

# Review of The Book of Mormon, January 1834

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## THE BOOK OF MORMON.

An Account, written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates, taken from the Plates of Nephi. By JOSEPH SMITH, JR., Author and Proprietor.

THIS is the title of the volume which contains the collection of writings held sacred by the Mormonites; in other words, it is the title of the Mormon Bible. The Mormonites, as they are commonly called, or, as they call themselves, the members of the true church of Christ, — as our readers are probably aware, are a new denomination of religionists. It is but a few years since they made their appearance in the western part of the state of New York. They have already met with some success in the spread of their opinions; and preachers of this denomination are now scattering themselves abroad over the land, labouring with much zeal to gain proselytes to their faith. The account which has been given of the origin of their sacred writings is, briefly, this: -- Joseph Smith, Jr., whose name appears on the title-page as author and proprietor of the work, was directed by the Spirit of God to dig, in a hill in the “township of Manchester, Ontario county, N. Y.,” for certain golden plates, which were there concealed, and upon which were inscribed sacred records. He obeyed the direction and found the plates. The inscriptions upon them were in an unknown tongue. But, by the special power of the Spirit, Smith was enabled to translate them. This translation is the volume, the title of which is placed at the head of this article. To confirm the truth of this account, the volume contains two certificates, one of which is signed by three, and the other by eight witnesses. The three witnesses testify, That an Angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates and the engravings thereon.” The eight witnesses testify, “We have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken, -- and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work and of curious workmanship.”

The volume contains a collection of writings, or, as they are called, of different Books, purporting to have been written at different times, and by the different authors whose names they respectively bear. The following are the names of the different Books, in the order in which they occur.

1. First Book of Nephi.
2. Second Book of Nephi.
3. Book of Jacob, brother of Nephi.
4. Book of Enos, son of Jacob.
5. Book of Jarom, son of Enos.
6. Book of Omni, son of Jarom.
7. Words of Mormon.
8. Book of Mosiah.
9. Book of Alma.
10. Book of Helaman.
11. Book of Nephi, son of Nephi, son of Helaman.
12. Book of Nephi, son of Nephi, one of the disciples of Christ.
13. Book of Mormon.
14. Book of Ether.
15. Book of Moroni.

We shall not undertake to give a particular analysis of each of these Books. We shall give only a brief outline of the contents of the whole. The volume is composed of what purport to be, historical records, prophetic declarations, and direct exhortatory addresses. The following is a brief sketch of what purport to be the historical records of the volume.

One Lehi, a devout and holy man, was moved by the threatenings of Jeremiah and other prophets who foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, to flee from that devoted city. He left in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah. From Jerusalem he went forth into the wilderness. After having travelled for three days, he pitched his tent in a valley, by the side of a river which emptied into the Red Sea. Lehi left behind, in Jerusalem, as he went forth, all his riches, and took with him only his family, which consisted of his wife Sarai and four sons, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. After he had pitched his tent, he sent his sons back to Jerusalem, to obtain the plates which contained the genealogical records of his family, that the remembrance of their origin might be preserved among his descendants. His sons succeeded in obtaining the plates, from which it appeared that Lehi was a descendant of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt. Again, Lehi sent his sons back to Jerusalem to seek out for themselves wives, who might go forth with them wherever the Lord should direct. The sons persuade one Ishmael to unite himself unto them, and to go forth into the wilderness, with his family, which consisted of daughters. The whole company now journey along the coast of the Red Sea for some days, and then strike off and journey in a direction due east, until they come to the great waters. Here, Nephi was directed of the Lord to construct a vessel; and being assisted by the Spirit, he at length succeeded, notwithstanding his elder brothers laughed him to scorn for his attempt. The vessel is completed, and the whole company now launch forth upon "the mighty deep." It is impossible to ascertain, precisely, from what place they sailed; and, as the direction and length of their voyage are not particularly mentioned, we lose all further geographical traces of them. During the voyage, the elder brothers, Laman and Lemuel, refuse to submit to their younger brother, Nephi. They rise in mutiny, seize Nephi, bind him hand and foot, and beat him with rods. While Nephi lay bound, a tempest arose, and they were driven from their proper course. As Nephi was the only one that had been instructed of the Lord in regard to the management of the vessel, the elder brothers, through fear, released him and restored him to the command. They at length arrive at a land unknown to the rest of the world. After their arrival, Laman and Lemuel revolted from the command of Nephi. This laid the foundation for two general divisions, called Lamanites and Nephites. These names came, however, in the course of time, to denote distinctions of character, rather than difference of family descent. Those, who disbelieved and disobeyed, were classed with the Lamanites, while the believing and the since it various subordinate tribes. They scattered themselves over the land, cultivated the earth, built cities and towns. They enjoyed prosperity or experienced adversity, as the people were obedient or disobedient. There were frequent wars between the Lamanites and Nephites, and victory sided sometimes with one party and sometimes with the other. The history is more directly that of the Nephites, and it is only incidentally that we are made acquainted with the affairs of the Lamanites. The Nephites were sometimes governed by kings and sometimes by judges. After the ascension of our Saviour, as recorded in the New Testament, he is represented to have appeared to the Nephites. While among them, he healed the diseased, and gave religious instruction. The religious instruction, which he gave, accords well with what is recorded of his discourses in the New Testament, since it is but a copy, almost word for word, from those discourses. After our Saviour had ascended from the Nephites, his gospel was preached and spread rapidly among the

