

## **The Book of Mormon – Is It True?**

In deciding whether a book is “true” or not, we need to define what “true” means. The Book of Mormon is truly a book, as opposed to being a rock or a tree. It contains bound pages inside a cover. In an electronic format, it is a collection of words, arranged in smaller books, chapters, and verses. So, in that sense The Book of Mormon is truly a book – a true book. Therefore, in that very limited sense, The Book of Mormon is true.

### **Claims of Truth**

What does it mean to say that a book is "true"?

In what ways can a book be "true"?

If certain claims are made about a book, and if we are able to verify some or all of those claims, does that make the book "true"?

Do all the claims need to be true, or is it enough that one claim be true?

If all the claims are false, is the book then false?

What unique claims are made of the Book of Mormon?

Which of these claims is supportable, provable, and plausible?

Seen from an eternal, rather than a temporal perspective, which of these claims really matter?

Can some of these claims be true and verifiable, while others are either false or not verifiable, and yet the Book of Mormon is still "true"? Surrounding the book are claims which few other books dare make:

1. Claims about the original authorship,
2. Claims about how the book was preserved,
3. Claims about how the book was discovered,
4. Claims about how the book was translated,
5. Claims about the historical contents of the book,
6. Claims about the principles taught by the book,
7. And last of all there are claims which have nothing to do with the book itself, but claims which say that if all the above claims are true, then Joseph Smith was a true prophet; everything he said or did is true; the LDS church that he organized in 1830 is true; and, by extension, the LDS church, as it exists today, is just as true.

## The “Oprah” Test

If a book which claims to be non-fiction (i.e. true) contains one falsehood, is the book then fiction? A recent guest of the Oprah Show got in trouble with her because he claimed that his book was a true autobiography, when it actually contained some fiction.

## The Only Claim that Really Matters

Joseph Smith, himself, made a very significant claim about the book.

“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.”

None of the other claims about the Book of Mormon have only real eternal import. On the day that we stand before Christ, and he gathers His sheep on one hand and the goats on the other, he will say to the goats “Depart. I never knew you.” Or in other words, “you never knew me.” Ancient civilizations, gold plates, the Urim & Thummin, the visions of others, and the organizations they founded will all someday have little import when compared to our relationship with God, and whether we have His Name written on our foreheads, or whether we have chosen to follow the beast and take his mark upon our hands and foreheads.

This statement from Joseph Smith invites a serious student of the Book of Mormon to place a higher priority on examining the **contents** of the books, and especially the claims made about the contents of the book, instead of focusing on the external events surrounding it.

Here are some questions we should ask ourselves?

- How would the story about how the Book of Mormon was discovered or revealed or written have any bearing on whether it was true or not?
- If the Book of Mormon came by modern revelation instead of being translated from ancient golden plates, would it be any less true?
- If the Book of Mormon was written by a number of people, through revelation or inspiration, would it be any less true?
- If book of Mormon teachings will bring a man closer to God, and if those teachings are contrary to the current teachings of the Church, then will obeying the precepts of the modern-day church take a person away from God?

## Does the Church teach the Precepts of the Book of Mormon?

I first read the Book of Mormon when I was about 12 years old. I had just been ordained a Deacon, and in preparation for receiving the Aaronic Priesthood, I had embarked on a deep study of Church history and doctrine. I was raised in a partial member family, so most of what I learned was completely new to me. But I couldn’t escape the idea that being ordained to the Priesthood was something very important,

and something that I took very seriously. I continued my studies by reading the Book of Mormon, recalling the story of the First Vision of the young boy, Joseph Smith, at the age of 14. I read about such Book of Mormon heroes as Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Alma, the other Nephi's, Mormon, and Moroni and was also thrilled to hear about their experiences. I fully felt that by the time I was fourteen years of age, I could have similar experiences to theirs and to the experience that Joseph Smith received.

