

## Chapter 13

### Mesoamerican Scripture or Fraud?

#### **Another Testament to the Truth of the Bible**

This book has shown that the Bible is supported quite well by science and archaeology. This book is much needed in this day of scholarly doubt about the Bible. This book has also shown that many Bible prophecies point to Bahá'u'lláh. The Bible will thus bring many Christians, and others, to the Bahá'í Faith.

More evidence that the Bible is true comes from the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ—a record translated from ancient golden plates by Joseph Smith and then published in English in 1830. Chapter 9 showed that Mormonism confirms that the Bahá'í Faith is true and that Bahá'ís believe Joseph Smith was a seer. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, even said that the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is something that historians must settle. Thus he made no statement for or against it.<sup>1</sup>

What is the Book of Mormon about? It is a record called after the name of the prophet who compiled it from earlier records. His name is Mormon (one of the last Nephite prophets). The Book of Mormon is an amazing Christian record. It teaches the gospel of Jesus Christ. It also tells the story of some Israelites who left Jerusalem in 602 B.C. and were eventually led by God to Mesoamerica, which extends from northern Central America to Northern Mexico. The record gives an account of the descendants of these Israelites, and of how these descendants were eventually destroyed due to disobedience.

Why does this book defend the Book of Mormon? Because, if a strong case can be made that the Book of Mormon is true, a strong case can be made that the Bible is true. This is because, like the Bahá'í Faith, the Book of Mormon testifies that the Bible is the word of God. The truth is that if both of these Holy Books are true the evidence for God and magick will be much stronger than if just one or the other were true.

#### **The Book of Mormon: Is it proven to be fake?**

This chapter gives solid evidence that the Book of Mormon is true. Many anti-Mormons though claim that the Book of Mormon was plagiarized from “Manuscript Found” by Solomon Spaulding and from *View of the Hebrews* by Ethan Smith. But that claim has been disproven.<sup>2</sup> But since anti-Mormons often refuse to read both sides of the argument in a fair manner, they think they are right even when they are not. And, as you will see, whether the Book of Mormon is true or not is a complicated subject.

All the teachings in the record are virtuous. There are no weird or satanic teachings, and it has nothing to do with the dangerous cults that make headlines today. It even has good linguistic and archaeological support.<sup>3</sup> For instance, it contains about 200 names that are not found in the Bible or the apocrypha.<sup>4</sup> This is surprising, for surely if Joseph Smith were trying to make the names in the record sound Near Eastern and biblical, he would have relied heavily on those two sources. The Book of Mormon mentions many Hebrew, Egyptian, Arabic, Hittite, and Greek names from the ancient Near East. This supports the claim that it was written by prophets whose ancestors came from the ancient Near East.<sup>5</sup>

For example, the record mentions a prophet of God named Alma. The record was criticized because Alma is a female name in Latin. However, letters from Bar Kokhba and tablets from Ebla have since proven that Alma was a man's name in ancient Hebrew. Another example is Sariah. It was not known to be an ancient Hebrew name for a female until long after Joseph Smith died.<sup>6</sup> The record also mentions many ancient Egyptian names, such as: Paanchi and Pahoran. This is fitting since the record claims to have been written in reformed Egyptian.

But critics claim that reformed Egyptian does not exist. Many examples of such writing though are known.<sup>7</sup> For instance, scholars have discovered such language on pottery fragments at Arad, in texts at Tel Ein-Qudeirah, and in Semitic documents from Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

The book also has Hebrew qualities, such as a form of ancient Hebrew poetry called chiasmus and also many Hebraisms. This is good evidence that its authors were ancient Hebrews. Indeed, Joseph Smith could not have learned of chiasmus or Hebraisms from the Bible. This is because they were obscured in the translations available to him. In fact, he probably could not have learned of chiasmus or Hebraisms from any of the sources available to him. This is because he was poorly educated.<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> Indeed, the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, with the literal English translation from the golden plates written upon it, had many punctuation and grammar mistakes. This was due to the structure of reformed Egyptian and the Hebraisms. Its punctuation, grammar, spelling, word order, and so on, were thus changed; however, its teachings were not changed.

The many geographic details in the Book of Mormon give more evidence that it is true. One of the first scholars to match those details with a specific location is John L. Sorenson, an anthropologist who is a specialist in ancient Mesoamerican studies. These scholars analyzed all the verses in the record that name locations. They then determined the approximate distances between those locations and noted all landmarks (e.g., the narrow neck of land and the Sidon River, which the record says flowed northwards into the sea). In fact, they also considered other details, such as their relative elevations and climates. They then found that these descriptions fit perfectly with only one location: the geography and archaeological facts of Mesoamerica.

However, Sorenson's geography of the Book of Mormon requires compass directions to be skewed, so that: north is northwest; south is southeast, and so on. It has been suggested that this is due to the Hebrew manner of establishing compass directions or to the translation process from Hebrew/Egyptian into English, as a number of LDS scholars have explained in detail.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Joseph L. Allen has proposed a Book of Mormon geography that does not require a shift in compass directions. Also, Mesoamerica is the only place in the Americas where there is a narrow strip of wilderness (i.e., a mountain range) that runs from a sea east unto a sea west, as described in the record. This mountain range thus formed a natural barrier between the Nephites to the north and the Lamanites to the south.<sup>12</sup>

Still, despite the evidence given so far, perhaps some of you remain entirely skeptical because of the Smithsonian statement that attacks the Book of Mormon. (This statement will be discussed later in this chapter.) Those who investigated it thoroughly though found that many of the claims in that statement are not true. The Smithsonian does have great expertise in archaeology in general, but, apparently, they did not specialize in Mesoamerican archaeology when the statement was written. Also, LDS scholars are far more knowledgeable about the Book of Mormon than anyone at the Smithsonian.<sup>13</sup> Thus those scholars (such as Sorenson) who are experts on both the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican archaeology are the most qualified to make judgments in this area. Professor Sorenson has written books that prove the Book of

Mormon is archaeologically plausible.<sup>14</sup> The latest Book of Mormon scholarship is taking it from plausible to probable.

### **Arabian Geography and Archaeology**

The first book in the Book of Mormon gives the account of a prophet of God named Lehi, and of his family, who at God's command left Jerusalem in 602 B.C., traveled close to the Red Sea, and journeyed for three days "in the wilderness" unto a "continually running" river (1 Nephi 2:2-10). Lehi then named this river the "river of Laman," after one of his sons (1 Nephi 2:9). This river flowed into the Red Sea all year within a prominent valley, which he named in a similar manner the "valley of Lemuel," after another son (1 Nephi 2:10). This practice of naming places was common to Hebrews at this time.

George D. Potter in "A New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel" gives evidence that this place exists. He located a stream that runs year round, is three days journey through the wilderness from the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, and flows in an impressive valley called Wadi Tayyib al-Ism. As Nephi 16:11 states, provisions could be found in this valley, such as dates, berries, and grain. The Hebrew word Nephi used to refer to the "river of Laman" can also mean "stream." For more details see the article.<sup>15</sup>

After Lehi, his family, and Ishmael and his family, who had since joined them, left the valley of Lemuel, they headed southward for four days to a place they called *Shazer*, which means "a place abounding with trees and shrubs." Here they hunted and killed game for food (1 Nephi 16:11-14). Indeed, there is a place with trees and game at a four days journey from the candidate for the valley of Lemuel. After this, they traveled southward once more, staying close to the Red Sea in what they called "the most fertile parts of the wilderness" (1 Nephi 16:14). Indeed, a place called Qura Arabiyyah, a most fertile part of the land, exists right where the Book of Mormon tells us it should. Such fertile areas are rare in Arabia, so because these places match the record's descriptions it is evidence for its authenticity. Maps available in the United States when Joseph Smith translated the record gave no details about these places. They were unknown to the West. Americans at that time thought that Arabia was a vast desert. It would have seemed absurd to them for Joseph Smith to claim that these fertile places existed.

1 Nephi 16:34 says that after leaving "the most fertile parts of the wilderness" they traveled south-southeast to a place "called Nahom." This was probably in Yemen. The record states that from there they then traveled almost due east. There are three locations near each other in Yemen that contain the name Naham. These three sites are even near where the ancient Frankincense Trail turned east. This suggests that these sites were within a greater area that was once called Nahom. This is supported by the discovery in this area of three ancient sixth or seventh century B.C. altars that mention a place called *nhm*. Because ancient Arabic writing did not have vowels, this most likely refers to Nahom. The evidence even indicates that an ancient tribe lived at this location at that time.