Nephites and among a part of the Lamanites. But, at length, the Nephites “dwindled in unbelief;” the infidel portion of the inhabitants gained the ascendancy, the true believers became extinct, and the plates, which contained the records of the nation, were “hid up unto the Lord in the earth, to be brought forth in due time by the hand of the Gentile.”

Such is a brief sketch of the historical records contained in the Book of Mormon. In all this history, there is but one allusion which affords us an intelligible hint in regard to the geography of the land, in which the Nephites and Lamanites dwelt. There is, incidentally, mention made of a narrow neck of land, which connects the North country with the South, which, we suppose, means the Isthmus of Darien. The preachers of this faith, we understand, endeavour to prove the truth of the history by a reference to the face of the country. They suppose the mounds throughout the western states, which have heretofore excited so much curiosity, are the remains of the cities of the Nephites and Lamanites.

The prophetic declarations of the Book of Mormon relate to the prosperity and adversity of the people to whom they are addressed, to the coming of Christ, and to “the hiding up of the plates and their being brought forth by the hand of the Gentile;” together with denunciations of woe upon all, who, at the time the plates may be brought forth, shall object to “more Bible” and shall contend that miracles have ceased. The prophecies which relate to the prosperity and adversity of the people, are, many of them, clothed in the language of the Jewish prophets; or, in other words, are composed of expressions taken from the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. In one instance, the Prophet, instead of making new disclosures, professes’ simply to read to the people from the prophecy of Isaiah, and, consequently, we have several chapters of that Book, copied almost word for word. The prophecies in regard to the coming of Christ and his precursor, John the Baptist, are more definite than the prophecies of the Old Testament, being clothed, for the most part, in the language of the New Testament, or in the language of modern theology. We find the following prophecy in regard to John the Baptist: --

“And he spake also concerning a prophet, which should come before the Messiah to prepare the way of the Lord; yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord and make his paths straight; for there standeth one among you whom ye know not; and he is mightier than I, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose. And much spake my father concerning this thing. And my father saith, that he should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan; and he also spake, that he should baptize with water, yea, even that he should baptize the Messiah with water. And after that he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold and bear record, that he had baptized the Lamb of God, which should take away the sins of the world.”

We find the following prophetic vision of the times of the Saviour: --

“And it came to pass, that the angel spake unto me again, saying, Look! And I looked, and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people, yea, the Everlasting God was judged of the world. And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.”

We find the following prophetic declarations, which have reference, we presume, to the present times: --

"And because my words shall hiss forth, many of the Gentiles shall say, A Bible, a Bible; we have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible..... 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."

From these quotations our readers may gain some idea of the character of the prophecies contained in the Book of Mormon.

In regard to the exhortations, there is one singular circumstance. We should naturally suppose, that, coming, as Lehi and his family are represented to have done, from Jerusalem, there would be some traces of Jewish manners and customs among the people. But we are disappointed. Nephi did, indeed, build a temple, after the manner of Solomon's temple. But we see no account of sacrifices and of national festivals, and but an allusion to synagogues. No. The moment they are established in their new land, we read of the church, of preaching, according to the modern style of preaching, of converts, dissenters, and of baptism. The exhortations are strongly tinged with the doctrines of modern Orthodoxy. Those given before are nearly the same with those given after the Saviour's appearance. In the one case, the people were exhorted to believe that a Saviour would come and that an atonement would be made; in the other, that a Saviour had come and that an atonement had been made. We find the following account of an interview between Aaron, one of the preachers, and the king, which may serve as a specimen of the exhortations. This interview took place, we would observe, before the appearance of our Saviour.