It wasn't until I was older, and the expected experiences still hadn't come, that I learned that there were certain principles that needed to be understood, before a man could have personal communion with God. But, as I read the Book of Mormon, I felt the overwhelming testimony, not of any of the claims above, except for #6, the truth of the principles taught by the book. I never received the "burning in the bosom" when contemplating a bunch of pre-Columbian authors carving away on gold plates and burying them in the ground. But, what caused the "burning" for me, and also all the other attendant signs of the Spirit at work as outlined by the Book of Mormon (change of heart, mind, and disposition, increase in charity, gifts of the spirit, expanded insights, and on occasion, hearing the actual words of Christ) were learning and living the teachings. But, as I later came to read and understand the Bible and some of its heroes, I began to have the same feelings and insights about them, also. My Biblical heroes, incidentally, are Noah, Joseph, Samuel, Isaiah, Daniel, and John. One night, in 1977, just before I drifted off to sleep, an angel, who identified himself as "Nephi" appeared at the side of the bed and told me that the Book of Mormon was very important, and that I should study it and share it.

This claim #6 tells me that my teenage instincts were right on the money. It was the principles taught in the Book of Mormon – the precepts – that brought me closer to God than anything else I experienced. There was something else that I experienced when reading the Book of Mormon – the teachings I read in that book were not being taught by the church. Is the Book of Mormon still the "keystone of our religion"? Has the Book of Mormon ever been the keystone of the any religion? Joseph Smith didn't preach a lot out of the Book of Mormon, but in his sermons, he did discuss the principles given out in the Book of Mormon. In D&C 20:9 and D&C 27:5 and 35:17 and 42:12, it states that the Book of Mormon contains "the fullness of the Gospel". But in 1832, the Lord told the saints:

And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received--

Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation.

And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all.

And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written... D&C 84:54-57

It is vitally important that we understand and receive the fullness of the Gospel. We are not to take it lightly, but we are to teach it and practice it. Nowhere do we read that this condemnation has ever been lifted.

Here are a couple of stories from college. All freshmen at BYU are required to take two semesters studying the Book of Mormon. My professor was a very staunch believer in the content of the Book of Mormon. His motto was "It's what the book says that counts." On his exams, he expected us to answer every question by giving a direct quote out of the Book of Mormon. He didn't expect us to memorize the book, but we were expected to know about a hundred significant passages from memory. Once, I had a run-in with my Sunday School class. I answered a question by a direct quote from the Book of Mormon, but the teacher and the class laughed at me, saying "That's just old Bankhead's opinion. That's not what the Church teaches."

Here is another story. The bishop of my BYU ward liked to hold special sacrament meetings on the Sunday evenings following General Conference. The bishopric passed the Sacrament, and the presidency of the Elders blessed the bread and water. This was a living example to us that the "greatest among us should be the servant of all". After the Sacrament, the bishopric spoke to the ward. On one occasion the Bishop spoke to us for 1 ½ hours out of the Book of Mormon, concerning Christ and his testimony of Christ. The spirit present in those special meetings was greater than all of conference.

### **What Does the Church Teach about the Book of Mormon?**

The Church seems to claim the exclusive right to teach the Book of Mormon, according to their interpretation, when they teach from it at all. This is similar to other Christian sects claiming the exclusive right to interpret the Bible.

But the church goes on to make another claim. Claim #7.

The new edition of the Book of Mormon contains an "Introduction", introduced by the Church in the new edition: <http://scriptures.lds.org/en/bm/introduction>.

Let's examine this introduction, which is now included in the Book of Mormon, with the implied weight of scripture. It is interesting to note that this section is in the introduction to the Book of Mormon; no date or authorship is provided; and the Church never voted in Conference to accept it as scripture, yet here it is, included along with Moroni's introduction and the testimonies of the three witnesses and the eight witnesses.

"The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains, as does the Bible, the fullness of the everlasting gospel."

42:12. "And again, the elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fullness of the gospel."

