



Type: Magazine Article

Some Important Book of Mormon Questions

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 44, No. 9 (September 1941), pp. 528, 569–571

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

Abstract: Advances several questions and answers about the Book of Mormon, including: Are all the Indians Lamanites? No. Did any people survive the battle of Cumorah? Yes. Did the Book of Mormon people occupy the greater part of the western hemisphere? No. Is it true that the Nephites and Lamanites spent most of their time at warfare? No. Do archaeologists accept the Book of Mormon and use it as a guide in discovering ruined cities? No.

Some Important BOOK OF MORMON Questions

By THOMAS S. FERGUSON
The Itzan Society

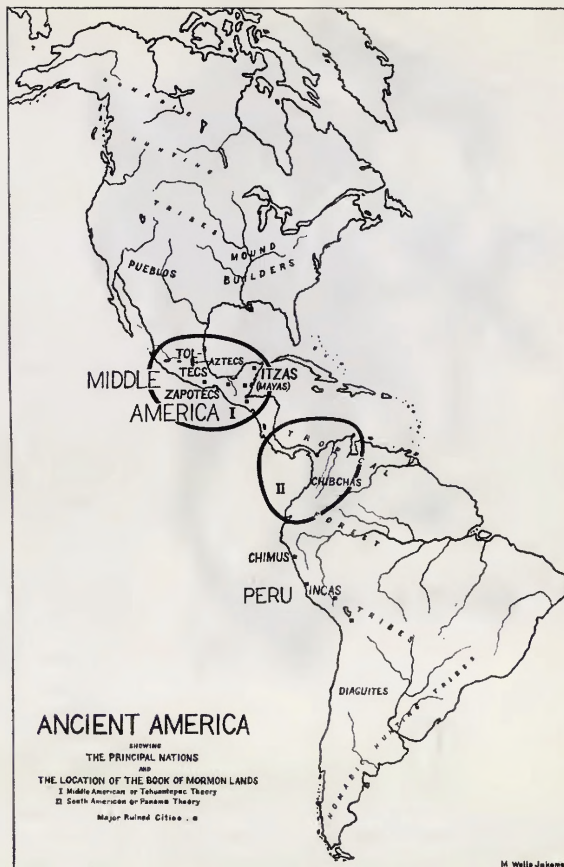
THE interest of the world in the Book of Mormon is greater today than it has ever been. This ancient American scripture is considered by many to be one of the most unusual and powerful books published in modern times. From its sacred writings the world can find the basic principles and laws of life which, if followed widely enough, would lead to the solution of the world's most perplexing problems. It is, of course, self-evident that the first achievement of each Latter-day Saint who would like to explain the Book of Mormon to the world is full understanding of its contents. The interested and inquiring mind of the modern investigator is not satisfied with explanations which are vague, unsound, and illogical. Those asking questions often put the answers to test and find them wanting.

How many Latter-day Saints can intelligently discuss the following typical questions: Are all the Indians Lamanites? Did any white people survive the battle of Cumorah? Did the Book of Mormon peoples occupy the greater part of the western hemisphere? Is it true that the Nephites and Lamanites spent most of their time at warfare? Does the scientific world accept the Book of Mormon and use it as a guide in discovering ruined cities? These questions are discussed below.

It may safely be said that all the Indians are not Lamanites. The Book of Mormon itself tells us that other nations besides the Jaredites, Nephites, Mulekites, and Lamanites were to be brought to this western hemisphere by the Lord. Shortly after the colony of Lehi arrived in America, Lehi uttered the following prophecy:

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THIS MAP BY DR. M. WELLS JAKEMAN INDICATES TWO POPULAR THEORIES CONCERNING THE LOCATION OF BOOK OF MORMON ACTIVITIES. OTHER SCHOLARS HOLD OTHER VIEWS ON BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY, SOME WIDELY DIFFERING FROM THOSE INDICATED ON THIS MAP. (See also Editor's Note and Article on page 526)



THROUGH the years, since it made its first appearance in March 1830, the Book of Mormon has been one of the most discussed books of the century in or out of the Church. Scholars, both Mormon and non-Mormon, continue to express their views on it in all its phases. The author of this article here presents some of his own ideas as to some things we should be mindful of as we contemplate some of the external evidences of the Book of Mormon. The author is a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley, and an active member of the Berkeley Ward.

Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever.

But behold, when the time cometh that they shall dwindle in unbelief, after they have received so great blessings from the hand of the Lord. . . .

Yea, he will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten. (2 Nephi 1: 9-11.)

