Ancient Records and the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** This article states that a testimony of the Book of Mormon comes by the Spirit (Moroni 10:4) and not from scientific research, nor from argument. And yet, the author claims, modern findings are vindications or supports to one’s testimony. Such evidences are cement buildings, gold plates with ancient inscriptions, and stone boxes as depositories of metal records.
Ancient Records and the Book of Mormon

by Mark E. Petersen

OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE

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ince we last met in general confer-
ce, we have passed the one hun-
dredth anniversary of the birth of
President Heber J. Grant. I call this
to your attention because I have great
appreciation for that wonderful man,
for the remarkable influence he had
upon my life, particularly in my younger
years.

It was President Grant who gave to
me my first real introduction to the
Book of Mormon. When I was about
ten years of age, he came to the ward
in which I lived and spoke in one of
our Sacrament meetings. As he has
done on other occasions, that day he
told of his own first reading of the Book
of Mormon and of the great impression
made upon him by the life of Nephi.
In his address he made Nephi such a
reality to me that I had a desire to
read about him for myself.

I took my father's Book of Mormon,
and I read the story of Nephi, having
in mind what President Grant had
said. As I read, not only did I learn to
appreciate that great prophet of old,
but I had come into my soul also a deep
love for the Book of Mormon, even as a
boy.

You will remember another address
that President Grant gave, sometimes
repeating, pertaining to the Book of
Mormon. I would like to read to you
an excerpt from that address. Said
President Grant: "When I was a young
unmarried man, another young man
who had received a doctor's degree ri-
diculed me for believing in the Book
of Mormon. He said he could point out
two lies in that book. One was that
the people had built their homes out of
cement, and they were very skilful in
the use of cement. He said there had
never been found and never would be
found, a house built of cement by the
ancient inhabitants of this country, be-
cause the people in that early age knew
nothing about cement. He said that
should be enough to make one disbelieve
the book. I said: 'That does not affect
my faith one particle. I read the Book
of Mormon prayerfully and supplicated
God for a testimony in my heart and
soul of the divinity of it, and I have ac-
cepted it and believe it with all my
heart.' I also said to him, 'If my chil-
dren do not find cement houses, I expect
that my grandchildren will.' Now, since
that time, houses made of cement and
massive structures of the same material
have been uncovered.

'Not very far from the City of Mexico
there is a monument two hundred and
ten feet high, built of cement... My
first counselor [Anthony W. Ivins] has
stood on that monument. You could
put forty tabernacles like this one inside
of it. It covers more than ten acres of
ground and is two and a half times
higher than this building. From the top
of that monument one can see small
mounds, and as these mounds are being
uncovered, they are found to be won-
derfully built cement houses, with drain
pipes of cement, showing skill and abil-
ity, superior almost to anything we
have today so far as the use of cement
is concerned.

"Another statement that this doctor
made," continued President Grant, "was
this: that the voice of man can only
carry a few hundred feet, and yet the
Book of Mormon teaches that... Jesus
Christ... spoke to the people and his
voice was heard all over the land. 'That
is a lie,' said he, and you know it.' I
said, 'That is no lie at all. Jesus Christ,
under God, was the Creator of this earth,
and if he had the power and ability to
create the earth I believe that he could
arrange for his voice to carry all over
the world at one and the same time.'

"The radio is doing what?" asks
President Grant. "I read the other day
that a song had been heard nine thou-
sand miles away, not only every word
of it, but every note... We had four
letters from New Zealand or Australia,
I have forgotten which, to the effect
that people there had heard perfectly
the programs that had been broadcast
over the radio... In that program the
announcement was made that if any-
body in a foreign land who heard the
program would so indicate there would
be sent to him a pound box of candy,
and four people wrote for the boxes of
candy. It takes the sun eighteen and
one half hours to travel that far (with
reference to the rotation of the earth),
yet the voice carried that distance as
quickly as you can snap your finger.

"I said to this man," continued
President Grant, 'the voice of the Savior
could go all over the world if he so
arranged it.' The radio has proved
what I said.

"Faith is a gift of God, and I thank
God for the faith in and the knowledge
of the divinity of the Book of Mormon
which I had in my youthful days, and
that these two alleged scientific facts,
which are now known to be fallacies,
did not destroy my faith." (Conference
Report, April, 1929:128-130.)

This was very interesting to me be-
cause I had an experience similar to
it. When I was a young missionary, I
came to a professional man and his wife
and told them the story of the coming
forth of the Book of Mormon, and of
its having been translated by Joseph
Smith through the power of God from
a set of gold plates. This professional
man laughed at me and ridiculed the
idea that gold plates were ever used as
records of the past. "Why," he said,
"I have specialized in ancient history,
and I know from all my reading there
is not one single instance in all of the
textbooks where it says that ancient
records were inscribed upon gold plates."

