

Chapter 1: The Mormon Scriptures

Who Are The Mormons?

The Mormons are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. They follow a religion founded by Joseph Smith, the first Mormon prophet, following a series of visions which started around 1820.

While they kept themselves separate during their early years, condemning all Christian churches and putting great emphasis on their prophet Joseph Smith, more recently there have been many changes in their culture and even a few changes in their doctrine.

Their emphasis now is much less on Joseph Smith and much more on Jesus Christ. As a Christian, I applaud and encourage this increased emphasis on Christ. I hope this direction will continue, and that many will come to trust Him completely and exclusively for their salvation.

In addition, where once Mormons were somewhat known for dysfunctional families with numerous downtrodden wives, in more recent years they have come to be admired for their strong emphasis on sound families and high moral values. In a world where alcohol and drug abuse abound, Mormons excel. A good Mormon does not even drink coffee or tea.

The Mormon's Scriptures

The Mormons have four books as their scriptures:

The Bible, King James Version

The Book of Mormon (My abbreviation: B of M) The Doctrine and Covenants

The Pearl of Great Price.

The Mormons consider *The Book of Mormon* to be the most important of these books. In addition, the president of the Church is considered to be a living prophet.

Where Did the Book of Mormon Come From?

Joseph Smith said that an angel showed him *The Book Of Mormon* written on gold plates in a language he called **1** Reformed Egyptian. . He said that he translated these plates into English. The gold plates are not now available, and the Reformed Egyptian language is not known. The reason to believe that the plates once existed is faith in the word of Joseph Smith and eleven others who said they had seen them.

The Book of Mormon Introduction includes two statements. One, called "the testimony of the three witnesses" contains the names of the three. The second, called "the testimony of the eight witnesses" is followed by eight names. Both groups say they have seen the plates.

The first three witnesses, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris are given the most importance because *Doctrine and Covenants* predicted: "I will give them power that they may

behold and view these things as they are; And to none else will I grant this power..." *The Book of Mormon* predicted:

"...The book shall be hid from the eyes of the world that the eyes of none shall behold it save it be that the three witnesses shall behold it by the power of God... And there is none other which shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God..."²

Doctrine and Covenants 17:2 says, "And it is by your faith that you shall obtain a view of them." By their faith, then, and by the power of God, the witnesses were to have viewed the plates.

Can we believe their witness? All of the three witnesses were excommunicated later by the Mormons themselves³ One of the Mormon's own scriptures, *Doctrine and Covenants*, has God saying that it was not wise to send Oliver Cowdery, the first of the three witnesses, carrying church money and a manuscript unless someone who was honest went with him (69:1). He later became a Methodist, and was eventually buried by a Methodist minister.

Another Mormon scripture went so far as to call Martin Harris, another of the three witnesses, a "wicked man"⁴ who accused them of lying, stealing, cheating, counterfeiting, defrauding, and persecuting the Mormons.

and a liar.

The Mormons themselves do not want to accept a later witness of David Whitmer:

"In June 1838, God spoke to me again by His own voice from the heavens and told me to 'separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints.'"⁵
From time to time, Whitmer belonged to at least three Mormon splinter groups.

It seems clear that the three witnesses did say they saw the plates. The question is, can we believe their testimony? If we can believe the statements of Joseph Smith and other Mormon leaders about the character of these three witnesses, particularly the accusations that they were liars, there is little to give us faith in *The Book of Mormon* other than the word of Joseph Smith himself.

We will leave the three witnesses with Joseph Smith's blessing:

"Such characters as McLellin, John Whitmer, **David Whitmer**, **Oliver Cowdery**, and **Martin Harris** are too mean to mention; and we had liked to have forgotten them."⁶

David Whitmer, one of the first three witnesses, wrote that all of the second group of eight witnesses who were then living, except Joseph's father and two brothers, had left the Church of Latter-day Saints. ⁷

Protestants, Catholics, and Mormons all consider the Bible the inspired word of God. The original Hebrew and Greek documents of the Bible no longer exist, but there are many ancient copies. Great effort is made to compare these copies to one another to determine which copies reflect the original, and which contain errors in copying. The object is to determine what the original Old Testament Hebrew and the original New Testament Greek actually said.