After leaving Nahom, Lehi and his party went almost due east through much affliction (across the harsh desert) until, after eight years, they reached the ocean at a place they called Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:1-5). This place had a mountain, cliffs by the ocean, honey, trees, much fruit, ore with which to make tools, and fresh water (1 Nephi 17:5-11, 48). Based on those details, LDS scholars have identified three likely candidates for Bountiful: Wadi Sayq, Salalah, and Khor Rori. All three of these are almost due east from ancient Nahom.

Again, at the time of Joseph Smith, no one in the Americas would have thought that this

region of Arabia, considered a vast desert, could have had such fertile places. Certainly, the first part of the Book of Mormon (translated by Joseph Smith in 1829) contains information that was unknown to the uneducated Joseph Smith. It even contains information that was unknown to the West at that time. This section gives good evidence that the book has ancient origins.<sup>16</sup>

## Mesoamerican Geography and Archaeology

It is true that the Book of Mormon mentions few city and place names that are found in ancient Mesoamerican. So, if the record is true, why have more city and place names not been found that are mentioned in the record? Well, one problem is that most of the Mayan texts date to after A.D. 250. There are actually few texts that date to Book of Mormon times. And nearly all the texts that date to before A.D. 250 cannot be read.<sup>17</sup>

Another problem is that there has not been a continuity of city and place names from the time of the Maya unto the times of the Aztecs and Spaniards. The Mayan names for most of the Mesoamerican cities that date to Book of Mormon times are simply not known. And in the instances where the original names are known, we usually do not know their pronunciations, and, in some instances, we do not even know their locations. Furthermore, the present day names for many of the ancient cities of Mesoamerica were given to them by the Spaniards.<sup>18</sup> Not only that, many cities from Book of Mormon times are buried beneath later Mayan cities, which makes excavating the earlier ones very difficult and expensive. And only a small percentage of the sites in Mesoamerica have been excavated.<sup>19</sup>

Still, so far, at least eighteen names of sites in the record have been found in Mesoamerica. The sites are even in the right locations. More such discoveries are expected. For instance, of the two candidates for the Sidon River in Mesoamerica, the best is the Grijalva River, which natives called the *Xocalha* or “Fish River,” and Sidon River means “Fish River” in Hebrew. The record also mentions the waters of Ripliancum—meaning “large, or to exceed all”—as being in the land northward. And a vast area of waters called *Hueyapan*—meaning “large waters”—is located in the right place to be these waters on Sorenson’s and Allen’s geographies.<sup>20</sup>

Mormon 6:2, 4, 6, and 11 mentions a Hill Cumorah. Although anti-Mormons claim that Joseph Smith and early leaders of the Church identified it with the hill in New York where Joseph Smith found the buried plates, it is clear that those leaders were simply stating their opinions. (Still, some researchers have gone to great lengths to place the Book of Mormon lands in eastern North America. John E. Clark, however, has analyzed such geographies and has shown that they are not even plausible.)<sup>21</sup> The truth is that the Book of Mormon proves that the original Hill Cumorah was in Mesoamerica, and this proves that the Hill Cumorah in New York is simply named after it.<sup>22</sup>

Statements in the early LDS newspaper *Times and Seasons* do argue in one case that Lehi landed in South America, and in another case, that he landed in Central America. The evidence though proves that someone other than Joseph Smith made those statements.<sup>23</sup> The truth is that Joseph Smith placed the Book of Mormon lands in Mesoamerica, not in North or South America.<sup>24</sup>

The only plausible location for the Book of Mormon lands is Mesoamerica, which primarily includes Guatemala and southern Mexico. The Book of Mormon now has impressive support from many archaeological discoveries made since it was first published. It is now known that Mesoamerica is the only place on the continent that between 1800 B.C. and A.D. 400 had large cities, the right population density (in the millions), an advanced written language, and large-

scale warfare, as described in the Book of Mormon. The Indians Joseph Smith had knowledge of were far different from those written about in this record. It is remarkable that the record accurately describes the ancient Mesoamericans in such great detail.<sup>25</sup>

According to John L. Sorenson, the approximate shape and size of the Promised Land, as described in the Book of Mormon, is a perfect fit for Mesoamerica. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is the “narrow neck of land” between the land northward and the land southward.<sup>26</sup> Also, Mesoamerica is covered with ruins dated to the appropriate period—between about 1800 B.C. (the beginning of the Jaredite civilization) to A.D. 385 (the end of the Nephite civilization). Furthermore, 90 percent of the archaeological ruins of significance in the Americas that are from this time period are in Mesoamerica.<sup>27</sup>

The record says that the forefathers of the Nephites, Lamanites, and Mulekites (Book of Mormon peoples) settled in Mesoamerica soon after 600 B.C. This was during the Middle Preclassic Period (ca 1000-ca 500 B.C.). The Lamanites then destroyed the Nephites in A.D. 385. This was during the Early Classic Period (ca A.D. 250-ca 600). The dates for these periods though vary for different regions.<sup>28</sup> For instance, the end of the Early Classic Period in some places is about A.D. 400.<sup>29</sup>

The record states that the city of Nephi began to be built in the sixth century B.C. and that it was the major site in the land of Nephi. It also states that this land was in the land southward and in the southern highlands near the coast. The major Mayan city in the southern highlands near the coast was Kaminaljuyu.<sup>30</sup> Archaeologists thought that a small village was first built there between 1200 and 1000 B.C. But, if that were true, it would have become a city before the sixth century B.C. New radiocarbon dates though show that it was first inhabited between 800 and 700 B.C. The Late Las Charcas phase there then began around 600 B.C. This suggests that a new group arrived there at that time. This group was the Nephites, who, after about a century, turned this small settlement into a city.<sup>31</sup>

Anti-Mormons claim that the Book of Mormon teaches that there were no other people in the Americas when the Jaredites, and later, the Lehites, and others, arrived. Yet the record indicates that there were other people. For instance, its introduction says that the Lamanites were “the principle [i.e., the most important] ancestors of the American Indians.” The book also gives the Lamanites a rate of population growth that is only possible if there was intermarriage with natives, which also explains why it says that the Lamanites had dark skin. The record does not directly mention these natives because it is a more spiritual than secular history. However, it does mention ancient secular histories that must have directly mention these inhabitants. Still, a careful reading of the Book of Mormon shows that there were, indeed, inhabitants in the Americas before the settlers it describes arrived.<sup>32</sup> Understand, though, that all the Native Americans who embraced a false religion like that of Laman and Lemuel are called “Lamanites” (See: D&C 28:8-29; 30:6; 32:2; 54:8).

In addition, here are some other direct archaeological hits: Although the Maya existed for hundreds of years beforehand, they began to develop into a civilization during the sixth century B.C., which is when the Book of Mormon says that the Nephites and Lamanites began to develop into a civilization.<sup>33</sup> The core of the Mayan civilization along with its hieroglyphic writing began first in the southern highlands and then shifted to the north, in agreement with the Book of Mormon.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the Maya built their first cities in the highlands of Guatemala between about 500 and 400 B.C. This confirms that they were the Nephites and Lamanites, who built their first cities during that time, which, according to Sorenson’s and Allen’s geographies, happened in that very area.

The Book of Mormon says that between A.D. 32 and 250 its people experienced their greatest prosperity and peace followed by a minor collapse of civilization. Indeed, this has been confirmed by the archaeological record.<sup>35 36</sup> This was marked by a shift in power from the southern Maya to the Lowland Maya to the north, in agreement with the Book of Mormon.<sup>37</sup> There is even evidence of the intense warfare that resulted in the destruction of the Nephites towards the end of the fourth century A.D.<sup>38</sup>

The Book of Mormon, as touched upon, states that the two centers of civilization in the land southward began first in the southern highlands and then second down in the central part of the land to the north. These were the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla, respectively, which according to the record began to develop into a high civilization around 125 B.C. These things are now confirmed by archaeology. Then, from the central part of the land, between about 50 and 25 B.C., the culture expanded to the north-east, and then it expanded to the north-west into the land northward. Then the central part of the land was depopulated around A.D. 350. Yet this history was not discovered until long after Joseph Smith's death. How could he have known where and when the core of Preclassic Maya civilization began, when the Maya developed into a high civilization, and where and when that civilization then expanded? How could he have known when the central part of the land southward was depopulated?<sup>39 40</sup>

Furthermore, more than one hundred religious and cultural ties between Mesoamerica and the Near East have been documented. There is even evidence that Caucasians, or Semites (e.g., Hebrews), lived in ancient Mesoamerica. For instance, many bearded statues have been discovered in Mesoamerica that date to Book of Mormon times. This is surprising since Native Americans did not have beards, and some of them are clearly Caucasian, or Semitic. Further support for Semites in ancient Mesoamerica comes from Mayan art that depicts natives with light colored skin. In fact, Andrzej Wiercinski, an anthropologist from Poland, has discovered that many ancient Mesoamerican skulls have Caucasian features.<sup>41</sup>

