

Pre-Book of Mormon

(March 20, 2007)

We left off two weeks ago – before our respite – with an examination of what the LDS call Joseph Smith’s First Vision.

The official year for the First Vision is 1820, but if you recall, there is a great deal of play regarding the date and what actually occurred in the vision itself.

Though contrary to the Bible, the LDS Church today claims Joseph saw “God the Father in a body of flesh and bones as tangible as Man’s, but his earliest accounts say nothing of the sort.

In light of the evidence, I personally don’t believe there ever was a “first vision” as it is depicted with such certainty by the LDS Church today.

Between the supposed First Vision of 1820 and the visitation of the Angel Moroni in 1823 – we know very little about Joseph Smith’s teen life.

We do know, from Joseph’s own accounts, that he was

“entangled again in the vanities of the world,” but that his sins were not *“great or malignant.”*

LDS historian Bushman notes that *“From time to time he drank too much,”* but we must note that *“drinking too much”* in those times was common (it was even a crime of the Bible prophet Noah).

Let me also say that I am not critical of Joseph Smith's personal foibles and sins nor do I take the route that they are evidence of him being a religious fraud.

As a Christian I recognize that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" - the prophets of the Bible included - so I do not think Joseph's personal failures should any more be a part of the evidences against him than Gordon B. Hinckley's shroud of supposed "righteousness" should be evidence that he is legitimate.

It doesn't matter to me that Joseph Jr. liked a drink every now and again, that he had a temper, that he couldn't stand being questioned, or that he often resorted to physical violence when angered.

The proof of a prophet has always been in the prophecies, not in the supposed righteousness of the prophets themselves.

Where I do take exception, however, is when Joseph uses "God" to justify - even sanctify - unbiblical doctrines, practices, and canonical books.

As we proceed through his life it will become more and more evident that this tendency to use "God's name in vane" escalated up until the last months of his life.

On the evening of September 21st Joseph Smith says he was visited by an angel who name was Moroni.

So let's take a minute and give a little history of how and when the Book of Mormon came to be.

As I mentioned on the show about Joseph's magic practices, September 21-22 was a very important night of the year for money diggers (or people who dig for treasure buried in the earth) because it is the Autumnal Equinox and magic practitioners believed it was the best time to communicate with the heavens about the location of buried treasure.

(See D. Michael Quinn's book: Early Mormonism and the Magic World View for some excellent information on this view).

Martin Harris, who helped Joseph Smith finance and translate the Book of Mormon is quoted as having told a Palmyra Minister that Joseph had acted as a seer for a local treasure hunt earlier that evening, but as usual, came home empty handed.

Joseph Smith's mother Lucy recorded that on this special night, the family stayed up late into the evening

"conversing upon the subject of the diversity of Churches that had risen up in the world and the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture."

Lucy also noted that Joseph seemed withdrawn or in deep contemplation as the family talked.

It is my opinion that this discussion added to Joseph's worries over religion and the families division over it. I think discussions like these played upon his sensitivities to the religious upheaval between his parents.

When Joseph retired he may have prayed for his father's conversion to the truth, or

for God's forgiveness for his sins, or for family reconciliation.

Later Joseph would claim that his mind was preoccupied with thoughts of his personal unworthiness and that he desired a manifestation from God to help him understand his worthiness before Him.

In the midst of whatever he was doing, He said an angel appeared at his bedside, who declared that "his sins were forgiven him" and that God had a special work for him to perform.

The angel told Joseph about a history of ancient inhabitants from America that was written on gold plates and buried in a nearby hill.

Remember that prior to the visit of the Angel Moroni, Joseph Junior had spent time, *and would continue to spend time in the years to come* "seeking" (through a seer stone) for treasures that were supposedly buried in the earth!

The Book of Mormon claims to be a record of people living in the Americas between 600 B.C.E. and 421 C.E. These people got to the Americas by leaving Jerusalem and crossing the sea in a boat.

Once here, they broke into two great nations, built a thriving civilization, warred, and in the end nearly exterminated each other. Over time those who remained became the American Indian.

One of the last Prophets, a man named Mormon, took the records of these people and compiled them on Golden Plates.

Before we get further into the story of the Book of Mormon, the Hill Cumorah events, the translation, publication, and ultimately the content and construction of the book, let's read what LDS leaders today and yesterday officially say about the Book of Mormon.

James E Faust, in the First Presidency Message of Jan 2004 said:

The Book of Mormon is a keystone (of our religion) because it establishes and ties together eternal principles and precepts, rounding out basic doctrines of salvation. It is the crowning gem in the diadem of our Holy Scriptures.