The introduction to *The Book of Mormon* states that it was written by ancient prophets by the spirit of prophecy and revelation on gold plates. The plates were later, "delivered to Joseph Smith, who translated them by the gift and power of God." Smith is then quoted as saying,

"I told the brethren that *The Book of Mormon* was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."

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Correcting the Most Correct Book

Though the English translation of *The Book of Mormon* serves as the original from which other translations are made, Mormon leaders have made over 4,000 corrections in Smith's translation. Many of the changes were made to correct embarrassing spelling and grammatical errors such as "...Adam and Eve, which was our first parents." Mormon Apostle B.H. Roberts wrote,

"Are those flagrant errors in grammar chargeable to the Lord? To say so is to invite ridicule... That old theory cannot be successfully maintained; that is that the Urim and the Thummim did the translating, the prophet nothing beyond repeating what he saw reflected in that instrument."⁸

Other corrections were added as Joseph Smith's view of God changed. For example, "mother of God" in the original 1830 version becomes "mother of the Son of God" (*B of M*, 1 Nephi 11:18). And "King Benjamin" becomes "King Mosiah" (*B of M*, Ether 4:1).

Instead of trying to determine and maintain the original just as Smith had first written it, as is the case with the Bible, Mormon leaders felt that it needed correction. After cleaning up the grammar, and correcting other mistakes, some Mormon leaders tell people that since Joseph Smith had little education, he would have to have had divine guidance to have written *The Book of Mormon* so well!

Jerald and Sandra Tanner's website, Utah Lighthouse Ministries will direct you to great quantities of well documented information, including many of the changes, plus links to images of the pages of the original 1830 *Book of Mormon* so you can compare them yourself.

The eighth article in the Mormon statement of faith is:

"We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe *The Book of Mormon* to be the word of God."

While Mormons tell outsiders that they believe the Bible, and it is in the list of the four books they accept as scripture, in practice, the Bible gets downgraded. When a point comes up in the conversation in which Mormon belief contradicts the Bible, Mormons are often taught that in that point, the Bible must have been translated incorrectly.

In practice the Bible is subordinated to *The Book of Mormon* and to today's Mormon teachings. Speaking of the Bible, *The Book of Mormon* states:

"...after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God."⁹

The explanation is given that this means the Catholic Church changed the Bible so that many parts of it are no longer trustworthy.

It is easy to check out that idea. Many parts of the Hebrew Old Testament were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls which had been hidden at various times from 100 BC to 100 AD in caves near the Dead Sea. They remained there until 1946 when the first of these manuscripts was found. The scrolls of the Bible were among the oldest of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These parts of the Bible were hidden before there was a Catholic Church, and found relatively recently, so they could not have been changed. No "plain and precious things were taken away from" the Old Testament.

This leaves only the New Testament, and there are more ancient documents of the New Testament still in existence than of any other ancient book. How could any church have gathered up and changed all those copies? Mormons claim that specific changes which they mention were made in translating the Bible. No old Greek or Hebrew manuscript of the Bible of any age backs up these claims.

The only translation of the Bible that the Catholic Church accepted up through the time of the Protestant Reformation was the Latin Vulgate, translated by Saint Jerome around 400 AD. From that time until the last few hundred years, Catholics opposed any new translations of the Bible, so only Protestants translated it. Protestants translated directly from the Greek and Hebrew, not from anything the Catholic Church could have changed. Therefore, while the Catholic Church could have influenced the translation of the Latin Vulgate, and other translations which depended on the Vulgate, they could not change the Protestant translations which are the great majority.

I read from the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament every day, not as an expert but as a student. Since these are the original languages of the Bible, I can say from personal

experience that the differences between what Mormons believe and the Bible are not caused by mistranslations of the Bible.

