



Type: Magazine Article

L.D.S. Church History, Lesson 4: Our Book of Mormon

Editor(s): Belle S. Spafford

Source: *Relief Society Magazine*, Vol. 26, No. 10 (October 1939), pp. 724–726

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

Abstract: No abstract available.

Mission Lessons

L. D. S. CHURCH HISTORY

Lesson IV

Our Book of Mormon

(To be used in place of Literary lesson)

WHY was the translation of the Nephite Record called the *Book of Mormon*? What is the *Book of Mormon* about? And how important is this work in our Church?

These questions we shall answer in this lesson.

When the *Book of Mormon* was first published, which, as we already know, was in March, 1830, people who did not like it began to call it the "Mormon Bible" and the "Gold Bible". This was because they wished to ridicule it.

The reason why it was named the *Book of Mormon* is very simple. Its author was named Mormon. Mormon was an ancient prophet, army general, and writer. He lived about four hundred years after Christ. One of the last of his nation, he was led to make an abridgment of the history of his people, who had been on the American continent ever since about six hundred years before Christ. His abridgment was on plates of gold, such as we have already described. And so his book was called the *Book of Mormon*—that is, the Book written by Mormon. Thus we speak of the *Book of Isaiah*, the *Book of Matthew*, and so on.

There is no book in the world like the *Book of Mormon*. It comes more nearly to being an inspired book than any other in all sacred literature.

First, it was written by inspiration. Mormon was led by the Spirit of God to compose it. Then it was revealed by a holy angel—that is, a man who had been raised from the dead for the purpose. Finally, it was translated "by the power of God" by means of the urim and thummim. As we shall learn presently, the Voice of God bore record that the translation was correct. Of no other literary work ever written can all these things be said truthfully.

The *Book of Mormon* does not displace the Bible, as some people have imagined. It is not really "the Mormon Bible". The *Book of Mormon* only supplements the Hebrew Scriptures. It tells us something more than does the Bible, something more about the dealings of God with man. The Nephite Record no more does away with the necessity for the Bible than the New Testament does away with the necessity for the Old Testament.

TWO peoples are told about in the *Book of Mormon*. These are, first, the Lehites and, secondly, the Jaredites, although, perhaps, we should reverse this order, and mention the Jaredites first.

The Lehites were the descendants of Lehi, a minor prophet among the Hebrews. Under divine guidance he conducted his family and some others, about twenty persons in all, from Palestine to what is now

America. This was about six hundred years before Christ.

After the death of Lehi, the little colony divided, unfortunately. Some followed Nephi, Lehi's fourth son, into the Wilderness; the rest stayed with Laman, Lehi's oldest son, near the coast where the company had landed. The former were called Nephites; the latter, Lamanites.

These two peoples increased greatly in numbers, but they lived very differently. The Nephites were civilized. That is, they knew how to read and write, they were skilled in the art of smelting ore and making tools with which to work, and they had a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures—our Bible down to the time of Lehi. The Lamanites, on the contrary, had no literature, no mechanical skill, and no religion to speak of. While the Nephites wore clothes which they themselves had made, their neighbors went almost naked.

After the Lehites had been on the American continent for about four hundred years before Christ, the Nephites, on their way farther into the wilderness, came upon another people—the Mulekites. The Mulekites had come to America eleven years later than the Lehites. They were so glad to see the Nephites that they took the name of the newcomers, and the two peoples became one nation.

Shortly after this time the Nephites discovered twenty-four gold plates which, when the record on them was translated, proved to be the history of still another people who had been led by inspiration to the American continent. They were the Jaredites, of whose national life a brief summary is given us in the

Book of Ether, by Moroni, Mormon's son.

Thus the *Book of Mormon* tells the story of two separate and distinct peoples—the Jaredites and the Lehites. But the Lehites comprise three different nations — the Nephites, the Lamanites, and the Mulekites. About two hundred years before Christ, however, as we have seen, the Mulekites and the Nephites joined and became one nation.

