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## Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 1—Origin and Analysis of The Book of Mormon

Author(s): Leland H. Monson

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**Abstract:** The objective of this lesson is to gain an appreciation of the purpose, the content, and circumstances of the coming forth of The Book of Mormon through a study of the Title Page, the Brief Analysis, and Origin of The Book of Mormon

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circumstances of the coming forth of The Book of Mormon through a study of the Title Page, the Brief Analysis, and Origin of The Book of Mormon.

### Lesson 2. *The Witnesses to The Book of Mormon*

Objective: To establish the authenticity of The Book of Mormon according to the principle of witnesses.

### Lesson 3. *The Migration*

Objective: To strive to understand and comprehend the kind of faith exemplified by the brother of Jared, and cultivate it in our own lives.

### Lesson 4. *The Migration (Continued)*

Objective: To show the purpose and promises of the Lord regarding the land of promise, applying them to our own day.

### Lesson 5. *Orihah to Coriantumr*

Objective: From a study of the history of the Jaredite nation under the rule of kings, to emphasize the necessity of obeying prophetic counsel.

### Lesson 6. *Coriantumr and Ether*

Objective: To study the results of disobedience and the necessity of exercising faith.

### Lesson 7. *The Formation and Dispersion of the House of Israel*

Objective: To gain an understanding of events which transpired in the Old World between the time of the Jaredite migration to the promised land and that of Lehi and his followers.

### Lesson 8. *Lehi, Man of Visions*

Objective: To show that "the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20).

## *Theology*—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

### Lesson 1—Origin and Analysis of The Book of Mormon

*Elder Leland H. Monson*

(Text: The Book of Mormon: "Title Page"; "Brief Analysis of The Book of Mormon"; "Origin of The Book of Mormon.")

For Tuesday, October 2, 1951

Objective: To gain an appreciation of the purpose, the content, and circumstances of the coming forth of The Book of Mormon through a study of the Title Page, the Brief Analysis, and Origin of The Book of Mormon.

**"THE** Book of Mormon—An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon Upon Plates Taken From The Plates of Nephi Where-

fore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites—Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant

of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile—written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation.” So reads the initial part of the title page of *The Book of Mormon*. The entire page reveals the strange source and content of the book.

As the title page indicates, *The Book of Mormon* was “written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile.” Regarding these Lamanites, the book itself explicitly states that one cause of their degenerate state and ignorance is to be found in the traditions of their fathers, and definitely promises that “the Lord will be merciful unto them and prolong their existence in the land” (*Alma* 9:16).

Writing directly to this remnant of the house of Israel, the modern Lamanites, Mormon says:

Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel. Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved. . . . Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ. . . (*Mormon* 7:2, 3, 8).

It is marvelous, indeed, that a book which was completed over fifteen centuries ago, should carry a message explicitly directed to the American Indian, a remnant of that civilization.

The unusual source of the book is indicated by the fact that it was translated from a record which had been abridged by Mormon and Moroni, Nephite scholars of the fourth century after Christ, who lived on the North American continent.