It is known that those whom the Lord brought out of the land of Jerusalem soon broke the commandments. They violated the condition upon which the agreement rested, and the breach would seem to end the obligation of the Lord to preserve this land for the Nephites and Lamanites.

Were "other nations" brought unto the Book of Mormon peoples, and, if so, who were they? Do the Indians possess the blood of any "nations" other than the Nephite and Lamanite peoples? Many anthropologists who have made a study of this subject are of the opinion that among the Indians of today there is a strong infiltration of other races. If they are correct, then but relatively few Indians are pure Lamanites. To this conclusion, however, there appear to be many exceptions.

Many Latter-day Saints are of the belief that after the battle of Cumorah there were no white people left alive and that there was no continuation of culture or building in ancient America. This belief is maintained in the face of direct statements in the Book of Mormon that many Nephites survived the Book of Mormon period. For example, Moroni, writing more than fifteen

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"Understanding Shall Keep Thee"

matter to bring about this effect.

And lastly, knowing that one has the power to increase eternally in intelligence and righteous power, one looks continually at the effect each act has upon his immortal character. That which detracts tends to be avoided; that which exalts and enhances tends to be cultivated. Greed, vice, immorality, lying, and hatred do not find place in the life of a man whose greatest aim is to prepare for a future life of association with Deity. Such a man bends his efforts to develop his character, his will, and his spirituality, by avoiding these evils. Worldly ambitions and powers, for their own sake, do not in the least attract him.

The surprising effect is that while one is preparing for such a future life, he automatically and untiringly toils for social, economic, and political advancement. In working for his eternal welfare, he is wholeheartedly engaged in good works and has no time or effort to waste on anything that will not help him and others to reach this ultimate goal.

As a result of making these comparisons, one is led to the conclusion that knowledge alone, being only an implement in the hands of its possessor, will not of itself produce the effects my atheistic friend predicted.

Only when people obey eternal principles and laws governing human conduct, will this earthly sphere be cleared of vice, immorality, greed, and other forms of evil. Only then will higher standards of civilization and culture be realized. Neither knowledge nor common philosophies can accomplish this colossal task.

Faith in a Supreme Being, an understanding of His purposes, and a knowledge of our relationship to God and to each other will motivate action that will not only make this world cleaner and finer and its inhabitants more intelligently happy, but will also prepare them for a greater and happier life in the hereafter.

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years after the battle of Cumorah, says that there were still Nephites alive:

Now I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished; and I make not myself known to the Lamanites lest they should destroy me.

For behold, their wars are exceedingly fierce among themselves; and because of their hatred *they put to death every Nephite that will not deny the Christ.* (Moroni 1:1-2.)

It is obvious that some Nephites were denying the Christ to save their

lives, and it is very possible that there may have been some who escaped or who were in such distant, isolated areas that they were not involved in the war.

The greatest building period of the mighty empires of the Mayas and Toltecs of Mexico and Guatemala was between 500 and 1000 A. D. These great civilizations flourished

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6 CARS DIED

IN OVERHEATED
DEATH VALLEY
TO PROVE THAT

YOURS CAN LIVE LONG

..."Forward the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!" he said
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

—from Lord Tennyson's famous poem,
THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

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SOME IMPORTANT BOOK OF MORMON QUESTIONS

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after the Book of Mormon period had closed. However, there is some remarkable evidence which tends to prove that the ruling classes of both these famous post-Book of Mormon peoples were of the white race. For example, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, a royal Indian of Mexico, writing in about 1600, tells that the rulers of the Valley of Mexico as late as 1100 A. D. were white and bearded. This seems to have been true also of the ancient Itzas, the ruling people of the Mayas.

How great an area was occupied by the Nephites and Lamanites? For about nine hundred and fifty of the thousand years of Nephite history, the Nephites and Lamanites occupied the same limited area. The Nephites held the land of Zarahemla and the Lamanites the neighboring land of Nephi. Both of these lands together probably comprised only a few thousand square miles of territory. It was probably but two or three hundred miles between the heart of the land of Nephi and the heart of the land of Zarahemla. This may be concluded because it was but a twenty-one-day journey on foot for a lost company which included women and children. (Mosiah 23:2 and 24:20, 25.) These lands were separated by a narrow strip of mountain wilderness in which was located the springs that constituted the headwaters of the River Sidon. The Sidon flowed down from the highlands and through the land of Zarahemla on the north and on to the sea. The entire area, including Nephi, Zarahemla, and the wilderness, was almost entirely surrounded by water. (See Alma 22.)

