



Type: Magazine Article

The Tapestry of the Ages

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Source: *The Instructor*, Vol. 103, No. 11 (November 1968), pp. 458-461

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

Abstract: Traces the succession of those who kept the records of the Book of Mormon until Moroni gave them to Joseph Smith.

*Year in, year out, a careful loom was weaving
The history of a people and their land—
Metallic fabric tracing out a pattern
That few could know or even understand.*

*But One who saw all history as ageless
Knew well it would endure through years ahead
To serve another time, another people,
Long centuries after weavers dropped the thread.
—Burl Shephard.*

*The Book of Mormon historians kept
the thread of their history unbroken,
knowing that they were weaving . . .*

The Tapestry of the Ages

by Goldie B. Despain

From the time Lehi sent his sons, Nephi, Laman, Lemuel, and Sam, back to Jerusalem to secure the brass plates from Laban, we can trace in bold relief the hand of God in keeping, preserving, and bringing the Book of Mormon to the world today. Nephi, the first to keep the record, says:

. . . Having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. (1 Nephi 1:1.)

Lehi had fled Jerusalem, with his family, after the Jews there sought his life because he testified of the warnings of God to them. They had brought

(For Course 6, lessons of November 10 and 17, "Nephi Was a Prophet" and "Alma Was a Prophet"; for Course 8, lesson of January 26, "God's Will Be Done"; for Course 12, lesson of January 26, "A Leader Is Obedient"; for Course 14, lessons of December 8, 15, 29, and January 5, "Book of Mormon"; for Course 16, lesson of January 19, "Other Scriptures"; for Course 18, lessons of February 2 and 9, "The Book of Mormon" and "Getting Acquainted with the Book of Mormon"; for Course 30, lesson of November 3, "Divinity of Book of Mormon"; and of general interest.)

no records of religious significance with them, so Lehi directed his sons to return to Jerusalem and secure the brass plates containing Jewish and family history.

This was a fearsome and hazardous mission. Under the rule of the weak King Zedekiah, a new aristocracy, rich and wicked, had taken over Jerusalem; among these was the wealthy and powerful ruler, Laban, a relative of Lehi. His power and strength were greatly feared; but at night, in a narrow street, the Lord delivered Laban into Nephi's hands. After slaying Laban, Nephi put on his armor and deceived Zoram, Laban's servant, into unlocking the treasury and delivering the brass plates into his hands. Then he and his companions returned to Lehi in the wilderness, carrying the precious record of the Jews and a genealogy of their forefathers.

From Nephi to Benjamin

Fifty-five years later Nephi turned the records over to his brother Jacob. The records Nephi had been keeping were called "the small plates of Nephi." Nephi told Jacob to write little of the secular history of the people on these plates, because this history would be kept on other plates, called "the large plates of Nephi." (Generally, from then until the reign of King Benjamin, the kings kept the large plates and the prophets kept the religious record on the small plates.) Nephi admonished Jacob to preserve the records and hand them down from one generation to another.

When Jacob was near death, he told his son Enos to take charge of the plates. And he says: "I told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me, and he promised obedience unto the commands." (Jacob 7:27.) Enos was a spiritually great man who hungered after the word of the Lord and prayed mightily for his people. When he grew old, he faithfully handed the plates to his son Jarom. And so the record continued.

Amaleki, the ninth from Nephi to keep the records (note the names of other recorders on the chart), had no sons; therefore, he gave the small plates to the righteous King Benjamin. This prophesying took the brass plates (the plates of Laban), and the small and large plates of Nephi into his keeping. He taught his sons the importance of the brass plates:

. . . My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God. For it were not

possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates. . . . (Mosiah 1:3, 4.)

"The Interpreters"

Just before King Benjamin's death, his son Mosiah was proclaimed king at a great assembly of all the Nephites.¹ Right after this, Mosiah was given the sacred artifacts—the brass plates, the plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director which had led Lehi and his people through the wilderness.