The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other book. You can check different translations of the Bible in every language you know. They use different words to express the meaning of the original, but you will never find one translation that says "King Benjamin" where another translates "King Mosiah." though this change was made in *The Book of Mormon*. If one book should be considered inferior to the other because of translation problems, the Bible should be honored above *The Book of Mormon*, not the other way around.

Like *The Book of Mormon*, the other official Mormon Scriptures, *Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price* have also undergone many corrections. As I will point out later, in many instances where Mormon doctrine contradicts the Bible, it also contradicts *The Book of Mormon*, and sometimes the first part of *Doctrine and Covenants*. In these cases Mormon leaders tend to criticize the Bible, saying it was translated incorrectly, while ignoring the same contradictions with their other two books.

Mormons usually say they know that Mormon beliefs are correct because they have been taught to pray that the Holy Ghost would give them the testimony, that is, knowledge received by revelation from the Holy Ghost, which teaches them that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth."¹⁰

Some have prayed for the testimony, and feel that they have it and that Mormonism is right, but others who have prayed feel just as strongly that it is wrong. Still others think they have received the testimony that one or another of the Mormon splinter groups is the true church. God has told me, by His Spirit and through the Bible, that in the points where Mormon doctrine contradicts the Bible, Mormon doctrine is wrong.

Why should we pray for this testimony only about Mormonism and *The Book of Mormon*? How about Islam and the Koran? The Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology? We need God's guidance, but people who rely on their feelings and purposely ignore the objective evidence can often be manipulated into believing things that are not true.

When Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he did not ask His disciples to believe in His resurrection only on the basis of the testimony of the Holy Ghost. He also showed them His hands and his feet, and ate in their presence. The evidence supported the testimony. If a testimony really is from the Holy Ghost, it is true, and the physical evidence will confirm, rather than refute that testimony.

It is easy to check out the evidence that confirms or refutes Smith's ability as a translator. Whether or not the gold plates of *The Book of Mormon* and its language "Reformed Egyptian" really existed, Smith later acquired a real ancient Egyptian manuscript. It was not written in hieroglyphics, but in the script called hieratic which came into use after hieroglyphics. Smith claimed to have translated this manuscript. He called the translation The Book of Abraham, written by the Abraham of the Old Testament. It is the second part of *The Pearl of Great Price*, one of the Mormon scriptures.

The manuscript, a papyrus, was thought to have been lost in the Chicago fire, but later found its way into the Metropolitan Museum of New York. Because it was identified by the Mormon Church as the one from which Smith had made his translation, the museum donated the papyrus to the Church.

The church's identification of the manuscript could hardly be in error because to protect the fragile papyrus, it had been backed in Smith's time with heavy old paper with writing on the back which helped the church to recognize it as authentic. This translation has given the church and the world the opportunity to put Smith's ability to translate Egyptian to the test.

A number of qualified Egyptologists have stated in writing that the manuscript made no mention at all of Abraham, but spoke instead of pagan funerals. One expert, Samuel A.B. Mercer, wrote:

"All the scholars come to the same conclusion, viz. that Smith could not possibly translate any Egyptian text, as his translation of the facsimiles shows. Any pupil of mine who would show such absolute ignorance of Egyptian as Smith does, could not possibly expect to get more than a zero in an examination in Egyptology..."¹¹

Smith translated one word, which was the name of an Egyptian moon god, one hundred seventy seven different [12](#)

A Mormon named Grant Howard was excommunicated from the church for pointing out one letter which Smith [13](#)

Because these manuscripts show that neither Smith or any spirit that may have inspired him could translate Egyptian, some Mormons have denied that the manuscripts which were found were the same ones which Smith had "translated." This theory can quickly be eliminated two ways.

Smith included pictures from the manuscripts in three places in the Book of Abraham, a part of the Mormon scripture, *Pearl of Great Price*. (See pages 28, 34, and 42.) Smith wrote detailed explanations of the pictures which are there with them. Some of these pictures have writing on them, so Marvin Cowan sent them to experts who translated them and attested that they have nothing to do with Abraham, and that Smith's explanations are false. [14](#) You can send them to an expert too.

