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## How We Got the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** Under the direction of Moroni, Joseph Smith obtained the plates and translated them according to the gift and power of God. He was an unschooled boy and an instrument in the hands of the Lord who confounded the mighty with his work.

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in addition to reading the Bible now, they read also the *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants*. They thus had a greater variety of scripture than their neighbors in other churches. There used to be Christians, too, who read the Bible once through every year. It was a good practice, and did not take so much time as one would think. Many of the early Saints applied this thought to the *Book of Mormon*, because of its greater plainness and simplicity, and because it is a "New Witness for God."

This practice should be revived. This year, especially, every adult Latter-day Saint should make it a point to read the Nephite Record from cover to cover, with a view primarily to increasing his supply of spirituality. Also, it might increase his power to live a decent life here below, as well as his power to do service to others.

## HOW WE GOT THE BOOK OF MORMON

By Elder James E. Talmage

It was on September 22, 1827, when Joseph Smith, under Moroni's direction, took from the side of the hill that had been shown him in vision a book made up of thin leaves of beaten gold, held together by rings after the fashion of our modern loose-leaf books. As described by Joseph Smith and by others to whom they were shown these leaves or plates were engraved with fine characters having all the appearance of ancient workmanship. They had been laid away with care and attention to preservation; for, when uncovered, they were found resting in a box of stone.

The characters were of a modified Egyptian type, though the language of the record was Hebrew—likewise altered through the isolation of the people—that is to say the Hebrew words were spelled out in Egyptian characters, just as today we have books in the German language printed in English letters. As the translation proceeded it was found that the writing constituted a history of the aboriginal peoples of the Western Continent, of whom, as stated, the existing tribes of American Indians are the descendants.

Like the Bible, the *Book of Mormon* is a compilation of books by a succession of authors, and covers the period between 600 B. C. and about 420 A. D., with an inclusion of a more ancient history, discovered by Lehi's descendants, which tells of an immigration to America soon after the building of the Tower of Babel.

### Translation by the Gift and Power of God

Let us go back to the unearthing of the plates. With them in the box lay two stones set in bows of silver. These as the angel Moroni informed Joseph Smith were the Urim and Thummim, the possession and inspired ability to use which constituted the

gift of seership as exercised of old; and of these particular instruments the angel said "that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book." With the aid of these "interpreters" Joseph Smith was instrumental in translating the ancient record into English. He was no linguist; indeed, at the time, he was unschooled beyond the rudiments of a simple education, unversed in any tongue but the vernacular, and according to all human standards was wholly unequipped to translate the records of a nation long extinct, and, except for certain Indian traditions, forgotten. But the operation of a power higher than human, by which the engraved plates were brought forth from the earth, was to be effective in making the long-buried chronicles intelligible to modern readers.

Joseph Smith avers that the translation was made *through the gift and power of God*. It was divinely appointed that the sacred archives should be restored to the knowledge of men through that power and not through human learning. Had it not been written that in the latter days the Lord would accomplish a marvelous work and a wonder, whereby the wisdom of the wise would fail and the understanding of the learned be hidden—and this because men would put their dogmas and precepts above the revealed word? (See Isa. 29:13-14) In the translation of the *Book of Mormon* there was to be no gloss of fallible scholarship, no attempt to improve and embellish the plain, simple and unambiguous diction of the original scribes who wrote by inspiration. Therefore was the commission laid upon one who was rated among the weak of the earth, but whose ministry, nevertheless, has confounded the mighty. (See I Cor. 1:27-28.)

The nation "brought down" as Isaiah foresaw and foretold has spoken "out of

the ground;" her speech has come forth "out of the dust," for the original of the *Book of Mormon* was literally taken from the ground, and the voice of this ancient Scripture is as that of one speaking from the dust of ages.

The *Book of Mormon* offers no apology for its existence. It needs none. The dem-

onstrations of its genuineness is an inherent characteristic of its pages. I pray you, read it and see.—From "Sunday Night Talks."

\*1938 Gospel Doctrine and "B" (Book of Mormon) Department teachers: Please take note and use.

## PERSONAL APPEARANCE OF THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH

President Joseph Smith was in person tall and well built, strong and active; of a light complexion, light hair, blue eyes, very little beard, and of an expression peculiar to himself, on which the eye naturally rested with interest, and was never weary of beholding. His countenance was ever mild, affable, beaming with intelligence and benevolence; mingled with a look of interest and an unconscious smile, or cheerfulness, and entirely free from all restraint or affectation or gravity; and there was something connected with the serene and steady penetrating glance of his eye, as if he would penetrate the deepest abyss of the human heart, gaze into eternity, penetrate the heavens and comprehend all worlds.

He possessed a noble boldness and independence of character; his manner was easy and familiar; his rebuke terrible as the lion; his benevolence unbounded as the ocean; his

intelligence universal, and his language abounding in original eloquence peculiar to himself—not polished—not studied—not smoothed and softened by education and refined by art, but flowing forth in its own native simplicity, and profusely abounding in variety of subject and manner. He interested and edified while, at the same time he amused and entertained his audience; and none listened to him that were ever weary with his discourse. I have even known him to retain a congregation of willing and anxious listeners for many hours together, in the midst of cold or sunshine, rain or wind, while they were laughing at one moment and weeping the next. Even his bitter enemies were generally overcome if he could once get their ears.—Parley P. Pratt, in *Autobiography*, p. 47.

Among other gratifications I had the pleasure of several interviews with our beloved prophet, who had lately been delivered from the rage of the heathen, the vain imagination of the people, and the council of rulers who had taken council together against the Lord, and against his anointed.

During my long acquaintance with him, and in all circumstances, he has ever been cheerful, but I think he never has appeared more so than of late. He seems as animated, as happy, as buoyant, and cheerful as a child; or as a youth just setting out in the morning of life, without a cloud to obscure the prospect of his brightest hopes. In his person one can hardly recognize a veteran soldier of the cross, who has stood for twenty years as a champion of the truth, like an oak amid the tempest, while storm after storm has beat around him; yet such is the fact.

Joseph Smith, that seeming youth, that joyous, happy young man, whose countenance seems lit up with the sparkling brilliance of early manhood, and smooth and unruffled as a child who has never known the bitterness of human strife. That same Joseph Smith has for twenty years labored, toiled and suffered, as the unflinching champion of eternal truth, at the head of the brave few who have dared to follow; amid contending millions he has stood for the tes-



DEATH MASK OF JOSEPH SMITH