A careful study of *The Book of Mormon* reveals that Ammaron, a

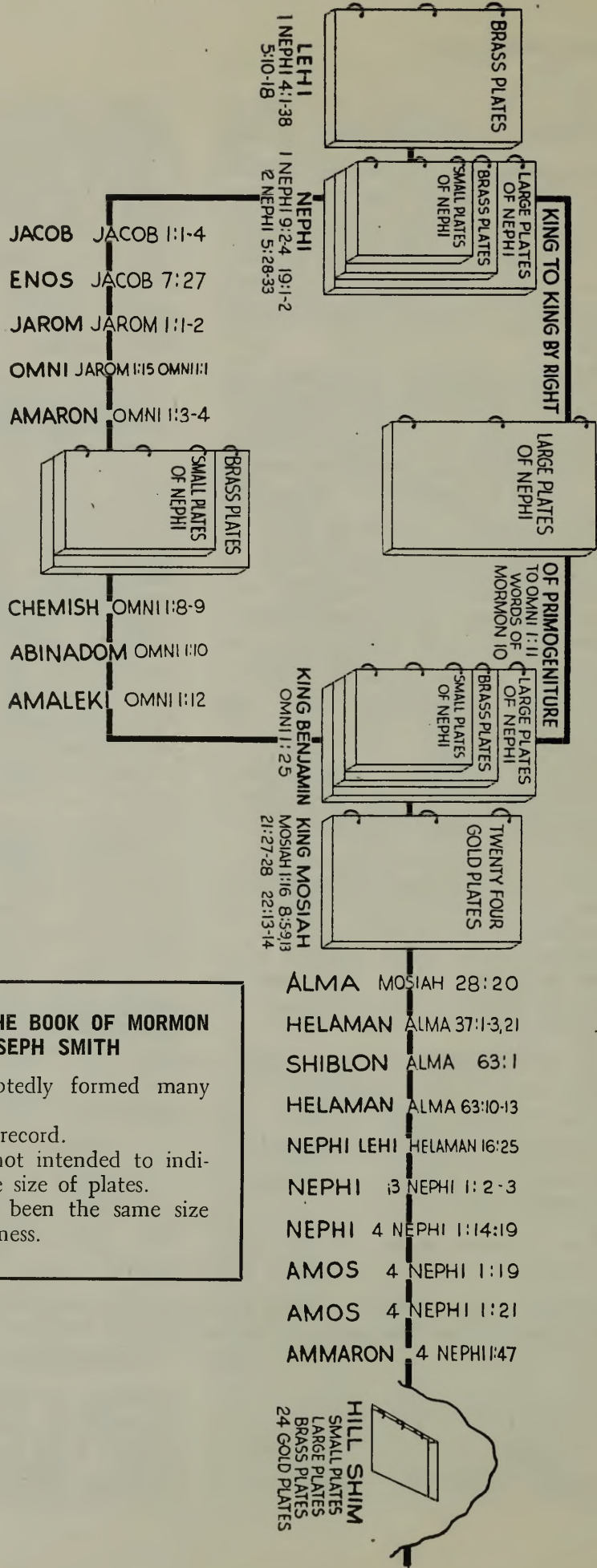
prophet laboring among the aboriginal inhabitants of America, and a keeper of the records of these people, became acquainted with a youth named Mormon. Impressed with the intelligence and integrity of this boy, the prophet Ammaron gave to him an important assignment, saying:

I perceive that thou art a sober child, and art quick to observe; Therefore, when ye are about twenty and four years old I would that ye should remember the things that ye have observed concerning this people; and when ye are of that age go to the land Antum, unto a hill which shall be called Shim; and there have I deposited unto the Lord all the sacred engravings concerning this people. And behold, ye shall take the plates of Nephi unto yourself, and the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are; and ye shall engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people (*The Book of Mormon* 1:2-4).

Among other records which Mormon found in this hill Shim were two separate sets of plates both of which were called the plates of Nephi. Nephi, the prophet who made both sets, called them the large plates of Nephi and the small plates of Nephi (*I Nephi* 9:2-4; *II Nephi* 5:29-33). The small plates contained the religious history of the people from 600 B.C., to about 175 B.C., and the large plates gave a secular and religious history of this same people, duplicating the period of time covered by the small plates and extending beyond that period to about 322 A.D.