Now, critics of the record claim that because the Maya practiced human sacrifice during Book of Mormon times there could not have been Christian Mayans (Nephites). The truth though is that, according to the record, the righteous Nephites were a minority among the Mayan people. Also, the Aztecs practiced human sacrifice much more than the Maya did. This practice did not become common until after Book of Mormon times.<sup>42</sup>

The record also gives the history of the Jaredites, whom the Book of Ether, within the record, says traveled across the ocean from their homeland in Mesopotamia to Mesoamerica at the time of the Tower of Babel (ca 1800 B.C.). These settlers were Akkadians (Jared and his family) and Sumerians (a few other families). They left southern Mesopotamia before the invasion of the Elamites and Amorites. And, because of the faith of Jared and his family, the Lord promised to not confound their language. This origin for the Jaredites is supported further by the fact that they have Akkadian and Sumerian names. How though did Joseph Smith include Sumerian names in the Book of Mormon, when the Sumerian language was not deciphered until many years later?<sup>43</sup>

According to most LDS scholars, the Jaredites, who were inhabitants of the "land northward" (Ether 10:20-21), were the Olmec civilization, which archaeology tells us began around 1800 B.C. in the land to the north-west of the Mayan civilization.<sup>44</sup> The Book of Mormon says that by about 300 B.C. civil war had destroyed the Jaredite civilization, except for a small remnant. Likewise, archaeology tells us that by about 300 B.C. the same thing had happened to the Olmecs. This is yet another direct hit for Joseph Smith.<sup>45</sup>

The date of about 1800 B.C. for the arrival of the Jaredites in Mesoamerica is even compatible with Ether 1:6-33, which lists thirty generations from right before the invasion of the Elamites and Amorites to the destruction of the Jaredites around 300 B.C. An average ancient generation was about thirty-three years, so twenty-nine generations plus eighty years for the life of Ether (the thirtieth generation) would be about 1,037 years.<sup>46</sup> Although this suggests that the Jaredites left the land of Babel no earlier than about 1337 B.C., one must note that three of the names in the genealogy are descendents of the previous person, not sons. These three gaps could quite possibly stretch the dates back to 1800 B.C. (with an average of about four missing generations per gap).

The Olmec king U-Kish Kan, a king of San Lorenzo, took the throne in 967 B.C. He must be the Jaredite king Kish, mentioned in the Ether 1 genealogies. He ruled about nineteen generations before the destruction of his people. An average generation is thirty-three years. Thus nineteen generations before about 300 B.C., with four missing generations between Hearthom and Aaron and four missing generations between Coriantor and Ether (Ether 1:6, 16), would place Kish's accession year to the throne in about 967 B.C. This suggests that he was the Olmec king U-Kish Kan.

Ether 10:20 states that King Kish's son Lib built the great Jaredite city of Lib, which was "by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land." According to the chronology just given, it was built around 900 B.C. Remarkably, that is when the great Olmec city of La Venta was built near the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which is the narrow neck of land, and upon the Gulf Coast, where the sea divides the land.<sup>47</sup> But how did Joseph Smith know that a major Olmec city was in this location? And how did he know it was built around 900 B.C.? The date of this city was not discovered until long after the Book of Mormon was published.

As stated, Mesoamerica must be the correct location for the Book of Mormon lands because it is the only place in ancient America where people were literate, as the Book of Mormon describes. The record states that its people used hieroglyphic writing. The earliest known Mayan writings (which used hieroglyphs) date to about 300 B.C.<sup>48</sup> It is plausible, then, that Israelites brought a reformed Egyptian hieroglyphic writing system to Mesoamerica in the sixth century B.C. and that it inspired the creation of the Mayan (Lamanite) writing system.

The record mentions cities, cement, roads, gardens, towers, temples, and multiple markets. The Mayan civilization had these things. But people in 1830 did not know that ancient Native Americans had them. Also, in 1830, when the record was first published, Mesoamerica was thought to have been a peaceful place during the Book of Mormon time period (1800 B.C.-A.D. 421). Why then does the record mention recurrent warfare involving tens of thousands of troops? Scholars now know that large-scale and repeated warfare did occur in Mesoamerica during that period.

The wars described in the record were usually between the eleventh and the third months. Yet this would be the coldest part of the year from Joseph Smith's perspective in New York. This is a bad time to conduct war there. But it is the best time to conduct war in Mesoamerica. This is because cultivation and harvest took place from the fourth to the twelfth month. The record also does not mention freezing or snow in the land, and it states that even on New Year's day it was very hot. This is evidence that its history took place in Mesoamerica. It also mentions volcanic eruptions in the New World at the time of Christ's crucifixion. This is another direct hit. Mesoamerica is the only place in the Americas that had volcanic eruptions that are dated within a margin of error that includes A.D. 32.<sup>49</sup>

## **Izapa: Tree of Life Stone?**

Izapa Stela 5 was found with many other stelae in Chiapas, Mexico near its border with Guatemala. Izapa, the site where it was found, dates from 300 B.C. to A.D. 350.<sup>50</sup> It has a sacred area with monuments aligned to significant astronomical points. According to Garth Norman, some of these stelae actually have dates carved on them that match all of the Jewish holidays that existed before 600 B.C. He even states that the two cubit measurements used at the site were also used in the ancient Near East.<sup>51</sup>

Amazingly, the scene on Stela 5 is very similar to the Tree of Life dream that the prophet Lehi had, which is recorded in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 8). The stela even has glyphs on it that probably represent the names of some people who were in that dream:

For instance, on Stela 5 an old man is shown facing a tree and above his head is a jawbone. This could be a name glyph for Lehi, since in the Valley of Lehi, Samson used a jawbone to kill one thousand Philistines (Judges 15). Another figure that faces the tree wears a headdress of grain, which in the Old World represented the Egyptian grain god Nepi—which suggests it is a name glyph for Nephi (one of Lehi’s sons). Furthermore, seated behind the proposed Lehi figure, there is an old woman, who wears a headdress, which appears to denote royalty. This is significant because the name of Lehi’s wife, Sariah, means “princess” in Hebrew. There is also another figure that faces the tree who likely represents Nephi’s elder brother Sam.

Accordingly, there are also two figures with their backs to the tree who most likely represent Laman and Lemuel. They are Nephi’s elder brothers who in the dream refused to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life. There is also another figure who appears to have partaken of the tree and yet has his or her back to it. This probably represents those who partake of the gospel and then turn away from it. Likewise, the final figure that faces the tree appears to be blind. This must represent those who are blind to the truth.

Furthermore, humming birds and fish are carved on the stela, and they probably represent resurrection and eternal life. It also looks like two cherubim are guarding the tree. But this is not all. There is even a river of water that flows at the bottom of the stela. It must represent the filthy waters in Lehi’s dream. And a line (the “rod of iron”) extends from the tree along what looks like a path just as in the dream. And finally, it seems the tree has twelve roots, which likely symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>52</sup>

Still, despite this solid evidence that the stela depicts Lehi’s dream, a new and supposedly much more accurate rendering of the picture engraved upon Stela 5 has led a number of Mormons to conclude that it has nothing to do with the Book of Mormon story. This is probably because the new drawing shows that some of the images on the stela are Pagan. However, the stela is difficult to interpret because it has become heavily eroded since it was first discovered.<sup>53</sup> Certainly, Book of Mormon scholars have written much about this stela, and the debate is not over. There is still strong evidence that this stone depicts Lehi’s dream.<sup>54 55</sup>

## **The Smithsonian Statement about the Book of Mormon**

In 1996, the Smithsonian Institute published a “Statement Regarding the Book of Mormon.” The statement claims that archaeology and history prove that the Book of Mormon is false. This section shows that the statement is wrong:

The Smithsonian scholars who wrote the statement did not study the record much or what Mormon leaders had taught about it. The Smithsonian claims that the Book of Mormon says that



all Native Americans are descendants of Israelite settlers of the New World. However, as stated, the book says in its introduction that they are the “principal,” or the most important, ancestors of the Native Americans. In fact, the record shows in other places, too, that when Lehi and his family arrived Mesoamerica was already inhabited.<sup>56</sup> Clearly, unless the Smithsonian Statement were written by scholars who were specialists in Book of Mormon and ancient Mesoamerican studies, it cannot be authoritative on the matter.