Some careful students of Book of Mormon geography are of the view that the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla constituted but a few thousand square miles, that they were not very far apart, and that they were located somewhere in the central region of the Americas. Two theories of their location are indicated on the accompanying map.

Book of Mormon populations were also probably much smaller than is commonly supposed. It is interesting to note that during all Nephite history there was mentioned no influx of additional white population from the outside world. The Nephite situation was much different

from our own recent Church history, which has seen countless boatloads of migrants arrive from the old world. It should also be carefully observed that at the very close of Nephite history, after a thousand years had elapsed, only 230,000 Nephite soldiers were killed in the battle of Cumorah, and the army was virtually exterminated. Since that was a battle to the finish, it is certain that virtually every available man was a soldier. However, even allowing ten women, children, and incapacitated males for every soldier, the total population at the close of the Nephite account would be but 2,300,000.

Were the Nephites and Lamanites engaged in constant warfare? Nearly everyone has heard generalities made to the effect that the Book of Mormon is nothing but a series of battles and wars. The record does not bear this out. In all there were recorded only about fifteen wars. There was an average of about sixty-five years between each war, which is far better than the European average for the thousand years just past. Looking only at recent American history, it is recalled that the American Revolution began in 1776; in 1812 there was the war with England; in 1846 came the Mexican War; the Civil War began in 1861; the war with Spain in 1898; and the first World War was entered by the United States in 1917. Since the Declaration of Independence, the United States has averaged only about twenty-five years between wars. In comparison, therefore, the ancient Nephites and Lamanites were very peace-loving nations.

Does the scientific world accept the Book of Mormon? It has been said by some that the Smithsonian Institution of Washington, D. C., the Carnegie Institution, and other organizations interested in American antiquities are satisfied that the Book of Mormon is true and that they even use it as a guide in some of the explorations. The fact is that these organizations have never officially accepted the Nephite record, probably because they have never given it any careful study. The important thing is that these organizations are putting millions of dollars' worth of time, materials, and effort into solving the great enigma of the ancient civilizations of America. They are steadily gathering data which even now greatly strengthen

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the position of the Book of Mormon. It is their data which may soon make it possible to establish the position of the Book of Mormon peoples in their proper relationship to the great civilizations of the Itzan Mayas and Toltecs which followed them.

At present, the Book of Mormon

does not stand proved by these agencies but, what is more important, it does not stand *disproved*, in even the slightest degree, although it has been in print for the world to criticize for more than a hundred years. Whenever scientists who are concerned with ancient America go deeper than theory, when they strike truth, the Book of Mormon is confirmed.

An important conclusion may be drawn: If Latter-day Saints are to make the Book of Mormon the great missionary which it is intended to be, they must read it more frequently and more carefully, especially in the light of its ancient historical background as gradually revealed by the discoveries of modern scientists.

CUMORAH-LAND

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. . . . the position of these forts, generally in close proximity to water, and other circumstances not less conclusive, imply a defensive origin. The unequivocal traces of long occupancy found within many of them, would further imply that they were fortified towns and villages, permanently occupied. In respect to date, nothing positive can be affirmed. Many of them are now covered with heavy forests. I have seen trees from two to four feet in diameter standing upon the embankments and in the trenches, which would indicate that the date of their origin would be some centuries ago.

In Frontenac's report to France, long before the white colonists had made many changes in that country,

he said of these strongholds for defense:

At Sandy Creek we found another formidable fort on an eminence. The trenches were eight and ten feet wide. Iron implements were also dug up here. By whom were these forts wrought? Not by the natives, surely. If the natives ever had the art of working iron, it is not probable that they would lose an art so useful. Further, no native Indian tribe could build such regular and well-planned works for self-defense. Again, this fort at Sandy Creek which is cut out of rock could not have been the work of native tribes. It is far too stupendous for untaught savages to effect; and it is very doubtful if it could have been done without the use of power.

In Turner's *Holland Purchase* (p. 24), we read:

We are surrounded by evidence that a race preceded the present Indians, farther advanced in civilization and the arts, and far more numerous. Here and there upon the brow of hills, at the head of ravines, are their fortifications, their location selected with skill and adapted for refuge, subsistence, and defense. Uprooted trees of the forest that are the growth of many centuries, expose their moulding remains, the uncovered mound with masses of their skeletons promiscuously heaped one on top of the other, as if they were gathered and hurriedly entombed dead of well-contested battlefields. In our villages, upon the hill-sides, the plow and the spade uncover their rude implements adapted to war, the chase, and domestic use. All these are dumb yet eloquent chronicles of bygone ages.

Although not confined to this region, there is perhaps no portion of the United

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