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## 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

SINCE WE LAST met in general conference, we have passed the one hundredth 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 ridiculed 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, because 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 accepted it and believe it with all my heart.' I also said to him, 'If my children 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 wonderfully built cement houses, with drain pipes of cement, showing skill and ability, 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 thousand 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 anybody 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 because 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)

## TOTAL CONVERTS

for 1950 1954 1955 1956

	<u>Foreign</u>	<u>Stake</u>	<u>Total</u>
1950	8,915	3,836	12,751
1954	9,645	8,400	18,045
1955	12,309	8,626	21,669
1956	15,932	7,991	23,923

(From statistics given at missionary meeting, Friday evening, April 5, 1957)



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 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 that 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 skillful 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 and 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 rounding 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. 2:51-52.)

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 Tuckaubatchee 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 would 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

**P**RESIDENT 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.)

THE IMPROVEMENT ERA