Some members of the LDS Church have made fantastic claims about archaeologists using the Book of Mormon. For example, one letter circulated among LDS members in Ohio in 1959 claimed that the Book of Mormon was used by "the government to unravel the problem of the aborigines. . . . it was 1920 before the **Smithsonian Institute officially recognized the Book of Mormon** as a record of any value. . . . it is true that the **Book of Mormon has been the guide to almost all of the major discoveries**. . . . This record is . . . recognized by all advanced students in the field"(Tanners, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* p. 97)

Because of many false statements disseminated by members of the LDS Church, such as the one cited above, the Smithsonian Institution was forced to publish a statement concerning these matters. The 1986 statement begins with a denial of the claims put forth by Mormon enthusiasts:

> 1. The Smithsonian Institution **has never used the Book of Mormon in any way** as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archeologists see **no direct connection** between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book. ("Statement Regarding The Book of Mormon," Smithsonian Institution, Spring 1986)

In 1973, Michael Coe, one of the best known authorities on archaeology of the New World, wrote an article for *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1973. After summarizing Book of Mormon claims, he frankly stated:

> Let me now state uncategorically that as far as I know **there is not one professionally trained archaeologist**, who is not a Mormon, **who sees any scientific justification for believing the foregoing to be true** . . . nothing, **absolutely nothing**, has ever shown up in any New World excavation which would suggest to a dispassionate observer that the Book of Mormon . . . is a historical document relating to the history of early migrants to our hemisphere. (pp. 42, 46)

Some LDS scholars are beginning to publicly admit that archaeology does not furnish any significant evidence for the Book of Mormon. Dee F. Green, who at one time served as editor of the *University Archaeological Society Newsletter*, published at the church's Brigham Young University, made it plain that archaeological evidence did not prove the Book of Mormon:

> The **first myth we need to eliminate is that Book of Mormon archaeology exists**. . . . If one is to study Book of Mormon archaeology, then one must have a corpus of data with which to deal. We do not. The Book of Mormon is really there so one can have Book of Mormon studies, and archaeology is really there so one can study archaeology, but the two **are not wed**. At least they are not wed in reality since **no Book of Mormon location is known with reference to modern topography**. Biblical archaeology can be studied because we do know where Jerusalem and Jericho were and are, but **we do not know where Zarahemla and Bountiful** (nor any other location for that matter) **were or are**. It would seem then that a concentration on geography should be the first order of business, but we have already seen that twenty years of such an approach has **left us empty-handed**. (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1969, pp. 77-78)

Thomas Stuart Ferguson was one of the most noted defenders of Book of Mormon archaeology. Mr. Ferguson, co-founder of the New World Archaeological Foundation, hoped to prove the Book of Mormon through archaeological research. The LDS Church granted hundreds of thousands of dollars to this organization, but in the end, Thomas Stuart Ferguson admitted that although the Foundation made some important contributions to New World archaeology, all his work with regard to the Book of Mormon was in vain. He admitted, in fact, that he had wasted twenty-five years of his life trying to prove the Book of Mormon. In 1975 Ferguson prepared a 29-page paper in which he wrote: "I'm afraid that up to this point, I must agree with Dee Green, who has told us that to date **there is no Book-of-Mormon geography**." In a letter to Mr. and Mrs. H.W. Lawrence, dated Feb. 20, 1976, Thomas Stuart Ferguson plainly stated: ". . . you can't set Book of Mormon geography down anywhere—**because it is fictional** and will never meet the requirements of the dirt-archeology."

Dr. Ray T. Matheny, Professor of Anthropology at the church's Brigham Young University, admitted that he has a difficult time reconciling New World archaeology with the Book of Mormon:

> I really have difficulty in finding issue or quarrel with those opening chapters of the Book of Mormon [i. e., the first seven chapters which only relate to Lehi and his family around the area of Jerusalem]. But thereafter **it doesn't seem like a translation to me**. . . . And the terminologies and the language used and the methods of explaining and putting things down are 19th century literary concepts and cultural experiences one would expect Joseph Smith and his colleagues would experience. And for that reason I call it transliteration, and I'd rather **not call it a translation** after the

7th chapter. And I have **real difficulty in trying to relate these cultural concepts** as I've briefly discussed here **with archeological findings** that I'm aware of. . . .