The Smithsonian Statement also makes other mistakes: For instance, it says that there was no Old World contact with the Americas prior to Columbus. The Discovery Channel though aired a documentary in 1997 called, “Curse of the Cocaine Mummies,” which indicated that there was pre-Columbian contact. This conclusion was made after scientists studied a number of Egyptian mummies dated between 1070 B.C. and A.D. 395 and found that they contained both cocaine and nicotine. (They analyzed hair, samples from deep inside the intestines, and so on, to make sure that their findings were not due to contamination.) So, because the only source for these two drugs is the Americas, this is solid evidence of pre-Columbian contact with the New World.

But this is not all. Pottery suggests that China and Japan also had pre-Columbian contact with the New World. Indeed, northern Pacific Ocean currents off the coast of Japan flow to Mesoamerica. This supports the Book of Mormon account of the Jaredites because they crossed the ocean from the Old World to the New World in 344 days. That is about how long these ocean currents would take to carry a boat across the northern Pacific Ocean to Mesoamerica. How did Joseph Smith know this?

Accordingly, many Old World practices are strikingly similar to those found in the New World, such as entombment within pyramids and other burial rites. Also, during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), Chinese astronomers used the same complex calculations to predict eclipses as the Maya did. Furthermore, Old World symbolism is strikingly similar to that used in the New World. For instance, the Mayan calendar has a 260-day period called a *tzolkin*, and part of its twenty day signs has a sequence of animal names in the same order as those found in ancient Asian lunar zodiacs. The Asians and Mesoamericans even relate the four directions to colors, plants, animals, and gods in a very similar way. This is thus probably not due to chance. There is also evidence that the technology of producing bark paper was brought to Mesoamerica from Indonesia in ancient pre-Columbian times.

The Bat Creek Inscription gives more evidence that there was ancient contact between the Old World and the New World. This inscription was found in Bat Creek, Tennessee in 1889. Although Jerald and Sandra Tanner claim the inscription is written in Cherokee, it is actually written in Paleo-Hebrew and has been dated to Book of Mormon times (A.D. 70-135).<sup>57</sup>

The statement also claims that certain plants and animals mentioned in the Book of Mormon did not exist in Mesoamerica during Book of Mormon times. There is evidence though that some of the plants and animals in question did, in fact, exist in ancient Mesoamerica during Book of Mormon times. Future discoveries could provide evidence that the other problematic plants and animals mentioned in the record did exist there during that period. Also, some of the anachronisms may be due to how settlers of a new, far away land often name new animals after similar animals found in their homeland. The record may have even been translated into English using anachronisms in some places to make sense to modern readers.

## **Book of Mormon Anachronisms**

Anti-Mormons claim that the anachronisms in the record prove that it is fiction. This claim is

like the attacks that anti-Christians made against the Bible. For instance, the Bible was attacked for stating that there were lions in ancient Israel. This was because no lion bones had been found there. But new discoveries of lion bones have since vindicated the Bible. Anti-Mormons thus use a double standard; indeed, the types of arguments used against the Book of Mormon could just as easily undermine the Bible. Certainly, if anti-Mormons would do their homework, they would have far less criticisms to use against Latter-day Saints. Remember, just because no evidence has been found for some claim does not mean that that claim is false. If that were the case, even the Bible would be in trouble.

Here is a list of so-called Book of Mormon anachronisms, each of which has been answered by LDS scholars: horses, cattle and cows, oxen, swine, barley, wheat, silk, linen, warfare, tents, breastplates and head-plates, shields and bucklers, thick clothing and animal skins as armor, steel bows, swords and scimitars, metallurgy (brass, iron, and steel), baptism, golden plates, coins, the compass, glass, wooden submarines, and the headless struggle for breath mentioned in Ether 15:29-32. Although anti-Mormons claim that these anachronisms disprove the Book of Mormon, those attacks have been sufficiently answered. Here are some examples:

Ether 9:19 mentions elephants. This account dates to the second millennium B.C. Although there is no proof that elephants lived in Mesoamerica during that time, elephants are mentioned in legends, and ancient elephant sculptures were discovered in Mexico and Arizona. This is not that surprising since mammoths and mastodons lived in the Americas until about 6000 B.C. Indeed, a *Scientific Monthly* article, "Men and Elephants in America" (October 1952) by Ludwell H. Johnson, III, actually supports the idea that elephants existed in America till about 1000 B.C. Thus future discoveries should vindicate the Book of Mormon on this matter.<sup>58</sup>

The record also mentions horses. But it does not say they were numerous in the New World. Evidence now suggests that horses did exist in the Americas during the time the record places them. It is certainly well-known that mid-sized horses existed in the Americas at least until about 8,000 B.C. It is also possible that the Israelite settlers gave the name "horse" to a similar animal.<sup>59</sup>

Alma 1:29 mentions silk. Was it in the ancient New World? The Spanish mentioned that three types of silk were in the New World before they arrived: one from rabbit hair (taken from their abdomens), another apparently from a wild silkworm, and a final type made from ceiba tree pods. There is no anachronism here.<sup>60</sup>

What about swords? The Spanish also mentioned that swords were in Mesoamerica before they arrived. They were made of extremely sharp obsidian shards affixed to a wooden shaft—which the Maya called a *macuahuitl*.<sup>61</sup> In fact, scimitars are even seen in artwork and on artifacts from ancient Mesoamerica.

What about metallurgy? Well, the record does not say that its people smelted metals in Mesoamerica. But it is known that other types of metallurgy were practiced in the Americas during Book of Mormon times, specifically in Peru and the Cauca Valley of Columbia, beginning around 2000 B.C. and 1000 B.C., respectively. Because it is known that these Peruvians were in contact with Mesoamericans, they probably shared this technology with them. In fact, Mayan languages have words for metal as far back as 1000 B.C. and the Olmecs did as far back as 1500 B.C.<sup>62</sup>

What about the mention of steel? The KJV translates the Hebrew word for bronze as "steel" four times. Bronze is copper hardened with tin. The word steel means "hard." Thus in the early nineteenth century, and earlier, bronze was called steel. But steel is only mentioned in the record before 400 B.C. The technology may have thus been abandoned after that time. It is also possible

that this metal was a natural meteoric nickel-iron alloy (a form of “steel”). A native chronicler wrote that the Tarascans of Mesoamerica wore steel helmets. Thus this may have been bronze or this nickel-iron alloy.<sup>63</sup>

The Book of Mormon mentions baptism for the remission of sins before the time of Jesus Christ. This is not an anachronism. The Maya and Jews practiced pre-Christian baptism. For instance, the Qumran community did in connection with repentance, preparation for the Judgment, and admission to their order. In fact, one’s entire body, including hair, had to be immersed for it to be valid just as with Mormon baptisms.<sup>64</sup>

The record also mentions coins. But there were no coins in the Americas during Book of Mormon times. The word “coins” though was not in the record until nineteenth century editors inserted it. Actually, in Mesoamerica, weight units of metal were used as money, not coins. Thus Alma 11:7 mentions weight units of silver and gold in relation to barley and all types of grain.

Ether 15:29-32 states that after Shiz was decapitated he raised up while struggling for breath. Critics claim this is impossible, but many reliable accounts of this phenomena exist. A professor of neuropathology even confirmed that this is possible, at least if the cut was up high enough (“the midbrain level”).<sup>65 66</sup>

LDS scholars have also addressed the other so-called Book of Mormon anachronisms. Those explanations are easily accessible on the Internet (e.g., see the footnotes for this section). The growing evidence will lead mankind to accept this record as holy scripture.

## **DNA and the Book of Mormon**

As explained, the Book of Mormon Israelites were a minority among the Native American Indians. Those Israelites were not the ancestors of all Native Americans. Thus LDS leaders who claimed that all Native Americans were descended from these Israelites were simply stating their opinions. Many anti-Mormons still claim that the record says that all Native Americans were descended from Israelites. As stated, the Book of Mormon suggests that Mesoamerica was already inhabited when the Akkadians/Sumerians (the Jaredites) and then the Israelites (the Nephites, Lamanites, Mulekites, etc.) settled there.

Genetic research does not prove that the Book of Mormon is fiction. Although during the fourth century A.D. those called “Lamanites” numbered in the millions, most of them were the descendants of native, non-Israelite populations. The Nephites, on the other hand, who were mostly of Israelite blood, not only did little intermarrying with the natives, but also were exterminated by the Lamanites near the end of the fourth century A.D. Thus the Near Eastern DNA among the later Maya was quite limited. The genetic criticisms of the record have been debunked by well-trained Mormon geneticists. Still, genetic evidence proves that the first Native Americans came to the New World from East Asia between about 19,000 B.C. and 17,000 B.C.