(Continued on following page)
He said, "If you know anything at all about ancient history, you know that clay tablets were used, and that papyrus was used, but never is there a mention of gold plates."

I was a student at school when I was called on my mission, and I had read some little bit in ancient history. I remembered that there was not any mention in my textbooks, either, about gold plates. Although as much had been said about the clay tablets. So I had no scholastic answer for this man. But as I stood before him, I remembered President Grant and his testimony that I heard as a ten-year-old boy, and then as I later heard, this declaration that he made which I have read to you:

In my simplicity I bore testimony to this learned man that although I knew little about the history of the past, and I had no scholastic material to present to him about the gold plates, God had given me a testimony that indeed Joseph Smith did have gold plates, and from them the Book of Mormon was translated, and that I knew it was true.

I used to think a lot about that conversation and wondered about the historians, and why they had said nothing about gold plates. It did not disturb me, however.

But how different are things today? History is no longer silent about the gold plates. Historians not only are vocal, but they are also eloquent in announcing to the world that many sets of plates of precious metal have been found containing many records of the past engraved on their pages by skilful men who knew how to write on plates of metal. Archaeologists have found gold plates and silver plates, copper plates and brass plates, and bronze plates. They have found big plates, little plates, thick plates and thin plates. Some of them were found separately and singly, and others had been brought together in book form—many with pages of gold and silver as thin as modern paper, many of them skillfully and beautifully engraved with the record of the civilizations of the past.

Quite as interesting to me as the discovery that there have been many other plates was the manner in which these plates were found. Under the stones of the palace of the Chaldean monarch, Sargon, was found a set of plates, some of gold and some of silver, and do you know how they were deposited? They were placed in a box made of stone carefully put together and buried in the ground. In Iran have been found some plates of King Darius, dating back to 518 BC. They were gold and silver also, and beautifully engraved. And how had they been preserved? By having been placed in a carefully made box of stone and buried in the ground.

As I read these things, my mind went quickly back to the description of Joseph Smith, pertaining to the manner in which the Book of Mormon plates had been preserved, for Joseph Smith wrote:

Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario county, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood. On the west side of this hill, not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounded in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth.

Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in, and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger. The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement. In the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things with them. (J. S. 25:1-52.)

When I read the reports of these other plates and remembered the story of Joseph Smith, I said to myself: "Thank the Lord. Surely God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform!"

Plates have been found in many places, in both the Old World and the New. They have been found in Palestine, in Egypt, in Babylonia, ancient Assyria, Rome, ancient Carthage, Portugal, Italy, ancient Phoenicia, India, Pakistan, Arabia, several places in South America and Central America, Mexico, and in the United States. A set was found in the state of Ohio. Many copper plates have been found, including one set of eight in Dunklin County, Missouri. Another set was found near Mound City, Missouri, and still another in the state of Georgia. Five copper and two brass plates were found among the Tuckaebatchee Indians, who have a tradition that these plates were given to them by God.

When I thought about the plates being discovered in Ohio, Georgia, and Missouri, I asked a friend of mine: "Which is more difficult to believe: that plates were found in Georgia and Missouri and Ohio, or that they were found in the state of New York?"

Then he said, "Yes, but you involve an angel with your plates."

I said, "Do you believe the Bible?"

And he said, "Yes, I asked him, "Which is more difficult: to believe that an angel came down from heaven and showed Joseph Smith the resting place of a set of plates made by ancient man; or to believe that God would come down from heaven himself and with his hand engrave the Ten Commandments upon two tablets of stone and give them to Moses?"

Then I remembered that we do not receive a testimony from scientific research, nor from argument. I remembered that the only way we get a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is in the way President Grant received it, in a way that I received it, and as a million other Latter-day Saints have received it—the way explained by Mormon when he said:

And when ye shall receive these things, I will 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 a 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.)

With all the fervor of my soul I thank the Almighty that he has given to me a testimony of that book. And what is the testimony? That the Book of Mormon is true, that it is the word of God, a new volume of scripture for this modern world. And I testify to you and all others who listen that if they will but read the Book of Mormon prayerfully with a sincere heart and ask God for a testimony of it, they will receive it, as so many of the others of us have, and this is my testimony, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sunday Afternoon Session, April 7, 1957

ON MISSIONS AND MARRIAGE

by Oscar A. Kirkham

OF THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY

President McKay, I am very grateful for this hour and for this opportunity. Your words have sustained me as have also those of your Counselors which have been spoken. The wisdom and the inspiration of this Church and its teachings have been a great boon in my life.

There are two things that deeply impress me in the Latter-day Saint teachings as I labor with youth. First, you must live worthy that you may go on a mission for the Church—the second I will give later.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 68, we read:

Go ye into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature, acting in the authority which I have given you, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. (D & C 68:8.)

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