

# Book of Mormon

~ Part 2 of 5

(April 3, 2007)

Listen, lately on our BLOG and in other forms of communications we are getting hit with comments like:

“Shawn attacks the BOM, but look at the mistakes and problems with the Bible! Why does he think he can attack one book but then place his faith and trust in another?”

I'd like to comment on this for just a second.

First, those who attempt to make ANY sort of comparison between the evidences for the Bible and the evidences for the Book of Mormon are simply asinine!

The Bible today is supported archeologically, linguistically, genetically, and culturally.

There are viable manuscript evidences for the Bible!

There are places spoken of in the Bible you can visit!

There are entire people groups and religious cultures – Christian, Jewish, Babylonian, and Islamic – that verify Biblical presentations and claims.

There are hundreds and hundreds of prophetic claims in the Bible that have been fulfilled.

To compare the validity and/or the evidences of the Book of Mormon to the Bible is like comparing an asthmatic kazoo player with the New York Philharmonic!

<p>Don't try and demean the Bible as a means of justifying the Book of Mormon.</p>	<p>Last week I inadvertently skipped a page of notes last week regarding the Angel Moroni visits and want the mention an event that is not often known but is certainly part of the Official Church Record.</p>
<p>In the final phase of translating the plates, Joseph was invited to move from Harmony Pennsylvania to an area in New York and join the Whitmer family. But Joseph was afraid to carry the plates with him in the wagon for fear they would be overtaken.</p> <p>So the Angel Moroni appears – 13<sup>th</sup> visit – and acts as a transporting agent for the plates, taking them from Pennsylvania to New York!</p> <p>When I first read this a few years ago, I imagined that the Angel Moroni did this by dissolving the plates into particulates, beaming them over to New York, and then reforming them there. Not so.</p> <p>According to witnesses, the poor Angel hauled them cross country on foot.</p> <p>According to something called The Historical Record (edited by one Andrew Jenson, vol. 6, May 1887, pp. 207–9.) which the CHURCH uses to tell the story, it reads:</p> <p>David Whitmer described to Joseph F. Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles the wagon trip he took from Pennsylvania to New York with Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.</p> <p>As they traveled across a section of prairie, they came upon a man walking</p>	

<p>along the road, carrying something that was obviously heavy in a knapsack on his back.</p> <p>When asked if he would like a ride, the man replied, "No, I am going to Cumorah."</p> <p>Puzzled, David Whitmer looked at the other men inquiringly, but when he turned back, the man with the knapsack was gone.</p> <p>David turned to Joseph Smith and asked:</p> <p>" 'What does it mean?' "</p> <p>Joseph informed him that the man was Moroni, and that the bundle on his back contained the plates which Joseph had delivered to him before they departed from Harmony, Pennsylvania.</p> <p>He also told him that the angel was taking the plates for safety, and would return them when Joseph arrived at the Whitmer's home."</p> <p>I thought this was too important a part of the Moroni saga to leave on the cutting room floor.</p> <p>Add it to the collection.</p>	
	<p>Two weeks ago, I visited an LDS ward with my wife. It was their ward Conference.</p> <p>We sat through a hour and a half of, well, meeting.</p> <p>Lots of administration, which is what you would expect at a conference, I suppose.</p> <p>But then the talks began.</p> <p>The ward conference theme was</p>

taken from a talk GBH gave in October 1991.

“Our safety lies in the virtue of our lives. Our strength lies in our righteousness.”

WOW.  
WHOA.

People are always asking what are the differences between Mormonism and Christianity.

This Ward Conference theme pretty much sums it up.

To a Christian, our safety lies in the virtue of Jesus Christ, not in our lives. A Christian’s strength lies in Him.

Consider . . .

*1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3:18-21*

*Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*

*19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.*

*20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.*

*21 Therefore let no man glory in men.*

We turn to . . .