It is thus difficult or perhaps impossible to find Near Eastern DNA among the genes of the majority (those of East Asian origin). Some evidence though of Near Eastern DNA among the Maya has been found. These facts and others thus show that DNA evidence does not disprove the Book of Mormon, so long as one does not erroneously assume the record claims that most or all Native Americans are of Near Eastern origin.<sup>67</sup>

## **Linguistic Evidence**

Many of the languages spoken by the ancient Native Mesoamericans are from the family of

languages called Uto-Aztecan (UA). However, this family is not related to the Mayan language family, which is the family to which the language or languages spoken by the Lamanites belonged. The Book of Mormon states that some Israelites settled in the New World, and indeed, there is evidence of Hebrew influence upon Uto-Aztecan. There is even evidence that proto-Aztecan, the first Uto-Aztecan language, was created in the sixth century B.C. when the Hebrew speaking Nephites and Mulekites arrived.

According to Brian Stubbs, a specialist in Near Eastern and Native American languages, around one thousand links between Uto-Aztecan and Semitic languages have already been found (primarily with the Northwest Semitic languages, which include Hebrew). For example, in Hebrew/Semitic “lightning” is spelt *baraq* and in UA it is spelt *berok*; in Hebrew/Semitic “shoulder” is spelt *sekem/sikm* and in UA it is spelt *sikum/sika*; in Hebrew/Semitic “kidney” is spelt *kilyah/kolyah* and in UA it is spelt *kali*; and in Hebrew/Semitic “water” is spelt *mayim/meem* and in UA it is spelt *meme-t*. Indeed, because about 30 to 40 percent of the UA lexicon has Hebrew/Semitic elements (including some Egyptian), these correlations cannot be due to chance. And much more evidence that Hebrew and Egyptian influenced ancient Mesoamerican languages should be found.<sup>68 69</sup>

In fact, more linguistic evidence also supports the record. Also, more and more Book of Mormon names should be linked with ancient Mesoamerican names. For instance, the meaning of the name of each Book of Mormon city may be found to match the meaning of the Aztec name of each corresponding ancient Mesoamerican city, or the name of each Book of Mormon city may be found to be pronounced in a similar way to the Mayan name of each corresponding ancient Mesoamerican city. Whereas the study discussed above compared Hebrew and other Semitic languages to the Uto-Aztecan languages, the next few paragraphs compare Book of Mormon names with Mayan names and words.

For instance, the Book of Mormon mentions a Jaredite king named “Shule,” pronounced in the same way as the Mayan place name “Xul.” (This “x” or “sh” sound is common in Jaredite names and in parts of ancient Mesoamerica.) Furthermore, one of the Twelve Apostles mentioned in the book was named “Kumen,” and an ancient city in Mesoamerica was also called “Kumen.” Also, the record states that the Nephites fought Gadianton robbers and their leader “Lachoneus,” which may have occurred in the place called “Lachana” today.

The record also mentions the “hill Shim.” The word *shim* means “corn” in Mayan. The hill Shim could thus be the hill called “Cintepec,” which means “corn hill” in Nahuatl. It is even in the right location to be the said hill. Moreover, a Lamanite king mentioned in the record is named “Lamani,” and an ancient city named “Lamani” is in Mesoamerica and dates to the right time period. Also, the record mentions a wilderness called “Hermounts,” which probably means “wilderness of wild beasts.” Thus there is a wilderness in Mesoamerica called “Tehuantepec,” which also means “wilderness of wild beasts.” It is even in the right location.

Furthermore, one day in the Mayan calendar and one letter in the Hebrew alphabet are each represented by a hand glyph. The name of the next day on the Mayan calendar and the name of the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet are both spelled similar. And the name of the next day on the Mayan calendar and the name of the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet both have the same meaning.<sup>70</sup>

The state of Tabasco in Mexico is in the right place to be the land of Bountiful. The Hebrew word *tob* means “bountiful earth,” and the Hebrew word *shoa* means “abundant prosperity.” These two words are thus linked by the vowel “a” to form the word *tobashoa*. This thus suggests that Tabasco is Bountiful.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, according to most LDS scholars, the state of Oaxaca,

Mexico is in the land northward and in the land of Desolation. Because Oaxaca comes from *huaxyucac*, which means “desolation” in Nahuatl, this suggests that it was part of the land of Desolation.<sup>72</sup>

But this is not all. The following names of Jaredite kings mentioned in the Book of Mormon are also Mayan names or words: “Kib”—also the sixth month in the Yucatec Mayan calendar; “Shule” (mentioned above)—also the name of the sixteenth day on the Mayan 260-day calendar; “Akish”—like the Quiche word *kaqix* (recall that the “x” is pronounced “sh”); “Com”—which means “armadillo” or “log stool” in Tzotzil Maya; “Kish”—also found in Yucatec Maya, Chol Maya, and Palenque hieroglyphs; and “Shiblon”—“Shib” in Shiblon is very common in Yucatec Maya.

And finally, “Akish” probably has the same meaning as the Quiche Mayan word *kaqix*, which means “the scarlet macaw parrot.” Likewise, the Aztecs called the Tuxtla mountains of southern Veracruz “Toztlan,” which means “the place of the macaw parrots.” Thus this must be the “wilderness of Akish” (Ether 14:3-4, 14). Then there is “the land of Heth” (Ether 8:2). It is probably Het, which is near Toztlan, which is the wilderness of Akish. Thus, these two Book of Mormon locations have been found in Mesoamerica.<sup>73</sup>

## **Book of Mormon Names**

As mentioned, there are about 200 names in the Book of Mormon that the Bible and the apocrypha do not mention. In fact, many of them have even been authenticated as ancient Near Eastern names. Here are some examples:

Paankhi (popular in the seventh century B.C.) and Korihor are ancient Egyptian names. This was not known until the end of the 1800s. The record also mentions the ancient Egyptian names Pachus and Pahoran. The second name is that of an eminent Judge mentioned in the record, which is the name of an ancient Egyptian ambassador to Palestine. Also, the Book of Mormon mentions the names Corihor and Korihor, and two similar names existed in the ancient Near East. Furthermore, the record mentions Hem, and it says he is the brother of Ammon. This is significant because, in the Old World, Hem means “servant,” specifically of Ammon. The record also mentions an apostle named Mathoni. That name is similar to two names known in ancient Tyre. The record also mentions the prophet Lehi’s son Nephi, whose name is pronounced the same as the Egyptian grain god Nepi.<sup>74</sup>

Many of the names in the record follow Egyptian patterns. Many of them thus begin with “Pa” or contain “mor,” “hor,” or end with ~m or ~n. Furthermore, many of the names in the record are in ancient records found in southern Egypt in the Elephantine region. This is significant because, after Lehi left Jerusalem, some Jews hid in the wilderness (from the Babylonians) and then fled to this very location—the region of Elephantine in southern Egypt.

Furthermore, names that end with ~m are most often found in the Jaredite period of the Book of Mormon (1800-300 B.C.), whereas names that end with ~n are most often found during the Nephite and Lamanite period of the book (602 B.C.-A.D. 421). This is significant because these endings are typical of ancient Near Eastern names during the time periods the record ascribes them to. Many of the record’s names also end in ~iah and ~ihah, an ending that Palestinian names had around the time of the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi (602 B.C.), but at no other.

Also, names compounded with the theophoric Baal element are found throughout the Bible but do not appear in the Book of Mormon. This is significant because the Jews stopped using such names right before the beginning of the sixth century B.C. This is supported by the fact that

none of the almost 400 names from this time period found on the Elephantine papyri are compounded with Baal. And it is also true that there are ancient Arabic, Hittite, and Greek names in the book. For instance, Lehi is an ancient Arabic name found among the people who lived in the desert area south of Jerusalem.

Nebuchadnezzar carried a list of names after his expeditions in Syria and Palestine that shows that Egyptians often named their children after hero kings of the past. Indeed, a Nephite general mentioned in the Book of Mormon named his son Aha (meaning “warrior”), which was the name of the second pharaoh of Egypt. Likewise, the Book of Mormon names Himni, Korihor, Paanchi, Pakumeni, Sam, Zeezrom, Ham, Manti, Nephi, and Zenoch are all Egyptian hero names.

Much more could be said about the record’s names. For instance, it contains ancient Near Eastern pendant names like Laman and Lemuel. These were common names for the two eldest sons in a family. It also mentions other names that have meanings that match the activities of the individuals who bore them. But the information given will suffice. The evidence is there for those who wish to see it.<sup>75 76</sup>

### **The Golden Plates: Eyewitness Testimonies**

Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Joseph Smith all testified that they saw a light, brighter than the sun itself, in which was seen an angel, who held before them the golden plates (from which the Book of Mormon was translated), so that they could behold them. David said it was a soft light. He recounted that the angel turned the leaves of the plates before them. We are also told that the voice of God then said: “These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear.”<sup>77</sup> Joseph and another witness, Martin Harris, later knelt and received a similar experience. Martin stated that he saw the angel and the plates as clear as one can see their own hand before their face.

