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Mormon I

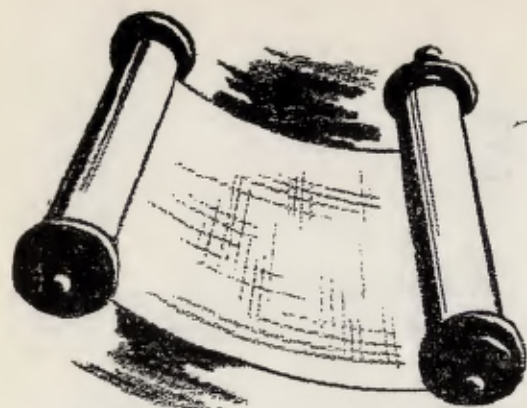
Author(s): Leland H. Monson

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Abstract: In this two-part series, the author writes concerning the conditions of the people and era when Mormon grew up and the manner in which Mormon's family influenced him for good. The first part discusses Ammaron's influence on Mormon, and Mormon as a record keeper.



Mormon



PART I

MORMON was born into an environment which could have made him an unbeliever, a skeptic, a man of the world. The Nephites and Lamanites were living in a limitless ocean of sin and abomination. It was a period of superstition, idolatry, and self-indulgence. They resorted to spirits and demons, rather than to Jesus Christ, the God of their land, as a means of controlling supernatural power.¹ Witchcraft, sorcery, and magic abounded in the land.

Idolatry was practised, especially by the Lamanites. Frequently when they conquered Nephite territory, they offered their captives, women, and children, as sacrifices to their idol gods.² The acrid odor of smouldering wood, and the sickening smell of burning flesh was winnowed through the land.

The Nephites degenerated to a point where the restraints of civilization no longer inhibited their base desires. Capturing the wives and daughters of the Lamanites, they deprived them of their virtue, tortured them until they were dead, and then feasted on their flesh.³ A

similar state of savagery existed among the Lamanites, who fed their captive women the flesh of their husbands, and their captive children the flesh of their fathers.⁴

Indeed, the Nephites and Lamanites of the fourth century after Christ reached a pitifully low state of civilization. They were a licentious, depraved, bloodthirsty, and godless people.

It was into this world of black magic, human sacrifices, and unrestraint that Mormon was born about 311 A.D.⁵ It was certainly not an environment to encourage the elevation of the human spirit and the expansion of the human mind.

Mormon, however, was born into a religious home. He was named after his father and after the place where Alma baptized his first converts. The selection of that name indicates sincere religious convictions on the part of his parents. As a small boy, Mormon, undoubtedly, knelt beside his mother and communicated with God. His life is evidence of that fact.

Fortunately for Mormon, an influen-

By LELAND H. MONSON

of the General Board of the
Deseret Sunday School Union

tial man came into his life when he was ten years old. That man, Ammaron, was the keeper of the records. He told Mormon about many plates which he had been instructed by the spirit of the Lord to bury in the hill Shim, and charged Mormon with the responsibility of engraving the history of the people on one of the records.⁶ In so doing, Ammaron exercised a singular influence over Mormon, pointing out his lodestar to him. He focused Mormon's attention on becoming an historian, the field of endeavor in which Mormon offered his greatest contribution.

With a life purpose in mind at the age of ten, and with a firm resolution to succeed, Mormon laid the foundation stones upon which he later built his superstructure of leadership. Moral

(Continued on page 550)