"And it came to pass, that when Aaron saw that the King would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam, reading the Scriptures, unto the king; how God created man after his own image, and that God gave him commandments, and that, because of transgression, man had fallen. And Aaron did expound unto him the Scriptures, from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state, and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all, whosoever would believe on his name. And, since man had fallen, he could not merit any thing of himself, but the sufferings and death of Christ atoneth for their sins through faith and repentance."

We have thus given a brief sketch of the contents of the whole book. -- In regard to the style in which the book is written, we have but little to say. There is an attempt to imitate the style of the sacred Scriptures. But the attempt is unsuccessful. Some of the more obvious peculiarities of scripture-language are indeed exhibited. Nearly two thirds of the paragraphs are introduced with the phrase, "And it came to pass." In endeavouring to preserve the solemn style of the Scriptures, there is a total disregard of grammatical propriety. We read, "The Lord sayeth unto me, and I sayeth unto the Lord." But perhaps a few extracts, selected at random, will give our readers a more correct idea of the general style of the book, than any remarks we might offer.

"And it came to pass that when they had *arriven* in the borders of the hand of the Lamanites."  
"And it came to pass that I Nephi did make *bellowses* wherewith to blow the fire."  
"And it came to pass that Limhi and many of his people *was* desirous to be baptized."

We might fill our pages with quotations like these. We will, however, bring forward but one or two more. On page 182, we find Abinadi, a true prophet of the Lord, breaking forth into sublime strains of holy indignation against the false prophets, who had caused the people to pervert the ways of the Lord. The following is the passage: --

"And now Abinadi saith unto them, 'Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desireth to know of me, what these things mean? I say unto, Wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord. For if ye understand these things, ye have not taught them, therefore ye have perverted the ways of the Lord. Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding,

therefore ye have not been wise. Therefore what teachest thou this people? And they said, we teach the law of Moses. And again he saith unto them, if ye teach the law of Moses, why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye spend your strength upon harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin, that the Lord hath cause to send me, to prophesy against this people, yea, even a great evil against this people? Knowest thou not that I speak the truth? Yea, thou knowest that I speak the truth; and you had ought to tremble before God.”

On page 515, we learn what to expect during the period of the much-talked-of Millenium. For we find a description of the state of society among the Nephites, at a time when the influence of religion was universally felt. At that time, we are told, "there were no robbers, nor no murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor no manner of Ites." -- But we have satisfied our readers, we trust, with specimens of the style of the Book of Mormon. We will only add, that the different writers seem to have been all educated in the same school, since the same style is manifest in the writings of all.

That the Mormon faith has spread, with some degree of rapidity, since its first appearance, cannot be disputed. We are told, that there are already six hundred preachers of this faith, scattered abroad over the land. We have, therefore, in reading the Book of Mormon, sought carefully for the peculiarities which are calculated to give it success, and we have also inquired as to the course pursued by the preachers in setting forth their views. There is some degree of plausibility, both in the course pursued by the preachers, and in the contents of the book itself. The course pursued by the preachers we understand is this. They state, what all admit to be facts, that, in the primitive ages of the church, there was among the disciples the power of speaking with tongues and of working miracles; that, at the present day, no denomination of Christians possesses this power. From these facts they draw the conclusion, that all denominations of Christians have departed from the true faith of the primitive church. They then claim for themselves and the members of their church the power of speaking with tongues and of working miracles. They jabber with some strange sounds, and call this the speaking with tongues. They assert it as a fact, that among them the dead have been raised and the sick healed. From these *facts*, as they call them, they draw the conclusion that *they* are the members of the true church of Christ. If you object to the historical accounts of their sacred books, they refer you to the mounds of the western country, as remains of ancient cities, and as proofs that this country was once inhabited by a race of people better acquainted with the arts of civilized life, than the present race of savages; and this, they contend, is satisfactory presumptive proof of the truth of the history. Do you ask, what reason there is to believe that our Saviour, after his ascension, appeared to the former inhabitants of America? They answer you in the words of their sacred books, in what purport to be the words of our Saviour himself while among the Nephites: --

"And verily I say unto you, that ye are they, of which I said, Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd. And they understood me not, for they supposed it had been the Gentiles.”