That, in brief, is the story of the *Book of Mormon*.

AND now what is there to the *Book of Mormon* besides its story? The answer is, in a word, its wonderful teachings.

Since the Nephite Record is a history of God's dealings with the ancient Americans, we would not be justified in thinking that the teachings of this book are different from those of the Bible. And as a matter of fact they are not. To be saved one must obey the same general principles and ordinances, no matter where or when one may live. This is made clear in both the Bible and the *Book of Mormon*.

In the *Book of Mormon*, however, these doctrines are much plainer and simpler than they are in the Hebrew Scriptures. Anyone who will read the statements about the same teaching in both of these works, will readily see that this is so.

Take baptism, for instance.

In the *Book of Mormon* we learn, first, that baptism is essential to entrance into the Kingdom of God; second, that it must be by immersion, not by sprinkling; third, that infants are not subject to baptism,

because of their innocence; fourth, that baptism is for the remission of sins. And these aspects of the ordinance are made so clear that no one can misunderstand.

To be sure, all this is in the New Testament also, but one has to hunt for the ideas. They are not put in such clear language. This is why modern Christian churches, which claim to be based on the same teachings, have different forms of baptism. One baptizes by immersion, another by sprinkling, and still another by pouring water on the head. Then, too, some will baptize only grown people, while others baptize babies.

Take, for another example, the teachings concerning the Christ.

In the New Testament the idea that Christ is God, the Savior, the Redeemer, is not so plain that one reader will have the same idea as every other reader on this important point. No two readers of the *Book of Mormon*, however, can possibly get two different views on the subject. Christ is God, the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

This is true of almost everything that is common to the two books—the pre-earth life of man, the spirit world, the doctrines of the Church, and so on.

The most striking thing, though, about the *Book of Mormon* is its spirit. Jesus, after his resurrection from the dead, appeared to the Nephites, and the description of this great appearance is touching beyond anything we have elsewhere. But

before as well as after that event the idea of Christ colored everything in the lives of the better class of Nephites. The whole book is saturated with the spirit of our Savior—his mercy, his tenderness, his compassion, his anxiety over mankind.

Of this phase of the Nephite Record the Prophet Joseph says, “I told the brethren that the *Book of Mormon* is the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and [that] a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book.”

On another occasion he said, “Seek to know God in your closets, call upon him in the fields. Follow the directions of the *Book of Mormon*, and pray over and for your families, your cattle, your flocks, your herds, your corn, and all things that you possess; ask the blessing of God upon all your labors, and everything that you engage in.”

Questions

1. How important is the *Book of Mormon* to us? How came it to be called by this name?
2. Tell the story of the Lehtes down to the division; of the Lamanites; of the Nephites; of the Jaredites; of the Mulekites.
3. Give instances of the clearer statement of the *Book of Mormon* over that in the Bible.
4. How much of this book have you read? What parts of it do you like best? Why?

Note: Map printed in July issue of the Magazine is to be used in teaching Church History lessons.

Music Department

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emphasized by its size. A very large beat indicates a slow tempo, a small one is used for fast tempo. The tempo may be retarded during a composition by slowing down and enlarging the beat, or made faster by speeding up and making smaller the beat.

When the tempo remains unchanged, a large beat will indicate loudness, a small one softness. The loudness may be changed during

performance by changing the size of the beat in proportion to the loudness desired, keeping the speed constant.

The primary functions of the baton are to indicate the rhythm and tempo, to start and stop the singing, and to indicate holds during the progress of the piece. Its secondary functions are to change the tempo and loudness as required by the proper expression of the emotional message of the composition. In these it is assisted and emphasized by the left hand, the use of which will be discussed next month.



Wife: Now don't get mad. . . it just looks like it cost \$35, but it's really from ZCMI's Little Shop and cost only \$7.88!