There were also eight other official witnesses. While the plates sat on a stump in the woods, these eight witnesses were shown them. They were then allowed to handle the plates. They said there were curious characters upon them. They also each described the weight and dimensions of the plates and noted that there was a sealed portion. They said that rings in a ‘D’ shape held the individual plates together. There was even a consistency to what they described.

Here is more evidence that these accounts were true: These witnesses never denied their testimonies, even though some of them left the Church. The Three Witnesses even led lives consistent with their testimonies.<sup>78</sup> This section thus confirms that the plates existed. But there is still one problem: What happened to the plates? Well, Joseph Smith wrote that, after he was done with the translation, an angel took them from him for safe keeping.

### **The Size of the Plates: Could the Book of Mormon fit?**

Some critics claim that the plates were too small for the Book of Mormon to have been engraved on just one-third of their surfaces. (The other two-thirds of the plates were sealed.) Now, the plates were described as thinner than common tin. Common tin in Joseph’s day was typically 0.02 inches. A calculation at 0.015 inches per plate plus air space equals 0.03 inches per plate. There were thus about 266 surfaces with each plate being six by eight inches. Therefore,

using a compact written language like reformed Egyptian, it is reasonable that the Book of Mormon could have fit upon one-third of the record's surfaces.<sup>79 80</sup>

### **The Weight of the Plates: Could one man carry them?**

Some critics claim that the way Joseph and others described the plates indicates they would have been too heavy for one person to carry. Joseph claimed though that he did carry them. The plates were light enough to carry because they were made of tumbaga (gold alloyed with copper), not pure gold. Yet, when washed with acid (e.g., citric acid), tumbaga, although less dense, still looks like pure gold. In fact, the witnesses never said that the plates were pure gold. Usually, they are simply called "golden plates."

So, given room for air space between the individual sheets that made up the golden plates and because they must have been made of tumbaga, they probably weighed about sixty pounds. On the other hand, a pure gold block of the same proportions would have weighed about 200 pounds, but less if it consisted of a stack of gold sheets. Thus, eyewitness descriptions of the plates (i.e., their dimensions and the thickness of individual sheets) show that one person could have carried them.<sup>81 82</sup>

### **Book of Mormon: Plagiarism from the KJV?**

Many critics point out that the Book of Mormon (BofM) often uses King James English. However, the witnesses of the translation process stated that Joseph Smith did not copy from the Bible. But the Lord did cause him to translate the record into King James English via the Urim and Thummim and the Seer Stone (the miraculous tools Joseph translated with). Likewise, Jesus and the apostles quoted the Old Testament from the Bible of their day; therefore, the BofM was translated into King James English to match the style of scriptural writing that was popular in Joseph's day. Nonetheless, when it quotes the Old Testament, not only do those quotes often vary from the KJV, but they also often have ancient manuscript support. This gives even more evidence that the record is authentic.<sup>83</sup>

Next, many examples are given of differences between BofM quotes from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah and their counterparts in the KJV. These BofM quotes are even shown to have ancient manuscript support. Many other examples could be given. However, for my purposes, the examples given will suffice.

2 Nephi 12:16 states, "upon all the ships of the sea, and upon all the ships of Tarshish . . ." But Isaiah 2:16 in the KJV states, "upon all the ships of Tarshish," whereas the Greek Septuagint (LXX) states "upon the ships of the sea." Thus this BofM quote combines both the KJV and the LXX reading.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, 2 Nephi 27:2 states "and with the flame," whereas Isaiah 29:6 in the Masoretic Text (MT) states "and the flame." The BofM here is confirmed by the Syriac text. 2 Nephi 24:4 states, "and it shall come to pass in that day." This is not found in the KJV. But it is confirmed by the Codex Alexandrinus, which states, "and thou shall say in that day."

Also, in the following verses, the BofM follows the LXX and the Syriac text and adds "and" to the KJV reading, which shows that it was omitted from the Masoretic Text: 1 Nephi 20:13 (Isaiah 48:13); 2 Nephi 7:9 (Isaiah 50:9); and 2 Nephi 8:18 (Isaiah 51:18). The other such example is 2 Nephi 13:14, which states, "for ye have eaten up the vineyard and the spoil," while Isaiah 3:14 in the KJV states, "for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil." Also, the "and"

added in 1 Nephi 20:5 to the KJV of Isaiah 48:5 is confirmed by the literal reading of the MT.

Furthermore, 2 Nephi 12:20 states “he hath made,” whereas Isaiah 2:20 in the KJV states “they made.” The BofM here is confirmed by the Codex Alexandrinus, which states “he made.” 2 Nephi 8:15 states “my name,” whereas Isaiah 51:15 in the KJV states “his name.” The BofM here is confirmed by the LXX and the Latin. 2 Nephi 15:5 states “and I will break down the wall thereof,” whereas Isaiah 5:5 in the KJV states “and break down the wall thereof.” The BofM here is confirmed by the LXX, which states “and I will pull down its walls.”

2 Nephi 27:32 states, “And they that make a man an offender,” having added “And they” to the KJV of Isaiah 29:21. The BofM here is confirmed by the LXX and the Syriac text. 2 Nephi 15:7 states “and behold oppression,” whereas Isaiah 5:7 in the KJV states “but behold oppression.” The BofM here is confirmed by the literal reading of the MT.<sup>85</sup> 2 Nephi 13:9 states, “and they cannot hide it,” whereas Isaiah 3:9 in KJV states, “they hide it not.” The BofM here is confirmed by the Syriac text.<sup>86</sup>

### **Plagiarism from “Manuscript Found”?**

The anti-Mormon book *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* claims that parts of the Book of Mormon were plagiarized from Solomon Spaulding’s early nineteenth century book “Manuscript Found.” This claim is made even though no early nineteenth century person could have known many of the archaeological facts found in the record.

This anti-Mormon book claims that Spaulding wrote two manuscripts. They claim that the first was called “Manuscript Story” and that the second was called “Manuscript Found.” The fact that there was only one manuscript though is documented in this section and the next. The so-called first manuscript is available for study at Oberlin College, in Oberlin, Ohio. Anti-Mormons claim that the Book of Mormon was derived from the second manuscript. This claim is made because the first manuscript, “Manuscript Story,” has no plagiaristic connections to the Book of Mormon. However, Solomon Spaulding’s widow, Mrs. Spaulding Davison, and her daughter always mentioned only one manuscript. This is good evidence that there was no second manuscript.<sup>87</sup> Also, the anti-Mormon affidavits and statements collected after 1830 that claim there was a second manuscript have been discounted by LDS scholars.

For example, in *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* eight so-called “affidavits,” collected by Philastus Hulburt, are described that claim parts of the Book of Mormon were plagiarized from “Manuscript Found.” However, most of the affidavits are not dated, and none of them are witnessed or signed. These so-called witnesses supposedly lived in Conneaut, Ashtabula County, Ohio. Yet none of them appeared in the 1810 census, and only two appeared in the 1820 census. (Censuses were every ten years.) Mr. Spaulding died in 1816. Also, another reason these affidavits are unreliable is because they were written over twenty years after the fact. They are also unreliable because Hulburt wrote the affidavits himself, after asking questions that led the witnesses to give the answers he wanted.<sup>88</sup>

### **Sidney Rigdon: Did he steal Spaulding’s second manuscript?**

Sidney Rigdon was an early convert to the LDS Church who later became Joseph Smith’s First Counselor. As stated, anti-Mormons believe Spaulding wrote a second manuscript called “Manuscript Found.” But eyewitnesses said it was written on “foolscap” paper, which actually fits the size of “Manuscript Story.” The meaning of the word “foolscap” used by the authors of



the anti-Mormon book in question was only valid before the 1700s. They claim that Rigdon stole Spaulding's second manuscript and then used it to help Joseph Smith write the Book of Mormon. Yet there is no evidence that Joseph Smith met Rigdon until after the Book of Mormon was published.

While Joseph translated the ancient record, Rigdon lived 300 miles away in northern Ohio. The authors of *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* believe Rigdon stole the supposed second Spaulding manuscript from a Mr. Patterson's printing shop located in Pittsburgh. Rigdon moved to Pittsburgh in 1822. That is six years after Spaulding died. And although this printing shop was not officially closed until February of 1823, there is no proof that Rigdon ever entered it. He probably moved to Pittsburgh after the shop itself was closed, but before the business was legally ended.