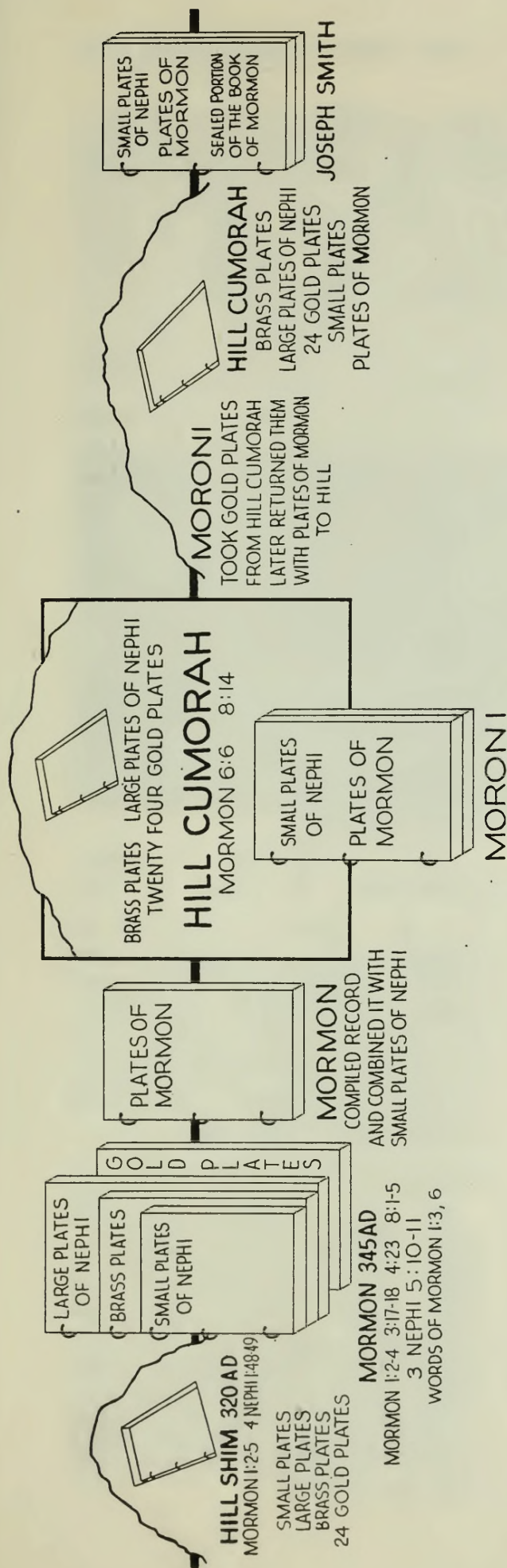
Undoubtedly, there were many volumes of large plates, for they represented a more or less detailed history kept by different kings and prophets prior to the time of Am-





**TRANSMISSION OF THE BOOK OF MORMON  
LEHI TO JOSEPH SMITH**

Large plates undoubtedly formed many volumes  
It was a cumulative record.  
Size of drawings is not intended to indicate comparative size of plates.  
All plates may have been the same size except for thickness.



maron. The chart on the previous page pictorially indicates how these and other records came into the hands of Ammaron.

Obedient to the instructions of Ammaron, Mormon did take from the hill Shim the records which Ammaron had deposited. Upon the large plates of Nephi he engraved a detailed account of what he had observed of the rapidly declining Nephite and Lamanite civilizations.

*The Plates of Mormon*

In the declining years of his life, about 384 A.D., Mormon became concerned about the records of the past which he had taken from the hill Shim (Mormon 6:6) and made a separate record upon which he gave an abridged history of the entire Nephite civilization. In this abridged history Mormon wrote:

And it came to pass that when we had gathered in all our people in one to the land of Cumorah, behold I, Mormon, began to be old; and knowing it to be the last struggle of my people, and having been commanded of the Lord that I should not suffer the records which had been handed down by our fathers, which were sacred, to fall into the hands of the Lamanites, (for the Lamanites would destroy them) therefore I made this record out of the plates of Nephi, and hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni (Mormon 6:6).

This quotation and the following verses make it clear that Mormon made a set of plates upon which he engraved the history of the Nephite nation:

But behold there are records which do contain all the proceedings of this people;



and a shorter but true account was given by Nephi. Therefore I have made my record of these things according to the record of Nephi, which was engraven on the plates which were called the plates of Nephi. And behold, I do make the record on plates which I have made with mine own hands (III Nephi 5:9-11).

It is this set of plates made by Mormon which were given into the hands of Joseph Smith. Because the history was compiled largely by Mormon, the translated record has come to be known as The Book of Mormon.

After completing his abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, Mormon discovered the small plates of Nephi which contained another history of the Nephites during more than their first four hundred years. This history, written by early prophets from a religious point of view, made a deep impression upon the mind of Mormon. Acting under the inspiration of the Lord, Mormon attached these small plates to the fore part of his own plates by means of three rings. The small plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon thus became one record. This record Mormon gave to his son Moroni, who completed it and deposited it in the hill Cumorah.