Together, these books contain the fullness of the gospel, but, apparently, they each and alone do not contain the fullness of the gospel. We need both. Each book explains the other.

The church has another purpose for the Book of Mormon, as we continue to read this introduction.

"We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder in their hearts the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if the book is true. Those who pursue this course and ask in faith will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost. (See Moroni 10: 3-5.)

"...Those who gain this divine witness from the Holy Spirit will also come to know by the same power that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that Joseph Smith is his revelator and prophet in these last days, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord's kingdom once again established on the earth, preparatory to the second coming of the Messiah. "

The introduction invites the reader to read, ponder, and pray about the truth of the Book of Mormon. Each new convert to the church which teaches the importance of ongoing and continuous revelation is invited to receive their own personal revelation. This is wonderful, but the introduction neglects to mention that by the power of the Holy Ghost one may know the truth of all things. It also neglects to invite the reader to test and pray about the teachings of the Book. To know the truth the precepts taught in the Book of Mormon, and to know the truth of all things requires not one revelation, but a lifetime of prayer, study, and experience. This requires many revelations. It is not a single act.

The introduction seems to imply that simply by knowing that the book of Mormon is true, a person will also come to know that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. The introduction misses the important truth that by following the precepts taught by the Book of Mormon, that a person will not only come to know facts *about* Jesus Christ, but will come to **know** Jesus Christ, himself, which knowledge is worth more than all the facts, all the books, all the churches in the world.

The introduction also implies that once you gain a that once you gain a testimony of the truth of the Book of Mormon, that you will also have a testimony of Joseph Smith and the Church, all that they have done or will do. And that the Church is the "Lord's kingdom", established on the earth.

The Church now sees the purpose of the Book of Mormon as a means, not to "get closer to God", but to gain a testimony that Joseph Smith is a prophet, and the Church is the "Lord's kingdom". The church wants you to gain a testimony that the Book of Mormon is true, and then extrapolate that testimony to include a blanket endorsement of Joseph Smith and the Church. All of that in exchange for the effort of a single prayer about whether the book is true.

**This is a perversion of the purpose of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is supposed to be a testament of Christ, and lead you to Christ, not lead you to some church. In fact, the Book of Mormon presents an indictment of churches built up in the last days. A serious study of the Book of Mormon could well lead the reader to a testimony that the church is not true.**

Prayer is powerful, and one prayer from Joseph Smith lead to many wonderful things, but it was constant and continual prayer over a period of time that lead to the accumulation of knowledge that Joseph Smith possessed. And, simple knowledge that the Book of Mormon is true does not automatically cover everything about the church and the kingdom under a single umbrella. Each item must be prayerfully considered on its own merits.

We are taught that “by the Holy Ghost, ye shall know the truth of all things”, but what few ever attempt, is to apply this test to specifically Joseph Smith and then to the Church and to then to the decisions made by the Church.

You can’t just apply that test once, and then give the Church a blank check to do all your thinking for you. There is one thing that you, as an individual possess, and that is your free agency. You cannot give it away to somebody else. You may think you are giving it away to another, but it is so much an inherent part of you such that even if you bury your head and pretend to give it away, you still have it and will be judged by how you use it. If you bury it, like the man who buried his talent, you will still be held accountable.

So, no blank checks to anybody. Not even to people that you trust. “Trust, but verify”, as Ronald Reagan used to say.

Always test.

I promise you this, and I speak from experience: God will never punish you, or cut you off, or value you less because you have questions and seek to verify His word, or something that purports to be His word. If a teacher or guru, or a church that claims to represent God, does punish you, or cut you off, or values you less because you seek to verify what they say, then know this: that teacher or that church is far from God.

Remember: the Mormon religion, itself, all began with a simple question.

Remember this as well: a person without questions is a person without revelation.

We need to **prove** ALL things, hold fast to that which is good, and **verify** everything by the Spirit, and verify everything by their fruits.