Ezra Taft Benson said in the First Presidency Message of Jan 1988:

The Book of Mormon was written for us today. God is the author of the book.

From the Church Manual, "Preach My Gospel" in 2005

Joseph Smith was directed by a heavenly messenger named Moroni to a hill where gold plates lain hidden for centuries. These gold plates contained the writings of prophets giving an account of God's dealings with some of the ancient inhabitants of the America's. Joseph

As the story goes, he gave these records to his son Moroni, who buried them in the Hill Cumorah in New York around 421 AD.

And Joseph Smith then claimed that it was this same Moroni who visited him and told him where the plates were buried.

Smith translated the contents of these plates by the power of God.

Joseph Smith himself said in History of the COJCOLDS (4:461) that

*"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 **any other book.**"*

Joseph Smith also said

"I did translate the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God, and it is before the world, and all the powers of earth and hell can never rob me of the honor of it."

Is it important to know if this book is true or not?

Can we "*rob Joseph of the honor of it*" or is it truly a record of an ancient civilization written on gold plates and buried in a hill three miles from his home?

If it is not true, would you want to know?
Or are you determined to cling to it because you're certain, in your heart, that it really is what it claims to be?

We going to examine the Book of Mormon over the next four to six weeks?

And I am going to ask YOU - Mormon or non-Mormon, Christian or heretic - to ask yourself one question over and over again.

I'm NOT going to ask you if the book of Mormon is true because it teaches about

Jesus. It most certainly does.
What kind of book that is proposing to have the ability to bring a person closer to God than any book on earth would try and NOT be focused on Jesus?

But because the BOM speaks of Jesus does not make it scripture or true!

Did you hear me?

We had a BYU professor call on our first show and one of his arguments for the validity of the Book of Mormon was that it quantitatively spoke more about Jesus than the Bible!

That's like saying I'm smarter than you because I have a larger library!

We need to know if the book is valid, not whether it wins in a quantitative analysis of what volume uses the name or topic of Jesus most.

Additionally, the question should not be, *"Could Joseph Smith have written this book?"*

This is a side issue that settles and proves nothing! It simply leads us from off the main path and down another dark ally of unanswerable debate!

He couldn't.

He could.

Neener, nener, nener.

Whether you believe he could or couldn't have written the BOM is irrelevant to its being the authentic word of God.

If it is God's Word it doesn't matter if he

could have written it or not, right?
God made a donkey talk, right?

There are a thousand explanations on how the book *could* have come into being. But none of them really matter when it comes to it being “true” or not.

Forget these thoughts and arguments.

Forget the inane and beguiling claim that Joseph wrote the book in 90 or so days.

These are the tactics of a defense attorney looking to spin the issues.

Oh, and another thing, as far as poor arguments go, many Christian apologists insist on making the inane claim that the Book of Mormon can't be true because it is “additional scripture” which, they claim, is forbidden in the Bible.

This is just another big fat, waste of time!

The Bible doesn't say this anywhere contextually!

And if God had, indeed, called special men to write a record about the comings and goings of a people from a different continent, who are we to argue it?

If it is God's Word, it is God's word. Right?

Now some even go so far as to say, “Well so what? So what if the BOM is a counterfeit. It teaches good things, doesn't it? It teaches about Jesus, right? “

My response is then, “Well so what

<p>Just because a book is good, it does not mean it is of God. And just because a book teaches truth, does not mean the author is</p>	<p>if the twenty you have in your pocket is counterfeit. It looks like real money, and trades like real money, and works like real money, where is the crime?</p> <p>The crime is in the fact that it dilutes the value of the legitimate currency thereby weakening the established monetary system of our nation.</p> <p>This is important because when you embrace the Book of Mormon as “authentic currency of God,” you are helping to dilute the value of the genuine article.</p> <p>How? Because when you embrace the Book of Mormon, you are also embracing Joseph Smith – and not just his first work – but everything else subsequent to it, which includes an assortment of teachings that are absolutely incompatible with the Word of God.</p> <p>I suppose that to accept the Book of Mormon would be akin to accepting the Quoran as Holy Scripture from God. Before you know it you will have reduced Jesus to a “good prophet” and having your wife donning a birka!</p> <p>But this is just not what the Bible allows.</p> <p>In fact it’s in opposition to it.</p>
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true.

Satan can tell the truth. He quotes scripture all over the Bible. Hitler hated burlesque. Marx loved his wife, and Osama prays!

