion is true. There is, at least, no religious book, so far as I know, that compares with the Book of Mormon in this respect. I do not think that even the Koran, that has been published in so many languages, can compare with it; and when we speak of a book meeting with favor or opposition, there has been no book published in the nineteenth century, or in the whole age of book printing, that has had so much criticism as the Book of Mormon. Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of a Christian sect, was the first man who wrote against the Book of Mormon, and after him thousands upon thousands of books and pamphlets have been issued—sometimes large volumes containing many more pages than the Book of Mormon itself, and in other instances small pamphlets; but all have bitterly opposed that sacred volume. Yet notwithstanding the fact that all these attacks have been made upon it, the Book of Mormon has multiplied and is spreading to-day more than ever before, just the same as the Bible.

There is scarcely a miracle of Christ, scarcely a saying of the Savior that has not been criticized most unmercifully in some age or another, and notwithstanding the literature that has grown up around the Bible, both to defend and attack it, the Bible keeps on multiplying, until millions of copies of the book are being spread broadcast every year.

According to the assertion I have alluded to, the Book of Mormon comes next to the Bible, and we believe that it, like the Bible, will continue to circulate and spread until it will be translated into all languages spoken in our day, so that every son and daughter of Adam may have an opportunity to know something about this great western Bible that was so miraculously brought forth through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, from the plates or ancient records which were brought forth from the ground eighty years ago to-day.

It is very essential that we should know that the Book of Mormon is true. It is absolutely necessary from the standpoint of

true religion: but also as a historical record, the Book of Mormon fills a most important gap in history. The eastern hemisphere has much ancient history. Think, for instance, of the valuable records preserved in the British Museum, and in fact in all the large museums and libraries in Europe and Asia, also some in Cairo, Africa. Think next of the great Alexandria library which was destroyed by the Turks A.D. 638. It must have contained the most valuable historical relics and writings imaginable. Think also of the great historical collection destroyed by the fanatical Mohammedans at Tripoli, in Asia Minor, at a later date. Yet after all that has been destroyed in the Orient from time to time, the eastern world is rich in historical manuscripts and relics compared with the western world. There are indeed thousands of books which give us historical information of what we to-day call the old world—the eastern hemisphere. It may be proven, however, by and by that the eastern hemisphere is the “new world,” and not the “old world” at all but that America is the “old world.”

ITS HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE.

Imagine for a moment that America is the old world, that Adam lived here, that the civilization before the flood was here, and that the flood came upon the face of the earth and swept off all the inhabitants, save eight souls. Then imagine further, the repopulation of the earth on the other hemisphere and follow it down to the period of 1492, when Christopher Columbus discovered America. When he landed in the western world he found the Indians over here, but knew nothing about them; and we have scarcely anything reliable in the shape of history concerning this western world from the days of the deluge till the landing of Columbus on San Salvador. The Book of Mormon fills the gap. It tells us how, after the flood, a man who is referred to as the “brother of Jared,” and others with him, came over from the land of the Tower of Babel, and settled here on this western land. The Book of Mormon tells us about that race of people—the Jaredites—how they prospered on this land for a time, but how they finally were destroyed. It tells also of another branch of the human family that left Jerusalem six hundred years before the birth of the Savior—the family of Lehi. These people settled in South America, but gradually spread to the northern land also. The Book of Mormon thus gives us about three thousand five hundred years of world history, pertaining to the western hemisphere, and thus it fills a great gap indeed—the period from the time of the flood to A.D. 1492.

After that we have no history for eleven hundred years—from the time the Book of Mormon narrative leaves the Nephites slain, around the Hill Cumorah, with the Lamanites in possession of the land, till Christopher Columbus discovered America; but we can easily bridge over that period of time, because Moroni, the last

writer in the Book of Mormon, describes the condition of the people when he closes his record. His narrative foreshadows the condition of the Indians when they were first discovered by the Spaniards. Discard the Book of Mormon and we have no history of this western land from the days of Noah or the building of Babel till the days of the landing of Christopher Columbus. Accept that book, and we have a history of what is now called America, from the beginning of the world till 1492, brief, it is true, but it gives us some very valuable information, and it gives the keynote to the explorations of Christopher Columbus and the Spaniards generally. They did not know anything of the country; but the Spaniards who conquered Peru and took possession of both Americas soon commenced to look into the history of the Indians and when they tried to interpret their hieroglyphics they reached conclusions which tell the Latter-day Saints that the Book of Mormon is true. The study and investigations by the Spaniards prove that such people as the Book of Mormon tells us about did live upon this western land. I shall refer to this matter again, a little later in my remarks.

(To be continued.)

I CAN AND I WILL.

[DEDICATED TO PRESIDENT CHARLES W. PENROSE.]

I can and I will is the song of my soul;
I ride on the waves where the dark waters roll.
No danger can daunt me, I welcome the blast,
The war-guns are booming, no quarters I ask.

My heart is of oak, my ribs are of steel;
A strength in the depths of my being I feel,
That surges and urges me on in the fight,
In the battle of life for the good and the right.

I can and I will is the birthright I claim;
My soul is unfettered, this truth I proclaim.
O join me, my brothers, O speak the great word,
And break all your shackles, be free as a bird.

I can and I will my life-work complete,
Though briars and thorns grow under my feet.
The pathway of roses is not for the brave,
The coward may walk it, direct to his grave.

I can and I will is the cure for the blues.
O try it and prove it and spread the good news.
Let the magical words leap warm from the heart,
Then laugh as you see all your sorrows depart.

I can and I will is the motto of MEN;
Go sing it aloud again and again.
The ring of these words new courage will give,
I can and I will is the song that will live.