Mormon's engravings on his record ended with chapter seven of The Book of Mormon within The Book of Mormon. Moroni added chapters eight and nine to this Book of Mormon.

Having discovered among the many records in the hill Cumorah twenty-four gold plates, which had been passed down by the prophets and kings, Moroni read them carefully and recognized that these plates gave the history of the Jared-

ites, a people who had dwelt on this land of promise long before the Nephites were directed here by the Lord.

These Jaredites, under the leadership of Jared and his brother, Mahonri Moriancumer, left the tower of Babel about 2247 B.C. for the land of promise and flourished here. The last person of their nation lived to report the sad story of the decline and fall of his people to the Mulekites, who lived in Zarahemla, and who later merged their civilization with the Nephites. (See Omni 13-19, 20-22.)

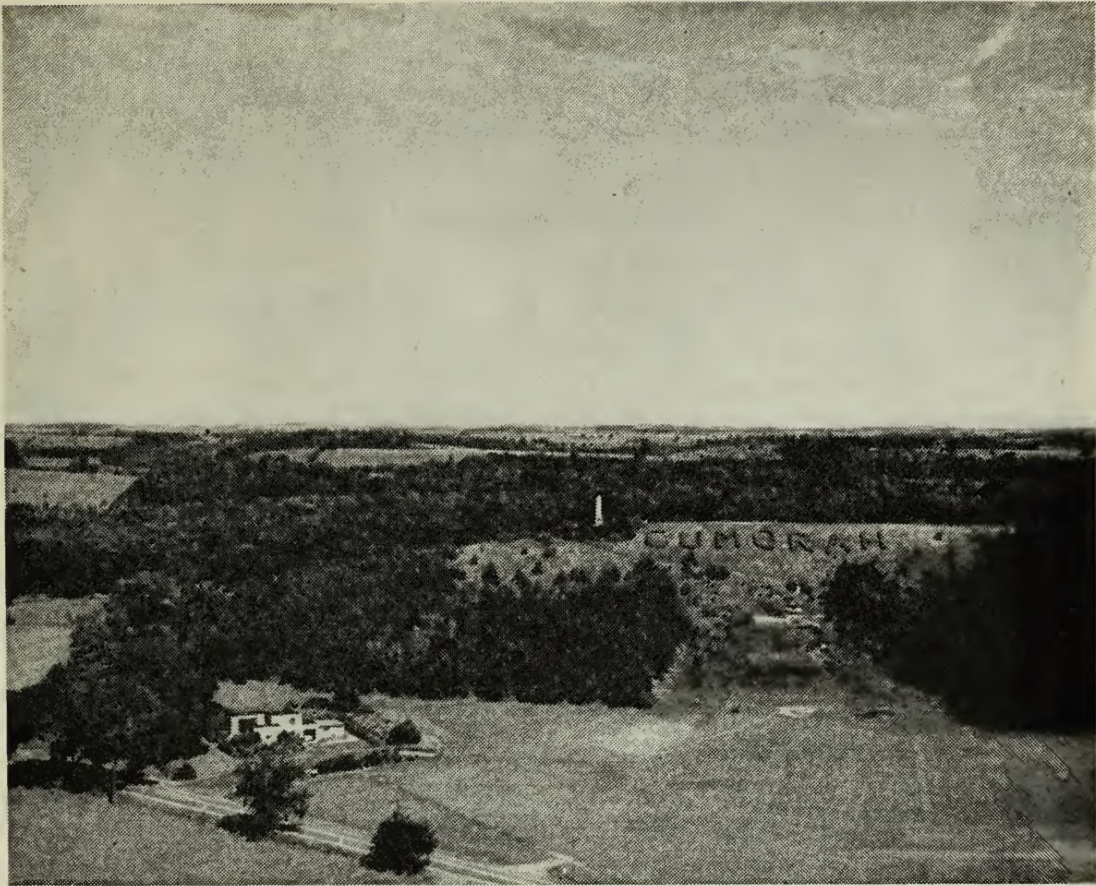
Working under the inspiration of the Lord, Moroni engraved an abridgment of the history of the Jaredites, as taken from the twenty-four gold plates, upon the plates made by his father Mormon. This history of the Jaredites is known as The Book of Ether. It follows The Book of Mormon.

