



Type: Magazine Article

Unique Character of Contents of the Book of Mormon

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 26, No. 11 (September 1923)

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

Page(s): 1015–1018

Abstract: This article argues that, while the historical and ethnological information in the Book of Mormon is invaluable, the theological themes are far more important. The theological aspects in the Book of Mormon harmonize with those of the Bible.

Unique Character of Contents of the Book of Mormon

By Elder James E. Talmage, of the Council of the Twelve

The Angel Moroni, who made known to Joseph Smith the existence and repository of the inscribed plates from which the Book of Mormon has been translated, informed the modern prophet that the metallic pages contained the fulness of the everlasting gospel as delivered by the Savior to the former inhabitants of the Western continent. This book is more than a series of annals and chronicles.

Invaluable as the ancient record may have proved in giving to man the history of a once mighty but now extinct nation, in demonstrating the origin and significance of traditions cherished by the degenerate Indians as evidence of a more enlightened past, in explaining ethnological data otherwise unrelated and largely inexplicable—in these respects the Book of Mormon could have been nothing more than an important contribution to the common fund of human knowledge, possibly of great academic interest but certainly of small vital value.

No apology could be consistently demanded for surprise, wonder, or even incredulity over the announcement of a messenger sent from the presence of God to restore to the possession of mortals a mere history of dynasties and kingdoms, of migrations and battles, of cities builded and destroyed, and of the rise and fall of commonwealths. The miraculous interposition of Divine power in such a matter is without recorded precedent and apparently lacking in the essential element of necessity.

The priceless character of the Book of Mormon lies in its sacredness as a compilation of Holy Scripture, telling primarily of the dealings of God with the ancient peoples of the West, of the Divine purpose in their isolation on a previously unknown continent, the teaching and practice of the gospel with all its essential laws and ordinances enjoined through revelation entirely apart from the Biblical scriptures, and particularly of the solemn testimony of a great nation relating to the atoning death and literal resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Savior of the race.

The avowed purpose of Jehovah, in leading Lehi and his colony from Jerusalem and conducting them across the great waters to the American shores, was to separate unto himself a body of Israelites who would be cleansed from false tradition

and the defiling precepts of men respecting the appointed mission of Christ in the flesh. As Moses was led into the desert and later into the mountain top, as Elijah was impelled to seek the cavern's solitude, that each might the better hear the Divine voice—so a nation was sequestered in the New World that they might learn the word of revealed truth in its simplicity and plainness.

In the mind of God it had been decreed that the life, death, and resurrection of his Only Begotten Son be attested by other witnesses than Galilee, Samaria and Judea. While Lehi and his people were journeying through the deserts of Arabia, the Lord revealed by vision and the visitation of angels unto the prophet and again unto Nephi that, six hundred years later, the Son of the Eternal Father would be born of the Virgin of Nazareth, that He was to be the Redeemer of the world, that a prophet would go before Him crying repentance unto the people and baptizing them in Jordan, and that twelve apostles would attend the Savior and continue to teach and administer after the Lord's death and resurrection.

The doctrine of the coming Christ and the necessity of repentance and baptism were preached by prophets throughout the six centuries of preparation. At the time of our Lord's birth at Bethlehem, the predicted signs of the glad event were witnessed in America, and prominent among these was the absence of darkness between two days. The tragedy on Calvary was signalized in the West, as the prophets had foretold, by great disturbances of the earth, and by the continuation of darkness between two nights.

The more righteous part of the people had been preserved from destruction; and to a multitude of these, assembled about the temple, the crucified and resurrected Lord appeared, with solemn accompaniment of the Father's proclamation from the heavens: "Behold my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name: hear ye him." (3 Nephi, chapter 11.)

The people looked upward.

"And behold they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe, and he came down and stood in the midst of them, and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them. And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying. "Behold, I am Jesus Christ whom, the prophets testified shall come into the world; And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning."