Now all this presents itself to the minds of the ignorant, as being plausible, as being forcible. They see not the sophistry. They know not what answer to give, and they are consequently carried away. In addition to all this, the preachers do not shock previously existing attachments, by rejecting the Bible. They profess to receive the whole Bible, just as it stands, and to regard it just as Christians generally regard it. They direct their hearers to search the Scriptures, and they

themselves undertake to explain the declarations of the Old and New Testaments. They bring forward the Book of Mormon as another and more clear and distinct revelation, given to another branch of the descendants of Abraham, but as corresponding in its design and its general tenor with the sacred Scriptures.

And then, too, the book itself is with some art adapted to the known prejudices of a portion of the community. It is well known, that, among a portion of the community, there is a strong prejudice against the support, by the people, of a regular ministry. All such will find in the Book of Mormon, that, among the members of the true church, the preachers did not set themselves above the people, that they laboured with their own hands for the supply of their wants, that, when the period of religious worship arrived, the preachers, as well as the people, went from their labours to their devotions, and that, when this period had passed, the preachers, as well as the people, returned to their labours.

Again, it is well known, that, among some, there are complaints that officers of government should be supported in what they regard a life of ease and laziness, by salaries, drawn from the pockets of the hard-labouring people, in the form of taxes. All such will find in the Book of Mormon, that those rulers are spoken of as most acceptable in the sight of God, who laboured, working with their hands, for the supply of their wants, that so the people might not be burdened with taxes for their support; and, consequently, all such are led to hope, that, when the doctrines of the Book of Mormon, or the true faith of the primitive church, shall prevail, they shall be freed from taxes for the support of government.

Still further, it is well known that, in some minds, there is a prejudice against fine clothing, or even against decent apparel, as indicating pride in the wearer. Those, who are under the influence of this prejudice, find something in the Book of Mormon to suit their taste. They find that calamities were often brought upon the Nephites, through the pride of those who wore costly apparel. They find that, on one occasion, when the devout were blessed of the Lord with worldly prosperity, they had, among other things, great supplies of "homely clothing."

Finally, it is well known that, in many minds, there is a strong feeling of opposition to the institution of Masonry. All such find something in the Book of Mormon to meet their views. They find that, at a certain time,

"Satan did stir up the hearts of the more parts of the Nephites, insomuch that they did unite with those bands of robbers, and did enter into their covenants and their oaths, that they would protect and preserve one another, in whatever difficult circumstances they should be placed in, that they should not suffer for their murders and their plunderings and their stealings. And it came to pass, that they did have their signs, yea, their secret signs, and their secret words, and this, that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the covenant, that, whatsoever wickedness his brother should do, he should not be injured by his brother, nor by those who did belong to his band who had taken this covenant; and whosoever of their band should reveal unto the world their wickedness and their abominations, should be tried, not according to the laws of their country, but according to the laws of their wickedness, which had been given by Gadianton and Kishkurmen. Now behold, those secret oaths and covenants did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman; but behold, they were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit."

Thus there are, in the book itself, artful adaptations to the known prejudices of the community. And, besides, there are circumstances, in the condition and views of those among whom this faith spreads, which are calculated to secure it success. In a large portion of the community, there