Also, photos were taken of the other pieces of papyri.¹⁵ One Includes the picture on page 28 of *Pearl of Great Price*, along with a good deal of writing on each side of the picture. It is undeniably the manuscript which Smith claimed to have translated. Since the engraved plates of *The Book of Mormon* are no longer with us, this is the only manuscript in existence by which we can judge whether or not Smith could translate Egyptian. He could not.

While Smith's statement about where his story of Abraham came from is not trustworthy, this does not mean that his whole book of Abraham is made up. Some of it comes from the King James Bible, which was translated into English from Greek and Hebrew in 1611. Compare Genesis 12:1-13 with Abraham 2 in *The Pearl of Great Price*. Smith made his "translation" some

time after 1835 when he acquired the ancient Egyptian manuscript. If he had really translated this from Egyptian, how could he use old English expressions like "removed from thence?" This phrase is word for word the way it was translated in the King James Bible, first published two hundred years before Smith's "translation," and thousands of years after Smith said Abraham had written the book in Egyptian.

It should not be inferred that Smith copied the whole book of Abraham from the King James Bible. He did not. Some passages, however, like the two samples below are too close to King James English to be accidental:

"Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:" (Genesis 12:1).

Compare this to Smith's translation from *The Pearl of Great Price*:

"Now the Lord had said unto me: Abraham, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee."
(Abraham 2:3)

In this verse, only two words of Smith's "translation" are different than the words of the King James Bible. Compare also the first half of Genesis 1:30:

"And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth..."

The first half of Abraham 4:30 is identical.

"And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth..."

(Compare also Genesis 12:2 with Abraham 2:9; Genesis 12:3 with Abraham 2:11, Genesis 12:4 with Abraham 2:14.) Smith must have copied these and other passages from the King James Bible.

The Book of Abraham is important because:

- It shows that Joseph Smith was either untruthful or seriously deluded in attributing the source of the Book of Abraham to a papyrus which had nothing to do with the content of his Book of Abraham.
- It exposes Smith's inability to translate Egyptian, a very important fact, because Reformed Egyptian is the language from which he claimed to have translated the Book of Mormon. [16](#)

- The Book of Abraham is a source of the doctrine that blacks could not be allowed into the Mormon priesthood. While this doctrine has always been morally wrong, it later became politically incorrect, and an embarrassment to the Mormon church. L.D.S. President Kimball had a revelation in 1978 which reversed the doctrine.

The Book of Moses, another of the books in *The Pearl of Great Price*, has at least one whole page which is almost word for word the old English of the King James Bible. (Compare Moses 4:8-25 to Genesis 3:2-19.)

The prize for the longest section copied from the King James Bible, however, goes to 2 Nephi in *The Book of Mormon*. Chapters 12-24 are copied nearly word for word from Isaiah chapters 2-14, in all, about fifteen pages. The King James is an almost word for word translation from the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New

language from which he claimed to have translated The Book of Mormon.

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Testament. In some places this does not make good English so the translators had to add some connecting words. To help us recognize what was in the original and what was not, the words they added were italicized in some editions, and put in brackets in others. Even these words which were not in the original Hebrew, but existed only in the King James Bible, ended up in *The Book of Mormon*.

Mormons are told: "Moroni deposited the plates in the Hill Cumorah in about 421 A.D"¹⁷ If these plates were really hidden away over a thousand years before the King James Bible was translated into English, and Joseph had translated *The Book of Mormon* from those plates, how could he have translated hundreds of words, one after another, in exact King James English? Had he memorized that much of the Bible, or did he copy them?

History, Archeology, and The Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon tells of groups of Jews who left the land of Israel and moved to what was probably Central America:

The Jaredites left at the time of the Tower of Babel, and were eventually destroyed by wars. A group from the half tribe of Manasseh and from the tribe of Ephraim led by Lehi arrived around 589 B.C. They eventually split into two groups, the Nephites who were destroyed by war, and the Lamanites who became the ancestors of the Native Americans. (See the first two paragraphs of the Introduction to *The Book of Mormon*.)