If I were doing this cold like John Carlson is here, I would say in evaluating the Book of Mormon that it **had no place in the New World whatsoever**. I would have to look for the place of the Book of Mormon events to have taken place in the Old World. It just **doesn't seem to fit anything** that he has been taught in his discipline, nor I in my discipline in anthropology, history; there seems to be n**o place for it**. **It seems misplaced**. It seems like there are anachronisms. It seems like the items are **out of time and place**, and trying to put them into the New World. And I think there's a great difficulty here for we Mormons in understanding what this book is all about." ("Book of Mormon Archeology," Response by Professor Ray T. Matheny, Sunstone Symposium, August 25, 1984, typed copy transcribed from a tape-recording, pp. 30-31)

Three years after speaking at this symposium, Dr. Matheny wrote a letter in which he made it clear that there was still no Book of Mormon archaeology:

> While some people choose to make claims for the Book of Mormon through archaeological evidences, to me they are made prematurely, and without sufficient knowledge.
>
> **I do not support the books written on this subject** including *The Messiah in Ancient America*, **or any other**. I believe that the authors are making cases out of too little evidence and do not adequately address the problems that archaeology and the Book of Mormon present. I would feel terribly embarrassed if anyone sent a copy of any book written on the subject to the National Museum of Natural History—Smithsonian Institution, or other authority, making claims that cannot as yet be substantiated. . . . there are **very severe problems** in this field in trying to make correlations with the scriptures. Speculation, such as practiced so far by Mormon authors has not given church members credibility. (Letter by Ray T. Matheny, dated Dec. 17, 1987)

While there is no archaeological evidence to support the Book of Mormon's claim that there were Nephites in the New World, the existence of the Israelites in the Holy Land is verified by a great deal of evidence. The "earliest archaeological reference to the people of Israel" is a stele of the Egyptian ruler Merneptah, dated about 1220 B.C. Many ancient inscriptions mentioning the Israelites have been found, and some inscriptions even give the names of kings or other people mentioned in the Bible. The New Testament mentions a number of rulers that are known to have lived around the time of Christ. The fact that the Jews were in Palestine at the time the Bible indicates is proven by hundreds of ancient Hebrew inscriptions. Portions of every book of the Old Testament, except for the book Esther, have also been found in the manuscripts known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. When we turn to the Book of Mormon, however, we are unable to find any evidence at all that the Nephites ever existed.

For more information on the Book of Mormon and many other subjects, see the book, *Major Problems of Mormonism*, available from Utah Lighthouse Ministry.

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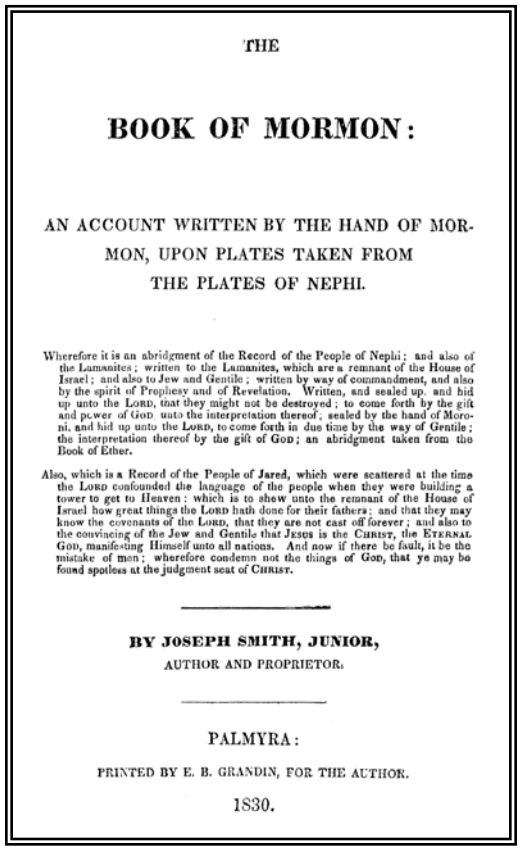
Testing the Book of Mormon



THE

BOOK OF MORMON:

AN ACCOUNT WRITTEN BY THE HAND OF MORMON, UPON PLATES TAKEN FROM THE PLATES OF NEPHI.

Wherefore it is an abridgment of the Record of the People of Nephi; and also of the Lamanites; written to the Lamanites, which 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 Prophesy and of Revelation. Written, and sealed up, and hid up unto the LORD, that they might not be destroyed; to come forth by the gift and power of GOD unto the interpretation thereof; sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the LORD, to come forth in due time by the way of Gentile; the interpretation thereof by the gift of GOD; an abridgment taken from the Book of Ether.

Also, which is a Record of the People of Jared, which were scattered at the time the LORD confounded the language of the people when they were building a tower to get to Heaven: which is to shew unto the remnant of the House of Israel how great things the LORD hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the LORD, that they are not cast off forever; and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting Himself unto all nations. And now if there be fault, it be the mistake of men; wherefore condemn not the things of GOD, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of CHRIST.

BY JOSEPH SMITH, JUNIOR,
AUTHOR AND PROPRIETOR.

PALMYRA:
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1830.