Long after Rigdon was excommunicated from the church, his son John Rigdon asked him in 1865 if the stories of his writing the Book of Mormon were true. Rigdon replied that they were not. Also, after Rigdon's death, his widow, who was present when Rigdon first saw the Book of Mormon, testified that he did not help to write it. Likewise, Joseph Smith's sister Katherine Salisbury testified that she had never seen or heard of Mr. Rigdon until months after the Book of Mormon was published. These facts thus show that Rigdon did not use a manuscript of Spaulding's to help Joseph Smith write the Book of Mormon. There is much more evidence to support these facts, but this should suffice.<sup>89 90</sup>

## **Computer Wordprint Studies**

There are sophisticated computer tests now that can identify the true authors of books and other writings. These tests have even been applied to the Book of Mormon. The most reliable of these studies, performed by a Jew, a Mormon, and an agnostic, began in 1980 and took seven years to complete. There was also an earlier Book of Mormon wordprint test, whose results were published in 1980.<sup>91</sup>

These studies show that Joseph Smith did not write the Book of Mormon. These tests even concluded that Solomon Spaulding and LDS associates of Joseph Smith like Oliver Cowdery did not write it either. Not only that, the tests indicate there were twenty-four authors, as the record claims it had. It was also discovered that the more time there was between Book of Mormon writers the more their writing styles are different. These things could not have been faked by Joseph Smith, since computer wordprint programs did not exist in 1830. This, along with the Hebrew writing characteristics called chiasmus and Hebraisms, thus shows that the Book of Mormon is an ancient record. Jerald and Sandra Tanner (two famous anti-Mormons) have written an article on wordprints that they claim disproves these results, but their paper has since been refuted.<sup>92</sup>

## **Was the Book of Mormon copied or dictated?**

There is about 25 percent of the original manuscript of the record still in existence. This manuscript was carefully analyzed. This proved that it was not written by copying from another source. Instead, it was written down by scribes as Joseph Smith dictated his translation of the plates unto them. We know this is true because of the nature of the errors. For example, when Joseph said names, they were written phonetically. Thus, sometimes, due to a name being spelled differently than it sounded, they were crossed out on the manuscript and immediately written

correctly. In fact, the original manuscript shows that most of the corrections were made in this way because the scribe miswrote what Joseph Smith said.

There is also evidence that Joseph Smith worked with no less than twenty words at a time and that his scribes read the text back to him. (Oliver Cowdery did by far most of this scribal work.) The original manuscript also indicates that Joseph could see the translation word for word and letter for letter, although not in standard English. This indicates in light of how the original manuscript contains many more Hebraisms than the published Book of Mormon that the translation he saw was literal.<sup>93</sup> Also, surprisingly, in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where the book was translated, the closest library at which Joseph and others could have checked their facts if they had written the original manuscript was over 120 miles away. Thus this also confirms that the book was not copied from or based upon other sources.<sup>94</sup>

### **Evidence of a Divine Translation Process**

According to witnesses, a portion of the golden plates was translated with the Urim and Thummim. This device is described in the Bible.<sup>95</sup> The words Urim and Thummim in Hebrew mean “Light and Perfections.” The rest of the unsealed portion of the plates, however, was translated using what is called a seer stone. In fact, about eight pages a day were translated over a period of about 63-70 days. This is not nearly enough time for Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to have written it.

Also, Joseph Smith’s wife, Emma, said that “[he] could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictat[e] a book like the Book of Mormon.” She also said that after a break he would start right off at the correct place without looking at the manuscript or having it read to him. Although a curtain was sometimes used to keep visitors from viewing Joseph and his scribe during translation, normally there was no such thing, as witnesses make clear. In fact, the scribes were always able to see Joseph and the plates as he dictated.

However, the translation was not automatic. Joseph Smith had to think it through before the translation would appear. In fact, the translation had Joseph’s poor English grammar, and it was written in the common English of the time (*Young Men’s Manual*, 1903-1904, p. 71). Later, statements will be given that suggest Joseph received the translation instantly, but an in-depth study of the accounts shows that that is not true.<sup>96</sup>

D&C 8:2 describes the translation process, “Yea, behold, I will tell you [the translation] in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.” The Lord continues in D&C 9:7-9 with:

Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me.

Moreover, in 1891, two years before his death and long after his brother Joseph Smith had died, William Smith testified to a Mr. Peterson and Mr. Pender about how the Book of Mormon

was translated. William had long before left the Church; however, during the interview, they learned among other things of the Urim and Thummim and of the breastplate to which it was attached. William said that the Urim and Thummim was like a pair of glasses with silver rims twisted into a figure eight shape with two stones between these silver rims. He said a rod was attached to the right shoulder of the breastplate. This rod was then connected to the silver rims. Thus wearing the breastplate and leaning forward one could then look into the two stones, as one looks into a pair of glasses, and translate. The “Urim and Thummim” and the “breastplate” was a divine tool used for “making decisions,” as stated in Exodus 28:29-30.

Likewise, Oliver Cowdery, one of the official witnesses of the golden plates, wrote: “Day after day I continued to write uninterrupted from his mouth as he translates with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, interpreters, the history, a record called the Book of Mormon.”<sup>97</sup> Then, in 1848, close to the end of Oliver’s life, he told Rueben Miller that, “I wrote with my own pen the entire Book of Mormon, except for a few pages, as it fell from the lips of the prophet, as he translated it by the gift and power of God, by means of the Urim and Thummim, or as it is called by that book, holy interpreters.”<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, David Whitmer, another witness who saw the golden plates, wrote near the end of his life:

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph would put the seer stone into a hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the lights. In the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down, another with the interpretation would appear. Thus, the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God and not by any power of man. (David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, p. 12)

In addition, Martin Harris, another witness who saw the golden plates, was reconverted to the Church toward the end of his life by Edward Stevenson. After this reconversion, Mr. Stevenson wrote this about Martin:

By the aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the prophet and written by Martin. And when finished he would say “written,” and if correctly written that sentence would disappear and another would appear in its place. But, if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraved on the plates, precisely in the language then used. (George Reynolds, *The Myth of the Manuscript Found*, p. 91)

And finally, Joseph Smith’s wife, Emma, also described how the record was translated. Here is an excerpt from an interview with her that appeared in the *Saints Herald* in 1879. She said, in response to the following questions:

**Question:** “Had he not a book or manuscript from which he read or dictated to you?”

**Answer:** “He had neither manuscript nor book to read from.”

**Question:** “Could he not have had and you not know it?”

**Answer:** “If he had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me.”

**Question:** “Are you sure that he had the plates at the time you were writing for him?”

**Answer:** “The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen tablecloth which I had given to him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates, as they lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.”<sup>99</sup>

This section thus shows that this was a supernatural translation process and not any kind of plagiarism or fakery. The Book of Mormon is indeed a true and sacred ancient record.

### **Changes to the Book of Mormon**

Some of the spelling errors that had to be corrected occurred because some of the words that were dictated sounded the same as other words but were spelled differently. For instance, when Joseph said “strait” or “straight,” they both sounded the same, and indeed, Oliver always wrote both of them as “strait.” Also, in 1830, English spelling in the United States was not yet standardized, so when it was later on, the older ways of spelling used in the earliest editions of the Book of Mormon had to be corrected. Nevertheless, most of the changes to the Book of Mormon were grammatical.

More errors occurred while copying the original manuscript to the printer’s manuscript. Also, even more errors were made while E. B. Grandin, who was somewhat unfriendly to the Church, typeset the book. Some of these errors were due to instances where the typesetter’s eye momentarily left the page and then came back to a similar looking but wrong spot on it. Other errors were made because Oliver’s handwriting was sometimes difficult to read. For instance, Oliver’s “r” and “n” and his “b” and “l” were difficult to distinguish, and “joy” was written in the manuscript in such a way that it looked like “foes.”

There were also deletions, such as: *that* (188 times), *the* (48 times), *it came to pass* (46 times), *and* (40 times), and *and had* (29 times). Additions though were less common, such as: *of* (12 times), *is* (7 times), and *the* (7 times). The sentence structure was also changed in many places (probably due in part to Hebraisms). Still, no addition or deletion changed doctrinal or archaeological details.