Mosiah's sons preferred to continue in missionary labors, so Alma the younger, the son of Alma, was chosen, following Mosiah, to keep the records. Before Mosiah turned all the records and sacred things over to Alma, he took the plates of gold found by King Limhi's people and translated them.

And now he translated them by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow. Now these things were prepared from the beginning, and were handed down from generation to generation, for the purpose of interpreting languages. (Mosiah 28:13, 14.)

. . . After King Mosiah had done these things, he took the plates of brass . . . and conferred them upon Alma . . . yea, all the records, and also the interpreters . . . and commanded him that he should keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people, handing them down from one generation to another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem. (Mosiah 28:20.)

A Wise Purpose

The words of Alma when he turned the records over to his son Helaman indicate that each record keeper knew what he was about. The records were kept "for a wise purpose," Alma told his son, and he added:

. . . It has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another . . . and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon. (Alma 37:4.)

Realizing what his son might be thinking, Alma said to him:

Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in

¹See "King Benjamin," *The Instructor*, centerspread, April, 1967.

me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and . . . were it not for these things that these records do contain . . . Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer. (Alma 37:6, 9.)

In the 36th year of the reign of the Judges over the Nephites, Shiblon took the records from Helaman the elder. Before Shiblon's death he gave the sacred objects to Helaman the younger, son of Helaman. Except for the parts of the records which Alma had forbidden to go forth, Helaman had the records written and sent out to all the nation. (See Alma 63:12.) And though parts of the records were withheld from the people, Helaman declared that all the records were to be kept and handed down.

Preservation of the Record in Wartime

Three hundred and five years after the coming of Christ to the Nephites, Ammaron, the 21st record keeper, received the records from Amos the younger. Fifteen years later Ammaron was directed to "hide up the records which were sacred—yea, even all the sacred records which had been handed down from generation to generation . . . even until the three hundred and twentieth year from the coming of Christ." (4 Nephi 48.)

At this time Ammaron approached Mormon, a boy of about ten years, and said to him, "I perceive that thou art a sober child, and art quick to observe." (Mormon 1:2.) Then Ammaron continued to explain to Mormon that when he became 24 years old he should go to the land of Antum and take the sacred records from the hill Shim. Mormon was to take only the plates of Nephi and add to them all that he had seen happen among the Nephites up to that time.

When the wars with the Lamanites became more fierce, Mormon took all the records from the hill Shim and added to them the history of his own times. Years later, from the large plates of Nephi, which had accumulated to a great number over the years, Mormon made an abridgment of the Nephite history.

Seeing his people scattered and suffering, Mormon petitioned the Lamanite king to allow the Nephites to gather together in the land Cumorah, by the hill called Cumorah, to fight. This favor was

(Concluded on following page.)

granted; and so, 384 years after the coming of Christ, all the Nephite people gathered to the land of Cumorah. Mormon knew this would be the last battle of his people, and he recorded their destruction.

The Last Record Keeper

Then, having been warned of the Lord not to let the records fall into enemy hands, Mormon tells how he "hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hands of the Lord, save it were these few plates [the small plates of Nephi and Mormon's abridgment] which I gave unto my son Moroni." (Mormon 6:6.)

After Moroni received the records, he found 24 gold plates in the hill Cumorah. These plates were a history of the Jaredites, who had lived in the land of promise even before Lehi came. Moroni made an abridgment of these 24 gold plates; this is called the Book of Ether. Under the Lord's direction, Moroni placed the Book of Ether with the small plates of Nephi and his father's abridgment. After this, to complete Mormon's record, Moroni added the Book of Moroni. Before Moroni buried all the records he wrote:

... Behold, I am Moroni . . . the son of Mormon . . . And I am the same who hideth up this record unto the Lord . . . And blessed be he that shall bring this thing to light; for it shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; yea, it shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of darkness, and come unto the knowledge of the people; and it shall be done by the power of God. (Mormon 8:12, 13, 14, 16.)