*1<sup>st</sup> 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*

	<p><i>mighty;</i>  <i>28 And base things of the world,</i>  <i>and things which are despised, hath</i>  <i>God chosen, yea, and things which</i>  <i>are not, to bring to nought things</i>  <i>that are:</i>  <i>29 That no flesh should glory in his</i>  <i>presence.</i></p> <p><i>A female ward member was asked</i>  <i>to close the meeting with prayer.</i></p> <p><i>I kid you not, this is what she said:</i></p> <p><i>“ . . . and we know, Heavenly</i>  <i>Father, that we have our safety in</i>  <i>the prophet Gordon B. Hinckley”</i></p> <p><i>It broke my heart.</i></p>
<p>Tonight we begin our examination of the content of the Book of Mormon.</p> <p>Tonight, you should begin to ask yourself:</p> <p>“Was this information really part of an ancient record written on gold plates and buried in a hill?”</p> <p>I propose that the Book of Mormon is, at it’s very best, a grand amalgamation NOT limited to, but certainly taken from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political themes found in early American republicanism.</li> <li>• autobiographical elements from Joseph Smith’s personal experience and family life.</li> <li>• an assortment of after-the-fact historical events.</li> <li>• a variety of popular religious issues debated and discussed in Joseph Smith’s early life.</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anti-Unitarian and anti-Trinitarian doctrinal refutations.</li> <li>• Anti-Mason rhetorical devices.</li> <li>• The Bible, used and quoted extensively;</li> <li>• Apocraphal writings.</li> <li>• An assortment of 19<sup>th</sup> Century geographical locations.</li> <li>• And various literary elements available to the Smith's at the time.</li> </ul>	<p>Over the next several weeks, I am going to try and paint a picture for you – from scratch.</p> <p>Tonight we are going to make the frame and stretch the canvas for our picture by examining early American Republican ideals as an underlying motif for many themes Joseph used throughout the Book of Mormon.</p> <p>This will not be the most exciting information we've delivered, but it is certainly evidence that Joseph Jr. incorporated events from his day into a record that was supposed to be ancient.</p> <p>Remember, if he did, the record translation story is a fraud.</p>
<p>Many political historians have seen Aristotle as the founder of "republican thought."</p> <p>Machiavelli, James Harrington and other thinkers of the English Revolution helped shape Aristotle's thoughts into a more</p>	

applicable working model.

By the time the American Revolutionaries took Aristotle's "Republican" ideals and applied them, they saw it as the "*political struggle between the forces of virtue and corruption.*"

American political theorists believed that a republic was the best form of government, but they also knew it was a very fragile system and quite difficult to keep healthy.

Where kingships and monarchies could be very evil, as evidenced by the actions of King George, they seemed to have provided an easier method for managing the "unruly masses."

After the American Revolution (ending in 1776) a tenuous, and possibly at times frightening, newcomer called democracy stood upon our verdant shores.

Joseph Smith was born just 30 years later.

It became apparent very quickly that the greatest enemies to the free republic were anarchy and tyranny.

Kenneth Winn, professor at Washington University and author of an outstanding book called, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, writes that:

"Anarchy reared its head when the rabble, (generally men with no stake in society, or "designing men") fractured the body politic into unrestrained forces."

In anarchy, the unruly masses often turned to a "visionary knights who would promise the world" believing he could provide peace while often forgetting the risk they ran of chaining themselves, once again, to a potential despot.

Political, social, or religious despots were certainly viewed as antithetical to democracy.

This is one of the reasons Joseph Smith Junior and his followers were persecuted. Rightly or wrongly, they viewed Joseph as tyrannical.

I'm sure the uniforms, white horse, and militias didn't help.

Ironically, Joseph saw Mormonism as a way to save the republic from the moral "anarchy" he believed the country was beginning to embrace.

Anything in early America that smacked of anarchy was considered anathema and a threat to the stability and liberty of the republic.

Therefore, a variety of social "safeguards" and attitudes were used and promoted by early Americans as a means of protecting the republic from the deleterious effects of anarchy and tyranny.