One change to the Book of Mormon that was misrepresented concerns Alma 7:10. This verse now states that Christ would be born “at Jerusalem which is the Land of our Forefathers,” whereas an earlier version read, “at Jerusalem, which is in the Land of our forefathers.” Yet we know Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Anti-Mormons, by pointing out how this earlier version is different than the present edition, claim that the Mormon Church changed the original meaning of this verse to correct it. Yet, the change is not a problem, for today Alma 7:10 reads exactly as it did in the first edition. Indeed, this verse is simply saying that Christ was to be born in the land of Jerusalem, for Bethlehem was in what was called, in ancient times, “the land of Jerusalem,” as confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Still, there were other problematic changes. For instance, in 1840 Joseph changed 2 Nephi 30:6 from “a white and delightsome people” to “a pure and delightsome people,” as it reads

today. The reading “white” is a literal translation from the reformed Egyptian. The intended meaning in the original language though was “pure.” The word “white” is thus often symbolic of purity, for “to make white” can mean “to purify.” Most editions after the 1830 edition perpetuated the literal reading until 1981, when it was uniformly changed.

Furthermore, in Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1, it read “Benjamin” where it now reads “Mosiah.” It is likely though that King Benjamin was not alive during the time period these two verses refer to. So, Joseph Smith corrected this error in 1837. This error probably occurred sometime between the completion of the original manuscript and the first printed edition.

And finally, Joseph changed 1 Nephi 11:21, 32 and 13:40. He added the words “the son of,” even though the original wording was correct. This change makes the meaning of the verses more clear. For example, 1 Nephi 11:21 originally said: “Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father!” Although anti-Mormons claim that this meant Jesus is the Eternal Father, the original wording simply meant that Jesus is the Lamb of God the Eternal Father. So, to make this clear, it now reads: “Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even *the Son of* the Eternal Father!” (Italics mine).<sup>100 101 102</sup>

## **Jesus Visited America: Native Accounts**

The Book of Mormon states that Jesus descended from the sky and then ministered to the righteous in Mesoamerica after his resurrection. So it must be asked: Are there ancient Native American accounts of this? The answer is yes. There are accounts of an ancient white, bearded god named Quetzalcoatl, who was known to different natives by different names, that seem to be describing Jesus.

Some researchers claim that this white, bearded god was a Pagan god who had nothing to do with Jesus. Still others claim that the early Spanish chroniclers Christianized Indian history to gain converts. Yet, despite such claims, there is still good evidence that Jesus is the white, bearded god of the American Indians, such as those of southern Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The original account though was later corrupted by Pagans who associated human sacrifice and war with this god.

The meaning of *quetzal-coatl* is Feathered Serpent (although *quetzal* also means “precious”).<sup>103</sup> But he was not just a local deity but instead was worshipped by natives in many areas. This means that he had greater importance than local deities. Another thing that needs to be understood is that many priest-kings took upon themselves the name of Quetzalcoatl. So these must be separated from the original accounts. Yet even amidst the many contradictory accounts of Quetzalcoatl, there is a pre-Columbian tradition that Quetzalcoatl: took part in creation, is the bread of life (thus his association with maize), assists and teaches the dead, shed his blood to save mankind, died upon a tree, resurrects the dead, and is associated with Light.<sup>104</sup>

Jesus Christ was probably associated with a flying serpent to symbolize the resurrection (flight) and redemption (symbolized by how snakes shed their skins). The name also probably represented how Jesus came down from heaven (feathers) to earth (serpent). The association of serpent symbolism with Jesus Christ is even found in John 3:14 and Numbers 21:6-9. After a number of Israelites had been bitten by “venomous snakes,” Moses held up a “bronze snake” upon a staff so that those who had been “bitten by a snake [who] looked at the bronze snake” in faith would be saved (NIV). This symbolism from the Exodus story became especially important to the Nephites, because they had taken their own journey unto a Promised Land similar to how the Israelites left Egypt, journeyed in the desert for many years, and then entered Canaan.

In fact, more evidence that Jesus visited Mesoamerica comes from Mayan traditions and writings that refer to the cross. According to Peter Martyr D’Anghera, the Maya associated the cross with “a very beautiful man,” “a man more radiant than the sun [who] had died upon a cross.” Mayan traditions and writings even associate the cross with the Tree of Life and with God. Indeed, there are many ancient stone crosses and crosses depicted in ancient art in Mesoamerica that the Maya associated with such things. There are even ancient crosses that each have a quetzal bird above them. This is significant because the name of this bird is part of the name **Quetzalcoatl**. These crosses each have a quetzal bird above them to represent the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>105 106</sup> There is much more evidence that Jesus visited the Americas, but it will not be given in this book.

However, two more anti-Mormon arguments will be addressed: The first is the claim that because human sacrifices were performed at the temple of Teotihuacan soon after its construction, which was dedicated to Quetzalcoatl, this proves that Quetzalcoatl cannot be Jesus. But there is one problem with their argument: This temple dates to about A.D. 200, which makes it an apostate temple built when nearly all the Book of Mormon peoples were in a state of apostasy (4 Nephi 1:22-34). The original teachings of Quetzalcoatl were then very corrupted.

Another anti-Mormon claim is that Quetzalcoatl dates to no earlier than about A.D. 1000. The speculation is that white, bearded Vikings came to Mesoamerica, where their leader became known as Quetzalcoatl. This is supported by the fact that a Toltec ruler named Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl lived around that time. The problem though is that Quetzalcoatl is mentioned in Mesoamerican records from long before this.<sup>107</sup>

## **A Final Note**

Many people claim that Mormonism is unbiblical. After reading many anti-Mormon emails, articles, and books, it is now clear that their claims are false. The truth is that anti-Mormons bend scripture to suit their needs (whether consciously or not). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is actually entirely biblical.<sup>108</sup>

Now, anti-Mormons often claim that Mormons teach salvation by works. The truth though is that Mormons teach that salvation is a free gift that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit then helps each convert to obey the commandments. Things like prayer, scripture study, baptism, taking the sacrament, and performing temple ordinances also help each person to magnify the gift of salvation. But each time a person sins they temporarily lessen or even lose that salvation. They must then ask in faith for the free gift of salvation again each time they sin. This eventually leads to eternal salvation.

This chapter gives a small portion of the evidence that supports the Book of Mormon. An intense search over many years has shown me that anti-Mormonism is false—however good the people involved with it may be. Joseph Smith was inspired by God and the Book of Mormon is true.

Many books have been written in response to anti-Mormon falsehoods. For example, there is *The Truth About “The God Makers”* by Gilbert W. Scharffs. There are also many sites online that respond to anti-Mormonism, such as: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, F.A.I.R., Jeff Lindsay’s LDS FAQ pages, and Kerry A. Shirts’s Mormonism Researched Page. Of course, you will also be edified by official publications of the Church and by publications from Deseret Books.

This book could give much more evidence that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true and that Joseph Smith was inspired by God. It could also answer many other anti-Mormon attacks. However, the LDS scholars and apologists already mentioned, and others, have dealt with those attacks quite well. The most powerful way though to know whether or not the Book of Mormon is true is to ask God about it in prayer. I have asked God to reveal to me the truth about both the Book of Mormon and the Bahá'í Faith. The Holy Spirit has revealed to me in a most profound manner that they are both true.

## Conclusion

There are amazing correlations between ancient Mesoamerican history and the Book of Mormon. For instance, the Olmec civilization began around 1800 B.C. and ended around 300 B.C. It is also in the land northward from the later Mayan civilization. This corresponds with the history of the Jaredites, who were located to the north of the Lamanites. The Maya began to develop into a civilization between 600 and 500 B.C. The Maya began along the southern Mexican and Guatemalan coast and then expanded northward, with their power base eventually shifting northwards. This is exactly what happened to the Nephite and Lamanite civilizations, according to the Book of Mormon. The Maya developed into a high civilization around 125 B.C. That is when the Nephite and Lamanites developed into a high civilization.

There are many other archaeological direct hits in the Book of Mormon. For instance, the account of the travels of Lehi and his family around 600 B.C. correspond with many geographic details of the ancient Near East that were unknown in the West at the time of Joseph Smith. Many personal and place names that were unknown in the West during the mid-nineteenth century are mentioned in the record and have been authenticated as ancient Near Eastern or Mesoamerican names or words. The geography of the record is also a perfect match to the geography of Mesoamerica, including its overall shape and size, the narrow strip of wilderness, the Sidon River, the narrow neck of land between the land northward and the land southward, the waters of Ripliancum, the land of Bountiful, the land of Desolation, the wilderness of Hermounts, the wilderness of Akish, and the hill Shim.

The complicated chiasmus and Hebraisms in the record also confirm its ancient origins. There is such a thing as reformed Egyptian. One thousand links between Mesoamerican languages and Semitic languages (e.g., Hebrew and Egyptian) have been found. There is also no evidence that the book was plagiarized from other sources. There were no significant changes made to the record. Computer wordprint studies even confirm that the book has ancient origins. Many eyewitnesses testified that the golden plates existed. The record states that Jesus descended to minister to Native Americans. This is confirmed by the Native American accounts of Quetzalcoatl.

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