¹Mormon 1:19

²Ibid., 4:21

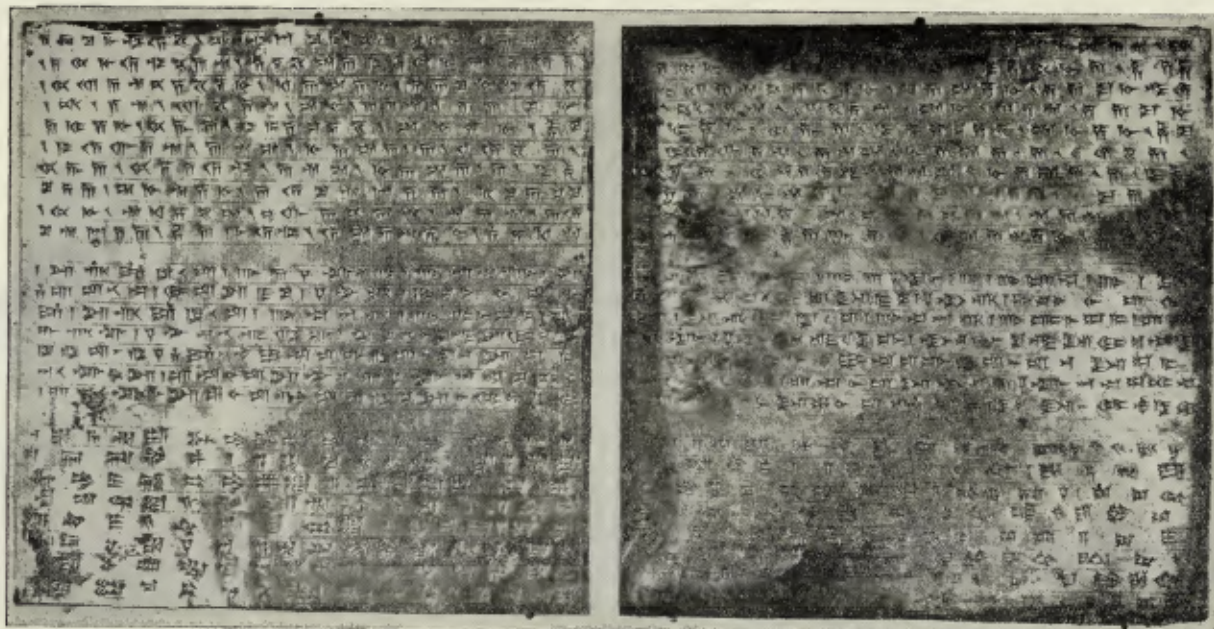
³Mormon 9:8, 9

⁴Ibid., 9:8

⁵Mormon 1:2

⁶Ibid., 1:4

GOLD AND SILVER PLATES FOUND BY UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO IN THE CORNERSTONE BOXES, AUDIENCE PALACE OF DARIUS THE GREAT.



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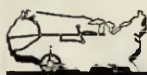


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MORMON

(Continued from page 512)

idealism and sheer will power pitted Mormon against that which was vile and mean. Because of his strength of character, derived from a strong home environment and the influence of Ammaron, the moral obliquities of the people gave him his great chance at leadership. His dual environment, therefore, furnished him with abundant opportunities for success and he capitalized on these opportunities. He was large of stature and must have had a commanding nature, for he was made commander-in-chief of all Nephite armies at the age of sixteen.

Yes, Mormon was a great man, a leader, a descendant of Nephi. His leadership was manifested in three ways: as an historian, as a prophet, and as a warrior.

MORMON AS RECORD KEEPER

WHILE searching for someone who could be trusted with many sacred records which he had buried in the hill Shim, and who could also engrave a history of the people on the plates of Nephi, Ammaron discovered the boy Mormon. Ammaron observed Mormon's sense of responsibility, his acute mind, and his faith in God. Impressed by his observations, he arranged to talk with Mormon.

He said:

... I perceive that thou art a sober child, and art quick to observe; Therefore, when ye are about twenty and four years old I would that ye should remember the things which ye have observed concerning this people; and when ye are of that age go to the land Antum, unto a hill which shall be called Shim; and there have I deposited unto the Lord all the sacred engravings concerning this people. And behold, ye shall take the plates of Nephi unto yourself, and the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are; and ye shall engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things which ye have observed concerning this people.⁷

Mormon accepted the responsibility and looked forward to the time when he could have custody of the records. Perhaps at his solicitation, Mormon's father took him the following year to the land of Zarahemla.⁸ It was a densely populated area, for Mormon wrote

⁷Ibid., 1:2-4

⁸Ibid., 1:6

OWNERSHIP

By Della Adams Leitner

HE found a rare old manuscript, Yellowed with tattered ends, And with collector's pride he showed His treasure to his friends.

Ignoring texts of wisdom's gold Handprinted on the scroll, He quoted cost and period— Possession was his goal.

A youth who saw it read with joy Its priceless words of truth— The buyer does not know his scroll Belongs to that glad youth.

that the people were almost as numerous as the sand on the seashore. The river Sidon flowed by the city of Zarahemla. To the east was the Atlantic ocean and to the west the Pacific. He may have had an opportunity on the east coast to travel through the cities of Bountiful, Mulek, Nephihah, and Lehi. And he may have found much to interest him south of Zarahemla in the land of Manti and west towards the Pacific in the cities of Zeezrom, Cumeni, and Antiparah. The distance from sea to sea was not great, and it is possible that Mormon saw the stormy Atlantic and the peaceful Pacific.

But above everything else, he must have persuaded his father to take him to the hill Shim, where the sacred records were deposited.

It was in 345 A.D., when Mormon was thirty-four years of age, and was serving as commander-in-chief of all the Nephite forces, that he went a second time to the hill Shim and took therefrom the large plates of Nephi. Upon them he engraved the history of his contemporaries.⁹ He engraved on these plates a "full account of all the wickedness and abomination." For the next forty years he had custody of the plates and continued to engrave on them the history of his people.

In 385 A.D., as commander-in-chief of all Nephite forces, he wrote a letter to the king of the Lamanites, arranging to meet the Lamanites in a battle of extinction around the hill Cumorah. Knowing this battle would be the last struggle of his wicked followers, and having been commanded to preserve the records, he made a set of gold plates, which we call the Plates of Mormon. In their completed form, including the small plates of Nephi, this record was eight inches long, six inches wide, and six inches thick.¹⁰

Making these plates was not easy, but this physical task was small in comparison with the intellectual labor involved in abridging the history of the Nephites and Lamanites; and in addition there was the work of engraving his history on his gold plates.