Moroni completed his father's record with The Book of Moroni, ten chapters explaining his desolate state, discussing ordinances and principles of the gospel, giving his farewell to the Lamanites, and stating the conditions under which a reader might obtain an individual testimony of the truth of the Book of Mormon.

#### *Structure of Our Book of Mormon*

The plates which Joseph Smith took from the hill Cumorah, the record of Mormon, were written by eleven writers, nine of whom were responsible for the history engraved on the small plates of Nephi, which Mormon had attached to his record. The remainder of the plates of Mormon were engraved by Mormon and Moroni.





Photograph by Otto Done

### THE HILL CUMORAH

The manner in which the record of Mormon was compiled by Mormon and Moroni and the order in which Joseph Smith translated it account for the unusual structure of our present Book of Mormon. An understanding of this structure is a pre-requisite to effective reading.

Joseph Smith originally began translating, not from the small plates of Nephi, but from Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi. Having completed his translation down to the reign of King Benjamin, Joseph entrusted Martin Harris with the manuscript. Martin lost it. (See D.H.C. I, page 21.)

Joseph was instructed not to again translate this same history from the large plates of Nephi, but to translate the material recorded on the small plates of Nephi, which material covered the same period of history. These small plates, you will recall, were attached to Mormon's plates by means of three rings.

The first 132 pages of The Book of Mormon are a direct translation of the small plates of Nephi, written by the following prophets: Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, Omni, Ammaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki. (The paging in The Book of Mormon has remained the same in all editions printed since

1920. The pages referred to in these lessons are from editions printed since that time.)

"The Words of Mormon," pages 132 and 133, serve the purpose of connecting the history taken from the small plates of Nephi with the history taken from the large plates of Nephi. Pages 134 to 459 inclusive are a translation of Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, which plates were originally written by prophets and kings from King Mosiah to Ammaron. Pages 460 to 472, or the first seven chapters of The Book of Mormon, within The Book of Mormon give Mormon's personal account of events he had witnessed.

Pages 472 to 478, or chapters eight and nine of The Book of Mormon, were written by Mormon's son, Moroni. Pages 478 to 510, The Book of Ether, are a translation of Moroni's abridgment of the twenty-four gold plates, the history of the Jaredite nation. Pages 510 to 522, the end of the book, contain Moroni's instructions.

The foregoing analysis of the structure of The Book of Mormon indicates clearly that the chronological or time order of events has not been followed. If the time order had been adhered to The Book of Ether would be the first book in The Book of Mormon, for it gives the history of the Jaredites who lived upon this hemisphere before the Nephites.

Recognizing the fact that the Jaredites did come to America before the Nephites, we shall first study the history of the descendants

of Jared, his brother, Mahonri Moriancumer; and their colony, which left the Tower of Babel about 2247 B.C., and were guided by the hand of the Lord to the promised land.

### Suggested Readings

ROBERTS, BRIGHAM H.: *New Witnesses for God*, II, pp. 134-138, *Deseret News*, 1920.

MONSON, LELAND H.: *Life in Ancient America*, pp. 11-13, *Deseret Sunday School Union*, 1946.

### Questions for Discussion

1. To whom was The Book of Mormon written?
2. Why does a structural analysis of The Book of Mormon make it easier to read?
3. Why do we call Mormon a scholar?
4. What plates did Mormon and Moroni use in the preparation of what is now called The Book of Mormon?

Note: The following quotation will be of interest to Relief Society members:

When residing in Kirtland, Elder Reynolds Cahoon had a son born to him. One day when President Joseph Smith was passing his door, he called the Prophet in and asked him to bless and name the baby. Joseph did so and gave the boy the name of Mahonri Moriancumer. When he had finished the blessing he laid the child on the bed and turning to Elder Cahoon he said, "The name I have given your son is the name of the brother of Jared; the Lord has just shown (or revealed) the name." Elder William Cahoon, who was standing near, heard the Prophet make this statement to his father; and this was the first time the name of the brother of Jared was known in the Church in this dispensation (*The Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 27, May 1892, page 282).