

Why Believe the Book of Mormon?

Thou fool, that shalt say, A bible, we have got a bible, and we need no more bible. Have ye obtained a bible, save it were by the Jews? Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth? 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 you 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. . . . And because that I have spoken one word, ye need not suppose that I can not speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be, until the end of man; neither from that time henceforth and for ever.—II Nephi 12:53-63

THE prevailing concept among Christians is that the Bible contains everything necessary for man's salvation, and that it is a closed book, complete and perfect for all time. Yet God has never at any time said that he was through writing Scripture, or that all the Scripture he had ever given to man is contained in the Bible. In this chapter we want to show why Latter Day Saints believe that the Book of Mormon, as Scripture, fills a real need in the lives of many Christian people and why it has claim upon the faith and

credence and loyal belief of all who love God and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The past century has seen the rise and widespread growth of skepticism, modernism, and the so-called higher criticism which have attempted to ridicule the Bible as unhistorical, unscientific, and unbelievable. These same forces have made innumerable attempts to deny the deity of Jesus, his miraculous conception and birth, his life and ministry, his death and resurrection. One has a hard time finding out any more what modern theology really thinks about Jesus Christ, for belief is often veiled in euphemism and indirection, and unbelief and skepticism sometimes keep silent in order to be thought respectable. Some have even boldly denied that any such person as Jesus ever lived. Some admit that he probably lived, but think that he was just a great and good man, many times better than any of us, but nevertheless divine only in the same sense that we are divine, the Son of God only in the same sense that we are all the sons of God by reason of creation. Some have been willing to believe in him as a historical person, but have denied his miracles, his atonement, and his physical resurrection. Some have believed in a mild sort of divinity for him, and have taken the position that Jesus lives spiritually in the memories and lives of those who believe in him but not in a resurrected physical body; and that therefore the only immortality for which we can hope is an immortality of the spirit in some far distant "heaven" plus a passing memory or two in the mortal minds of our friends.

A CHRIST-CENTERED BOOK

The Book of Mormon is centered in Christ as the miraculously conceived, incarnate Son of God, who was God manifest in the flesh, who possessed deity as well as humanity, testified to his preexistence many centuries before he was born in the flesh, and in 2200 B.C. appeared to the brother of Jared on the mount and showed to him the form of the body in

which he would someday take upon himself human flesh. The Book of Mormon testifies to the literal truthfulness of the fact of his physical resurrection which above all other facts proves that Jesus was what he said he was. The Book of Mormon gives account of his three visits to the people of the American continent after his resurrection and ascension in Palestine. They heard his voice; they saw his physical body; they felt the healing touch of his hands; they examined, as Thomas did, the wounds in his hands and feet and side. As he dwelt among them in this resurrected body, they saw him heal their sick, bless their children, ordain those men who were to minister to them in his name after his departure. They heard his voice, the voice of the Shepherd of Israel, as he taught them and preached his doctrine.

The testimony of one small group of men, living in a remote age, in a geographically insignificant area (Palestine), as recorded in the Bible, has convinced many that Jesus lives. But many have also scoffed and disbelieved and doubted. Is the Bible so impregnably convincing that it could not use an added witness? The Book of Mormon gives an added witness and testimony of Jesus Christ which no one who loves the Lord and wants others to believe in him can possibly afford to overlook or ignore. It is the answer to modern skepticism which relegates Jesus to the realm of the mythical, or makes him only human. The Book of Mormon bears witness that Jesus is the Son of God and that he lives!

Because the Book of Mormon bears witness to the deity and historicity of Jesus, and contains a record of God's dealings with men on this continent, as the Bible records his working with men in the Old World, the Book of Mormon is an added witness to the Bible, establishing the truthfulness of what the Bible says, bearing witness that God does reveal himself to men and command them to write his revelation in Scriptures. We should believe the Book of Mormon because it is an added witness to the inspiration of the Bible.

We should believe in the Book of Mormon because like

the Bible it "persuades men to do good." There is something incongruous and inconsistent about the attitude which is willing not only to believe in but to quote as maxims the sayings of John Bunyan, Shakespeare, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Edgar Guest, or almost any other man who has produced wholesome writings of good moral tone which teach the Christian virtues and graces—and then at the same time utterly rejects and condemns with anathema the Book of Mormon, simply because its believers claim that it had a miraculous origin and that it is worthy to be regarded as Scripture. Is the world so good, so perfect, so moral, that it does not need any more books exhorting men to do good?

The Book of Mormon teaches faith in God and in Christ. It exhorts men to repentance. It teaches that the wages of sin for men and nations is death. It counsels love of neighbor, stewardship over material things, honesty, sobriety, chastity, monogamy, and family solidarity in the marriage relationship. It counsels the reader to develop the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness. It condemns pride, selfishness, adultery, intemperance and drunkenness, theft, murder, sorcery, and secret oaths. It teaches democracy in government and advocates both religious and political freedom so that each man may exercise his own God-given agency. It condemns disloyalty and treason to government, so long as government protects human rights. Any God-fearing, Bible-loving Christian can read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover, and never once take issue with its ethical and moral tone or teachings. In these teachings, the Book of Mormon establishes the truth of the Bible by giving an added witness and testimony to the laws of conduct which God has given to men. It also furnishes an inescapable object lesson to prove that those laws are at work in the world to condemn and destroy wickedness and to preserve righteousness, as it tells of the fall of two great civilizations which failed to live up to the principles laid down by the Book of Mormon.