Day after day the sound of the hammer striking the anvil could be heard in the distance as Mormon worked to prepare the thin sheets of metal for his record. He mined it, beat it into thin sheets, cut these sheets into plates eight inches by six inches in size, and ringed them together. He must have felt proud of his achievement. What he did not know at the time was that his record was not completed, that later he was to face the task of ringing the small plates of Nephi with the record he had produced. Completing this task, he had finished the physical labor involved in preparing the plates.

⁹Ibid., 2:16-17

¹⁰Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, IV, 537; J. M. Sjodahl, *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, pp. 35-46.

MORMON

But this was only a small part of the work he had outlined for himself. He read the large plates of Nephi and selected the ideas he wished to present on his plates. He realized that the success of his work would be determined by his ability to be discriminating in the selection of details. After he had read a few pages, he formulated sentences to express the ideas, and then engraved them on his plates in reformed Egyptian characters.¹¹ It was a tedious process.

Using the large plates of Nephi as source material—and there were many volumes of them—Mormon completed the history of the Nephites and Lamanites from the time they left Jerusalem in 600 B.C. until 385 A.D., a period of almost a thousand years.

IN addition to writing his abridgment of Nephi history and attaching the small plates of Nephi to his record, Mormon wrote seven chapters of the Book of Mormon and the "Words of Mormon." The Book of Moroni also contains two letters which Mormon wrote to Moroni, and a synopsis of an address he had delivered on "Faith, Hope, and Charity."¹²

It is upon this production that we must base our opinion concerning Mormon's ability as a writer and a scholar. He did not claim perfection for his work. In the first place, he records that he was unable to relate certain facts because of the imperfection of the reformed Egyptian language which he used.¹³ Moroni, his son, relates that his

father used reformed Egyptian because Hebrew required too much space. He further states that if Mormon could have used Hebrew there would have been no imperfection in the record.¹⁴ Moroni, apologizing for certain imperfections, asks us not to condemn the record.¹⁵ Continuing, Moroni wrote: "And if there be faults they be the faults of a man. But behold, we know no fault."¹⁶

The history, of course, was prepared under divine direction. So far as historical facts and doctrine are concerned, we may be sure that they are accurate. Placing Mormon in his historical setting, recognizing that he wrote without the help of modern rhetorical devices, and knowing that we must judge his style from a translation, we should not be too critical of his craftsmanship.

He gave to us an interesting religious and secular history of a great civilization which flourished upon this continent for a thousand years. Without this history by Mormon, we would be groping in the dark concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of America. Almost a million living members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints owe a debt of gratitude to this prophet of God for his work. And this record of Mormon will go forward as a witness that Jesus Christ is divine, a potent force in confirming people in righteousness. Such is the influence of this man of letters, this record keeper.

(To be concluded)

¹¹Mormon 9:32

¹²Moroni 7, 8, 9

¹³III Nephi 5:8-26; Mormon 9:32, 33

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 8:12

¹⁶Ibid., 8:17

EVIDENCES AND RECONCILIATIONS

(Concluded from page 521)

own, personal approaches to him, in righteous living, in prayer, they may know, beyond doubt, that he lives. The greater enlightenment of this day has declared that only "the fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Science has merely added confirmation to this knowledge, by its invasion of the secrets in nature's keeping.

The conduct of man among the innumerable forces of nature is the objective of religion. Science stops short, at present, with the discovery of the phenomena of nature. It has touched only lightly upon the proper use of its discovered facts—whether powder, for example, shall be used to secure a foundation for a home, or to destroy life. Yet, a short while ago a number of scientists concluded that the work of science is not complete until it considers the proper use of its hard-won knowledge—for the good of man. That conclusion was published to the world.

Progressive science has steadily confirmed and is confirming the claims of religion, the basic one of which has been discussed here. It cannot gainsay them; but only fortify them. Whenever there seems to be a conflict, it is not in the

facts discovered, but in man's feeble changing explanations of them.

Religion, a system of truth devised by God, accepts all truth, under whatever name it may be presented. In that system there is place for every truth that man may discover. True religion looks upon science as a handmaid, also engaged in the search for truth. It welcomes every new discovery, for true religion fits all increase of knowledge into its own structure. Every new discovery in the end becomes another means for living more fully the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There was never a time when religion was so well equipped as now to serve humanity, for every available truth is as a tool in the hands of those who labor for human good, and there is more known today than at any other time on earth. So, the question propounded at the head of this writing may be answered with certainty: The progress of science increases the challenge of religion—the science which includes all lesser sciences.

Those who doubt this are among the people who have eyes and they see not. They have ears and they hear not. They are trailing at the end of the world's procession of thinking people.—J. A. W.

Wartime Travel Hint

If you must travel now, please make your hotel reservations well in advance of your arrival and have them confirmed before you leave home. You'll save hours of worry and possible disappointment. And please, for the sake of servicemen and other essential travelers, cancel your reservations promptly if you don't need them. Thank you!

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