He permitted them to see and feel the wounds of the cross

in his hands and feet, as well as the spear-thrust in his side; and they worshiped him.

The Book of Mormon is a new and independent witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ and his gospel, by which all mankind may be saved through obedience and without which no man can have place in the kingdom of God.

Thus two national histories, separate and distinct, written on opposite hemispheres, unite in circumstantial testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ as the World's Redeemer; and these are embodied in independent volumes of scripture—*The Holy Bible* and *The Book of Mormon*.

The evidence of witnesses, whether individuals, coteries or nations, refutes itself if it fail in consistency, mutual support, and agreement in all substantials. The most critical examination of these two compilations of scripture as to this vital feature is invited.

Among the outstanding facts of profoundest import recorded in the Bible concerning Jesus Christ and his mission are these:

1. His pre-existence and antemortal Godship.
2. His fore-ordination as the Redeemer and Savior of mankind.
3. Predictions of his embodiment in the flesh, as the Son of the Eternal Father and of mortal woman.
4. The fulfilment of these predictions in his birth as Mary's Child.
5. The sending of a forerunner, John the Baptist, to prepare the way for the Lord's public ministry.
6. Christ's earthly life, covering about a third of a century, characterized by beneficent service, by authoritative administration, and by unexceptional example.
7. The establishment of his Church with duly ordained Apostles, who, with other ministers invested with the Holy Priesthood, carried forward the work of salvation after the Lord's departure.
8. The specific and authentic enunciation of the fundamental principles and ordinances of the Gospel, by which the way of salvation has been opened to all, and without which none can abide in the kingdom of God, these comprising: (1) Faith in him as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world; (2) Repentance of sin; (3) Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and (4) Bestowal of the Holy Ghost by the authoritative laying on of hands.
9. The Lord's sacrificial and atoning death.
10. His actual resurrection, whereby his spirit was reunited with the crucified body and he became a glorified and immortalized Soul.
11. His ministry as a Resurrected Being among men.
12. His exaltation to the place he had won at the right hand of God the Eternal Father.
13. The general apostasy of mankind from the Gospel of Christ, bringing about an era of spiritual darkness.
14. The restoration of the Holy Priesthood in the latter days, by which the Gospel would be again preached in power and its ordinances administered for the salvation of men.
15. The assurance of our Lord's yet future return to earth, in glory

and judgment, to inaugurate the predicted Millennium of peace and righteousness.

16. His eternal status as Judge of both quick and dead, and the eventual Victor over sin and death.

In every particular, even to curcumstantial detail, the scriptures of the West accord with those of the East in their solemn witness to these portentous developments of the Divine plan, which has for its purpose *the immortality and eternal life of man*. The voice of the continents, the independent testimonies of Judah and Ephraim, the scriptures of the Jews and those of the Nephites, are heard in tuneful harmony bearing true witness to the world of the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ.

In vindication of the prophets of both East and West, the holy Priesthood has been restored to the earth in this latter age, and the saving ordinances of the Lord's House are again administered for the salvation of souls. In this glorious restoration, coupled with the miraculous bringing forth of the Book of Mormon, is found a rich fulfilment of ancient prophecy for verily *Truth has sprung out of the earth, and Righteousness has come down from heaven*. (See Psa. 85:11.)

Now, in olden times, at least two witnesses were required to establish the truth of any important fact; and thus spake the Lord respecting the independent testimony of nations concerning himself:

"Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto ycu that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together, the testimony of the two nations shall run together also Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible, ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written. . . . For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth, and they shall write it. . . . And it shall come to pass that my people which are of the house of Israel, shall be gathered home unto the lands of their possessions; and my word also shall be gathered in ene." (2 Nephi 29).

The theme of this unified anthem of Divine ministry is the preparation of the race for the impending advent of the Lord, who shall stand in Bodily Presence upon the earth, to subdue wickedness and reign in righteousness in company with all who are or shall have become his.