We should believe in the Book of Mormon because it has a special witness and promise for the scattered peoples of Israel. There is no more pathetic people in the world today than the Jews, who for four thousand years have been enslaved, oppressed, afflicted, persecuted, tortured, robbed, massacred, and driven from place to place, with no home and no country they could call their own. It is well to remember, however, that the Jews are only one tribe of Israel, the tribe of Judah, and that since 721 B.C. ten and a half tribes of Israel have been sifted among all nations, scattered, lost to history. God has not forgotten his covenant with his people, Israel. The Bible bears witness in prophecy time and time again that all Israel shall be gathered together again and brought to a knowledge of her Redeemer, that the breach between Israel and Judah shall be repaired. The Book of Mormon is one of the means provided by an all-wise Father to assist in bringing about this happy result. The gathering of a few Jews back to Palestine is wonderful, but at best it is only a partial fulfillment of prophecy, for the promise is that *all* Israel shall come to a knowledge of her Redeemer and be gathered in one.

The Book of Mormon has comfort and promise for Israel and for the Jew. Because it was written by descendants of Joseph, it gives an important segment of history which no Jewish tradition or history knows anything about. The Book of Mormon is replete with additional prophecies and promises of the gathering and unification of all Israel, under the banner of Israel's Shepherd, Messiah, and King. It explains, as no book of science, fiction, or history can possibly do, the racial origins of the pre-Columbian inhabitants of America. It therefore has specific interest, information, and promises for the modern descendants of these ancient peoples, particularly those living in Mexico and Central America, who are the direct descendants of Book of Mormon peoples.

IT IS A BOOK OF AMERICAN SCRIPTURES

The Book of Mormon, because it is a book of American Scripture, written by Americans, about Americans, and for Americans, has some specific warnings and promises for the Gentiles who inhabit this choice land today. We are here by God's sufferance, for this is Joseph's land. The Book of Mormon says that America is a land of promise, a land choice above all other lands, that God purposely kept it from the knowledge of other nations for a specific purpose, and that the nations which came to it were led by his hand. It says that this shall always be a land of liberty for those who dwell here; that the inhabitants of this land shall always be free from bondage and captivity, as long as they keep the commandments which he has given them; that if they are ever brought down into captivity it shall be because of iniquity. It says that whosoever possesses the land must serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, or be swept off when the fullness of his wrath comes upon them and that the fullness of his wrath will come when they are ripened in iniquity. We would do well to heed carefully that warning. We must serve God on this land, or be swept off when we are ripened in iniquity. But the Book of Mormon also promises that if we do serve God, he will fight our battles, and that any nation which comes against this land shall perish.

The Book of Mormon gives much added light on the doctrines which are sometimes taught so vaguely in the Bible as to be the source of endless confusion and division. For example, some Christian denominations say that baptism is not necessary at all, some advocate sprinkling, some pouring, and some immersion. Which is right? All four of these opinions can be supported to a greater or lesser degree by Bible references, so the Bible alone cannot settle the issue. On the other hand the Book of Mormon contains clear and unequivocal teaching about baptism. If one accepts the Book of Mormon

as inspired Scripture there can never again be any doubt as to what is the purpose and form of baptism.

To give another example: at various times and places in the past nineteen hundred years, several so-called Christian denominations have either taught openly, or tolerated and condoned the practice of polygamy and concubinage. Though the overall teaching of the Bible is fairly clear on this subject, there are numerous incidents and passages in the Bible which can be used to excuse these practices. But the Book of Mormon leaves no room for doubt. It condemns polygamy and whoredoms and concubinage, calls them gross crimes and abominations in the sight of God. In a day of lax sexual morality, perhaps this is one more good reason why we should believe the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon has countless passages that give clear, reasonable, and beautiful exposition and teaching on such subjects as the nature of the Godhead, the nature of man, the fall and original sin, faith, grace, good works, probation, life after death, the resurrection of the body, the duty of man to the state and the state to man. Can there be any so narrow and so blind as to say that we need no more enlightenment on these subjects than is found in the Bible, when many centuries of Bible study has only made confusion worse confounded as 250 denominations read into the Bible their own traditions and preconceived attitudes, each differing from the other? The Book of Mormon, with its divine origin attested by the almost unbelievable miracle of its coming forth out of the dust to a needy and unbelieving world, could do much, if men would let it, toward bringing about that spiritual and doctrinal unity among Christians which all claim to desire so much.

These are a few of the reasons why we believe that the Book of Mormon is needed in today's world, and is worthy of men's belief, their loyalty, their obedience.

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Book of Mormon Evidences

Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; and whatsoever is more or less than this, is the spirit of that wicked one, who was a liar from the beginning. The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth. And John bore record of me, saying, He received a fullness of truth; yea, even of all truth, and no man receiveth a fullness unless he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments, receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth, and knoweth all things.—Doctrine and Covenants 90:4 b, c.

IN previous chapters we have discussed Bible prophecies foretelling the Book of Mormon, and some of the reasons why we think it worthy of belief. Now we proceed to a consideration of some of the many historical, archaeological, ethnological, and other scientific facts which corroborate the Book of Mormon story.

SOME HISTORICAL FACTS

Let us first establish a few historical facts about the Book of Mormon itself as background for our discussion. Joseph Smith claimed that during an angel visitation he saw in vision the hiding place of the plates which contained the record of the Book of Mormon. This was in September, 1823. He was permitted to go to the hill where they lay buried and see them, but was not allowed to take them from their hiding place until September, 1827, four years later. The copyright for the Book of Mormon was secured by filing the title page in June, 1829, which fulfilled the copyright law of that day.