These "republican themes," many of which originated through the Puritans, were considered essential to controlling "chaos and decline in early America."

Interestingly enough, these themes also happened to conveniently find a place in the pages of the Book of Mormon.

One of these themes was an agrarian approach to living.

Just as early Americans long

extolled the farmer as the epitome of industriousness, independence, and civic virtue, so does the Book of Mormon.

When the great Nephi prophet Alma led people out from under the control of the poster child for “anti-republican ideals” (King Noah), the Book of Mormon says that the people

“pitched their tents, and began to till the ground, and began to build buildings, etc.; yea they were industrious, and did labor exceedingly.”

Even when the savage, nomadic, and anarchist Lamanites converted to the ways of the industrious, Joseph Smith writes that they too began “tilling the ground, raising all manner of grain, and flocks and herds of every kind.”

In other words, when the wild and ferocious Indians of the Book of Mormon turned from anarchy, Joseph turned their hands to the epitome of 19<sup>th</sup> century virtue - farming.

Simply being “industrious” was not enough to merit respect in early America.

Traditionally, early American theorists feared that certain occupations – like merchants and lawyers – might not be totally committed to republicanism because they played to luxury, lived off the troubles of others, and did not have their hands in the soil.

To truly support the early American republican ideal of civic respectability, one had to work with his hands.

Few did this more than farmers.

In the Book of Mormon, these same common ideals were applied to the “righteous Nephites” who, whether a leader or commoner, “tilled the earth.”

One popular Nephite hero, the “goodly King Benjamin,” who spent his days “serving others,” embodies this early American ideal. So much so that Joseph has him say in the Book of Mormon:

*“I, myself, have labored with my own hands, that I might serve you, that you should not be laden with taxes.”*

Joseph described Mosiah, King Benjamin’s son, in terms of the republican ideal by saying he:

*“did cause his people to till the earth. And he also, himself did till the earth, that thereby he might not be burdensome to his people.”*

Even the religious leaders and prophets in the BOM, like Alma, fit the common republican model when he tells his priests

*“not to depend on people for their support, but to labor with their own hands.”*

What you often find in the Book of Mormon are “good” characters being the embodiment of all that

early American Republicans thought was good, and the “evil” characters representing all that early Americans found reprehensible and dangerous to the republic.

Every good Nephite, or converted Lamanite, was not poor, but a self-reliant, industrious, farmer who disdained self-seeking luxury at the expense of others but is sensitive to the needs of the community and poor.

Every “bad Lamanite” or fallen Nephite was the epitome of all the republic feared: vice, avarice, laziness, tyrannical, and anarchistic.

There are dozens of Book of Mormon references that attack merchants and lawyers for their contribution to the decay of the nation, and a number of other passages that elevate farmers and craftsmen by extolling their agrarian virtue over everything else.

I am not saying these characterizations were necessarily wrong. I am only saying they did not come from gold plates.

As if to forget he was translating from ancient records, Joseph Smith’s personal invective against attorneys seemed to slip into the text when he writes that the “sole object of these lawyers was to get gain.”

The Smith’s rarely had any good experiences with attorneys. The

Hand in hand with the virtue of aggressive industriousness was the republican attitude toward wealth, and its step-sister, luxury.

Classical theorists of early America feared that the republican virtues of simplicity, economy, and industry would amount to large fortunes and ultimately, luxury.

Luxury was an enemy to the republic because anyone who desired “more than what he or she needed” might be tempted to sell their political liberties in order to retain and maintain a personal luxurious standard of living.

Republican idealists sincerely believed that whenever the public good took a backseat to private interest, the republic was at risk.

Luxury – any form of it – was considered the truest indicator that private desire was taking over public good, and that the republic was headed for disaster.

In typical republican prose found throughout the Book of Mormon, Smith writes:

*“It came to pass in the eighth year of the reign of Judges, that the people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold, and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry, and in all those things they were lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear costly apparel.”*

bias comes through loud and clear.