is a great degree of ignorance in regard to the geography of the sacred Scriptures, the manners and customs of the Jews, and the natural history of the Bible. There are many, who read their Bibles daily, and with devotional feelings it may be, who have no idea that the places mentioned in sacred history, like those mentioned in any other history, can be traced on the map, can be found and visited at the present day, although disguised under modern names. It makes no part of their study of the Bible, to ascertain where the places mentioned are to be found, and what they are now called. They have no idea that the allusions to manners and customs, found in the Bible, can be understood, through an acquaintance with the practices and habits of the people described; and, consequently, the study of Jewish manners and customs makes no part of their preparation for understanding the Scriptures. They have no idea that the allusions in Scripture to facts in natural history can be verified by an acquaintance with that science; and, consequently, they make no exertions to understand the natural history of the Bible. They do not take up the Bible and read it with the expectation of being able to understand it, even in regard to these particulars, as they would understand any other book. All such are prepared, by their very ignorance on these subjects, to become the dupes of the Mormon delusion; or, rather, they are not prepared to detect and withstand this delusion. They open the Book of Mormon. The paragraphs begin with the phrase, "And behold it came to pass." They read of the cities of Zarahemla, Gid, Mulek, Corianton, and a multitude of others. They read of prophets and preachers, of faith, repentance, and obedience; and having been accustomed, in reading the Scriptures, to take all such things just as they are presented, without careful examination, they can see no reason why all this is not as much entitled to belief, as are the records of the Old and New Testaments. But if, on the contrary, they were acquainted with the geography and the natural history of the Bible, and with the manners and customs of the nations there mentioned, and especially, if, in their reading of the Scriptures, they were accustomed to examine carefully into these points, they would at once perceive the utter impossibility of identifying the cities mentioned in the Book of Mormon, with any geographical traces which they can now make. They would thus perceive the great chance there is for deception, and would be put on their guard. And then, too, upon further examination, they would discover that the manners and customs of the people, the sentiments and disputes, are not such as belong to the period of the world in which the people are represented to have lived, that they take their colouring from modern customs, from modern opinions and controversies; and so they would, from this knowledge, and from these habits of examination, be led to reject the whole as a delusion.

Again, there prevail, in the minds of a large portion of the community, pernicious errors in regard to the influences of the Spirit. There are those, who believe that they can certainly tell, from their own feelings at the time, when the Spirit is specially operating upon their hearts; that they can distinguish the operations of the Spirit from the workings of their own minds. There are those who believe that they can tell, from the appearance of an assembly, when the Spirit of God is specially and powerfully present in "their midst." If the speaker is more than usually earnest and fluent, they believe that the Spirit of God is present to his mind affording special assistance. If the assembly is more than usually interested, and, especially, if many are affected unto tears, they believe the Spirit of God to be powerfully operating upon the hearts of the people. The language, used by preachers and in religious periodical publications, encourages this belief. Go to the camp-meeting ground, or into a protracted meeting, and you will hear the preachers declaring that the Spirit of God is specially and powerfully present. And what is the proof? The speakers felt great freedom in laying open the truths of the gospel, and great earnestness in

exhorting sinners. The people were much affected, and many were in tears. Turn to the religious periodical publications of the day, and read the accounts given of revivals. You will read, that on such an occasion, at such a meeting, the Spirit of God was visibly present. The proofs are the same as those mentioned by the preachers. Nay, more; these revivals, these special manifestations of the Spirit, are represented as proofs that the doctrines advanced at such times are the truths of the gospel, and that the measures adopted are "owned of God." The great mass of the more ignorant part of the community understand these expressions to mean what they literally purport to mean. And this, as it seems to us, has given success to many of the delusions that have prevailed. It is well known to most of our readers, we presume, that, some years since, the Cochran delusion, as it is called, prevailed in and around Saco, a village in the State of Maine. What gave that delusion success? Why, Cochran spoke with great fluency, warned sinners with great earnestness, and poured forth his prayers with great fervour. The people were much affected. Many were in tears, many were sobbing aloud, many cried out for mercy, and some were even prostrated upon the floor. "Surely, then," those under the influence of the delusion we speak of would say, "the Spirit of God was powerfully and visibly present." "Surely," they would say, "the doctrines advanced by Cochran must be true, the measures adopted by him are 'owned of God.'" So with the Mormon delusion. The preachers are fluent, they warn sinners with earnestness, they pray with fervour; the people are affected; the Spirit of God is especially, powerfully, and visibly present; and, consequently, the opinions advanced must be correct, the measures adopted are "owned of God." In this way, men, of sound judgment in other respects, are carried away, through the influence of their erroneous views of the operations of the Spirit, and become the dupes of the delusion.

We here close our remarks upon the Book of Mormon and the causes of the success which has attended the Mormon delusion. We hope that what we have said may serve to gratify the natural curiosity of our readers upon the subject. Nay, more; we hope that it may serve to awaken them to the importance of strenuous exertions, on their part, to remove all improper prejudices, to spread abroad a correct knowledge of the sacred Scriptures and proper principles in regard to the study of the Bible, and to extend sound and rational views of the nature of religion and of the influences of the Spirit.

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