The Book of Mormon is presented as true history and gives a number of details which we can check out. Mormons often claim that archeological discoveries confirm the statements of *The*

Book of Mormon. Many cities, mentioned in the Bible have indeed been uncovered by archeologists just where the Bible said.

However, no archeological evidence has been found in the Americas that directly verifies *The Book of Mormon*. Artifacts that have been found which could have been produced and used by the people of *The Book of Mormon*, could also have been produced and used by other people. Mormons have claimed, for example, that the Smithsonian Institution officially recognized *The Book of Mormon* and that it had been used as the guide to almost all of the major discoveries. This generated so many inquiries that the Smithsonian had to write out a stock answer which denies the claim. Here are a few excerpts:

"...The Smithsonian Institution has never used *The Book of Mormon* in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archeologists see no connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book... We know of no authentic cases of ancient Egyptian or Hebrew writing having been found in the New World."¹⁸

As of 2001, the answer had been abbreviated to:

"Your inquiry of February 7 concerning the Smithsonian Institution's alleged use of *The Book of Mormon* as a scientific guide has been received in this office for response. *The Book of Mormon* is a religious document and not a scientific guide. The Smithsonian Institution has never used it in archeological research, and any information that you have received to the contrary is incorrect. Your interest in the Smithsonian Institution is appreciated."

The Languages

According to *The Book of Mormon*, the languages spoken by the first people to live in the Americas were Hebrew and Egyptian. If this were true, at least some of the native American languages should contain words which clearly show this origin. English has thousands of words which contain Greek and Latin roots. After two thousand years these roots still show the influences of Greek and Latin. If *The Book of Mormon* is correct, many Indian words should contain Hebrew and Egyptian roots. Many English words come to us from Spanish, French and the Germanic languages. Hebrew and Egyptian words, however, are not found in any of the Indian languages.

We use the Japanese word "tsunami" for tidal waves. Many such foreign words tend to creep into languages when there is some contact between the people, but Hebrew or Egyptian words did not creep into the native American languages.

The Hebrew immigrants, according to *The Book of Mormon*, knew how to read and write. If these really were the original languages it would seem probable that with all the archeological finds in Central America, manuscripts or inscriptions in Hebrew or Egyptian would be found.

While Mormons point to a few artifacts which may well have arrived from across the ocean, particularly from Japan, these artifacts do not indicate that the inhabitants of the Americas came from there.

I grew up near the Oregon coast, and remember that as a child it was a popular pastime to walk the beaches looking for blown glass fishing net floats which escaped from the nets and floated to our coast from the seas around Japan. The glass balls were rare enough to make them desirable, but most people who kept looking found a few. Much more would have been needed to validate any theory that the first inhabitants of Oregon came from Japan, just as much more than a few artifacts and a doubtful inscription are needed to show that the American Indians came from Israel.

The Animals

"And it came to pass that we did find upon the land of promise as we journeyed into the wilderness that there were beasts in the forest of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat..."¹⁹

All the animals mentioned were imported to the Americas by Europeans after Columbus discovered America. None are believed to have lived in Latin America a few hundred years before and after the time of Christ when the migrations of *The Book of Mormon* were to have taken place. Native animals, such as the Alpaca and the Llama, are never mentioned in *The Book of Mormon*.

The People

Many of the old inhabitants of the Americas are well known, the Incas, Aztecs, and the Mayas for example. None of these are mentioned in *The Book of Mormon*. It speaks instead of Jaredites, Nephites, and Lamanites. All are supposed to have come from the general area of Israel. None of these are mentioned in any other history of the new world. The Indians of America are, for the most part, of Mongolian origin.

In addition to the metals that people of the Americas are known to have used, *The Book of Mormon* says they also used iron and steel, implying an iron industry much larger than could be based on an occasional iron meteorite. ²⁰No iron industry in America in this period has been reported in history or found by archeologists. While it is possible that American Indians had iron and steel industries which left no trace, the fact that none have been found is an additional evidence to consider.