When you consider the dire economic straights of the Smith family, which, as we've noted, resulted in a number of difficult circumstances, like very poor apparel, the origins of passages such as this become very apparent.

In September of 1826, before Joseph is said to have obtained the plates (or, in my opinion, during the time he was formulating his outline for the Book of Mormon) an event occurred which had national implications and gave Smith more grist for the mill.

A man named William Morgan, an ex-Mason, was kidnapped not too far from Joseph's home, and never seen again.

Morgan was an ex-Mason who had just completed writing an expose on the secrets of Freemasonry and it was believed that the Masons got a hold of him and killed him for his soon to be released revelations.

(BY THE WAY: William Morgan's widow,

Because of time, I won't attempt to examine the political themes present in the Book of Mormon relative to monarchy, kingship, and judges, but the similarities are plentiful and astounding.

Neither will I describe and compare Joseph Smith's the characteristics Smith gives the books political heroes like Captain Moroni.

I am, however, going to spend these last few minutes discussing the republics fear of "internal subversion" and how Joseph included these "secret combinations" in the Book of Mormon.

Lucinda Pendleton, became one of Joseph Smith's first polygamous wives).

Over the next three years, while Joseph was writing the Book of Mormon, the politically powerful and evasive Masonic movement faced a huge public outcry which was heard across the land as it connived and strived to exonerate itself in the murder of Morgan.

This initiated an anti-Masonry movement that for all intents and purposes killed the popularity of Masonry then – and even to this day.

Why the huge outcry?

Early Americans believed that secret societies endangered the republic because secret oaths and loyalty to Masonry had subversively replaced out in the open loyalty to the republic.

Secret societies led to insidious manipulations, potential anarchy and ultimate tyranny.

Masonry was also seen as a secret, organized form of organized tyranny and this could not, would not, be tolerated in a democratic republic.

Like other contemporary themes, as anti-Masonic fervor swept through the established nation and community of Joseph, it also became a theme in the Book of Mormon.

In the Book of Mormon, Joseph named the Masons the "Gadianton Robbers."

The following description he gives of them could easily pass for a contemporary republican critique of Freemasonry.

Listen to the Masonic references!

Okay, when the Nephites joined the Gadianton robbers, Joseph writes in the Book of Mormon that they

*“did enter into their covenants, and their oaths, that they would protect and preserve one another, in whatsoever difficult circumstances they should be placed in, that they should not suffer for their murders, and their plunderings, and their stealings. And it came to pass that they did have their signs, yea their secret signs, and their secret words; and this that they might distinguish a brother who has entered into the covenant, that whatsoever wickedness his brother should do, he should not be injured by his brother, not by those who belong to his band, who had taken this covenant; and thus they might murder, and plunder, and steal, and commit whoredoms, and all manner of wickedness, contrary to the laws of their country, and also the Laws of their God; and whosoever of those who belonged to their band, should reveal unto the world of their wickedness and abominations, should be tried, not according to the laws of their country, but according to the laws of their wickedness.”*

The irony of this is that in not too many years, Joseph would actually embrace much of Freemasonry, becoming a Mason himself, and actually adopting many secret Masonic forms into the religion called Mormonism today!

One of the greatest political fears American’s had was that this secret, upstart group would somehow undermine and take over republican society. That democracy would be replaced by special

interest group wielding the power.

America reacted to the Masons secret murders and manipulations out of pure, unadulterated fear.

As a warning to the nation, Joseph has the fictionalized Gadianton robbers taking over the “sole management of the Government” among the Nephite’s, and by the end of the book, this same “secret combination” would contribute greatly to the Nephite’s ultimate demise.

I don’t pretend that the information tonight it is conclusive of Joseph having committed literary fraud.

It certainly adds dimension to what the LDS call the “Most Correct Book” on the face of the earth.

And it should certainly give pause to the question each of us should ask ourselves as we examine the LDS claims of the Book:

“Did this information come from an ancient record written on golden plates, or did it come from some other source?”