Fourteen Hundred Years Later

Joseph Smith, after praying for light and knowledge from God, received a number of visits from this

same Moroni; and over one thousand and four hundred years after Moroni sealed up the records in the hill Cumorah, he delivered them into the hands of Joseph Smith.

In his account of Moroni's visit, Joseph says:

He [Moroni] said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants; also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim. . . . (Writings of Joseph Smith, 2:34, 35.)

(Here again are the interpreters which were handed down from generation to generation with the records. This Urim and Thummim was the same as that used by the brother of Jared, because it was provided by God for the express purpose of translating the Jaredite and Nephite records.²)

In the forepart of the Book of Mormon, under "Origin of the Book of Mormon," we read:

Joseph Smith, through whom, by the gift and power of God, the ancient Scripture, known as THE BOOK OF MORMON, has been brought forth and translated into the English tongue. . . .

Clearly defined is the mighty and ever-guiding hand of God our Father, weaving gospel truths into history with a fine thread through centuries of wickedness and sorrow and destruction, bringing to us in these last days the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ as it was taught in ancient America.

²See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*; Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1966; page 818.
Library File Reference: BOOK OF MORMON—HISTORY.



"We did find upon the land of promise . . . beasts of every kind." (1 Nephi 18:25.)

Pictograph of horse found in Capitol Reef, Utah. Date unknown.

The Book of Mormon historians kept the thread of their history unbroken, knowing that they were weaving . . .

The Tapestry of the Ages

1 NEPHI TAKES THE BRASS PLATES



2 NEPHI GIVES THE RECORDS TO JACOB

Nephi, to 546 B.C.
 Jacob, 546 B.C. to (Jacob 1:2-4)
 Enos, to 422 B.C. (Jacob 7:26, 27)
 Jarom, 422 B.C. to 362 B.C. (Jarom 1:1)
 Omni, 362 B.C. to 318 B.C. (Jarom 1:15)
 Amaron, 318 B.C. to 280 B.C. (Omni 3)
 Chemish, 280 B.C. to (Omni 8, 9)
 Abinadom, to (Omni 10, 11)
 Amaleki, to 200 B.C. (Omni 12)



(From Amaleki to King Benjamin, Omni 25)

3 KING BENJAMIN GIVES THE RECORD TO MOSIAH



King Benjamin, 200 B.C. to 125 B.C. (Omni 25)
 King Mosiah, 125 B.C. to 91 B.C. (Mosiah 1:10-16)

4 KING MOSIAH GIVES THE RECORDS TO ALMA

Alma, the younger, 91 B.C. to 73 B.C. (Mosiah 28:11, 20)
 Helaman, the elder, 73 B.C. to 57 B.C. (Alma 37:1-20)
 Shiblon, 57 B.C. to 53 B.C. (Alma 63:1)
 Helaman, the younger, 53 B.C. to 39 B.C. (Alma 63:10, 13)
 Nephi, 39 B.C. to 1 B.C. (Helaman 3:37)
 Nephi, the apostle, 1 B.C. to 34 A.D. (3 Nephi 1:2, 3)
 Nephi, 34 A.D. to 110 A.D. (Heading 4 Nephi)
 Amos, 110 A.D. to 194 A.D. (4 Nephi 1:19, 20)



Amos, the younger, 194 A.D. to 306 A.D. (4 Nephi 1:21, 22)

5 AMMARON COMMISSIONS 10-YEAR-OLD MORMON



Ammaron, 306 to 320 A.D. (4 Nephi 1:47) (Hid records in Hill Shim)
 Mormon, 320 A.D. to 385 A.D. (Mormon 1:1-4)

6 MORMON GIVES THE RECORDS TO MORONI

Moroni, 385 A.D. to 421 A.D. (Mormon 6:1-6)



7 ANGEL MORONI DELIVERS THE RECORDS TO JOSEPH SMITH



Joseph Smith received the records in 1827 A.D.

Dates and name of record keepers are in *The Story of the Book of Mormon* by George Reynolds; Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1957; pages 205, 206.