Wake it up, man.

If a fraud is good, the goodness is used to hook us into something that is evil in the end!

Who would have followed Joseph if he introduced polygamy first?

Who would have joined the LDS Church if it began with the New and Everlasting Covenant as being necessary for salvation?

Bait should always be full of flavor, right?

So how can we tell whether to trust the BOM?

How can we differentiate between the real deal and a counterfeit?

I propose that anyone who really wants to know if the Book of Mormon is genuine should ask themselves this one question:

“Do the *contents* of the book come from an ancient record that were written on golden plates or not?”

This is the question I hope you will constantly ask yourself over these next four to six weeks as we examine the evidence:

Could *the contents* of the Book of Mormon have originated from an ancient record written on golden plates or do they

indicate an origin of another source?

Why is this important?

The official LDS story of the Book of Mormon claims that the content came from an ancient record written on golden plates.

They have built an entire religious industry on this tale, with reenactments, graphic illustrations, music, and official statements which support and reinforce this claim.

If it becomes evident that the information in the book came from elsewhere, then you can safely discern it a fraud.

But if it is reasonable that the contents came from an ancient record written on golden plates, well . . . we'll get to everything that comes along with it in the shows that follow.

But just imagine that someone comes to you with the recently discovered personal journal of Abraham Lincoln.

It is filled with accurate information about the life of Lincoln.

It speaks of Abraham Lincoln.

It preaches like Abraham Lincoln.

And the seller naturally wants a hefty price for the mss.

So before buying into it you take the time to investigate the contents.

Now counterfeiting has a few general guidelines that come along with it:

First, a counterfeit always comes after the real deal.

A counterfeiter of currency would not be very wise to produce a three dollar bill in America, because America doesn't have a three dollar bill!

And after an initial look, things seem to be legitimate.

However, you soon discover a few things that cause some concern.

First, there are couple of photographs of Lincoln that include items which were not around when he was alive.

For instance, on the table of the very authentic room he is standing in is a Frisbee and next to it is a lamp with a 21st Century design.

There are also quotations in his writings which are out of date. He is found discussing global warming, the morning after-pill, and motorcycle helmet laws.

The question you must ask yourself, when determining on whether this journal is authentic is what?

“Does the content of this journal support that it is from the hand of Abraham Lincoln or does the content appear to have come from somewhere else?”

Get it?

There must be a "feit" for there to be a counterfeit. (and I don't even know if this is correct English)

Jesus came before Joseph.
The Bible before the Book of Mormon.

Jesus said "it is finished."
Joseph said "more is required."

God tore the veil down.
Joseph pinned it back up.

The Bible presents the Good News or the "Feit."
The Book of Mormon is the Counterfeit."

Second, counterfeiters do not seek for originality but instead strive to reproduce the original.

Andrew Jackson must look like Andrew Jackson. Counterfeit cotton paper must feel like authorized US cotton paper.

The closer to the original, the better the counterfeit, right?

Why is the Book of Mormon written in Kings English?

Why?

Why does it quote from the Bible extensively, verbatim, and thematically?

Why?

<p>Third, the best way to detect a counterfeit is not to study the counterfeit itself, but to instead study the real deal!</p> <p>This is true in currency comparisons. This is true in comparatives claims to canonicity.</p> <p>As we dive into the content of the Book of Mormon over these next few weeks, ask yourself:</p> <p>Was that really included on golden plates, or did it come from somewhere else?</p>	
<p>WHILE WAITING . . .</p> <p>While we are waiting for the operators to clear some calls, I had the opportunity to visit my old ward this past Sunday.</p> <p>It was Ward Conference day.</p> <p>I sat in the back and listened intently on what was said, what was taught, what was not mentioned, and what was not.</p> <p>The results were just flat out disturbing.</p> <p>First of all, the theme of the conference was:</p> <p><i>“Our strength lies in our righteousness.”</i></p> <p>Taken from a speech given by Gordon B Hinckley in October of 2001.</p> <p>Listen to this? <i>“Our strength lies in our righteousness.”</i></p> <p>Any Bible believing Christian knows – that we have no strength of our own, and we have no righteousness other than Christ!</p>	

What does 1st Corinthians 1:27-31 say?

1st Corinthians 1:27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

A member of the Stake Presidency said:
There is strength and comfort in knowing we have a prophet today.

The person who closed with prayer said:

We know our safety is in the prophet.

Of course, the talk, and the prayer, closed in the name of Jesus Christ.