And, just what are those fruits? Popularity? Wealth? Number of members? According to the Book of Mormon, itself, these are not the true fruits of the true church of Jesus Christ, or the true fruits of a disciple of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon teaches that there would be but few members of the true church of Christ, and they would be scattered throughout the world. The other church (and there are only two), will also be scattered all over the world, and the Book of Mormon condemns it for its wealth, for ignoring the poor, and for its lack of faith, as evidenced by its lack of miracles and gifts of the Spirit.

### **How are the Words of the Book of Mormon True?**

This is what I really wanted to study with this reading of the Book of Mormon. Are the words true because they simply repeat passages out of the Bible, or are there any new truths which are also taught in the Bible, but are better explained in the Book of Mormon? Also, does the Book of Mormon introduce any new truths?

I approached my study with the view that nothing in the book was true. I just wiped out my mind of any prejudices and approached reading the book as if I had never read it before. This is a useful approach to

learning any new truth. It's called "becoming as a little child" because it comes naturally for little children. Adults have to apply some mental discipline, but it is a lesson that will serve you well throughout your life, once you practice it and master it.

One of the meanings of repentance is to turn again in both our deeds and our thoughts -- to change from doing one thing to doing another, and from thinking one way to thinking another. We need not only know the difference between evil and good, but the difference between "good" and "better". Life is a series of choices. To repent is to "choose again". We must be constantly aware of our choices and decisions throughout life, not to make a single choice, but to be constantly discerning and choosing. The sum result of choosing better is full repentance, which means to turn and face the Lords.

Another important principle to remember with regard to make a choice is to choose between the alternative as they truly ARE, not between the choices you are GIVEN. If you choose only between the alternatives that are given you, you may be given only the illusion of choice, or a false choice. Anybody who has ever voted in a US election knows whereof I speak.

This study is by no means exhaustive, but here are a few highlights.

## **The Quality of Language in the Book of Mormon**

Many people may be attracted to the Book of Mormon by its beauty of language alone.

In looking at the quality of the language of the Book of Mormon, when you compare the Book of Mormon to other Mormon writings, the writing is far superior. There is a greater clarity of thought and expression. The truth seems to ring through clearly in places, some of which I have quoted in this document. While the language is beautiful, the characters and the situations they are placed into seem simplistic. This makes sense and is not seen as a weakness of the book when you consider that each situation is specifically design to teach you a lesson. The Book of Mormon is presented as a series of strategically selected object lessons which have been curated out of a longer epic narrative, addressed specifically believers of the Book of Mormon in our day. To serve this purpose, and this purpose alone, character development and geographic context take a back seat.

The Book of Mormon is addressed to the believers in our day. Many people believe that the Book of Mormon is addressed to other Christian sects who deny faith, miracles, and other gifts of the spirit, but these people will never read the Book of Mormon. The book is intended for latter-day saint readers who profess to believe in Christ, and the gifts of the Spirit, but excuse their lack of faith by claiming that miracles are done away, and that faith is mere belief, and that the Spirit is just a good feeling you get inside. There is more, but you can read the book and see for yourself. They truly saw our day and knew our doing.

The key to mining knowledge and truth out of the Book of Mormon is that you must read it literally and liken it to yourself. The book assumes its readers will disbelieve it. I can't tell you how many times I read the Book of Mormon and didn't take it literally or seriously. When I came across a passage I didn't understand or didn't agree with what I was taught in church, I just assumed that Joseph Smith made a mistake, or the writers of the Book of Mormon didn't possess all they truth we have today, and so they

erred in doctrine, and passed it by (i.e. took it lightly). I have since come to realize that the writers of the Book of Mormon did not err in doctrine, and that their teachings are perfectly in alignment with and amplify the teachings of the Bible, and they foreshadow the later doctrines taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

As a missionary, it was easy to sit down with investigators and together read passages out of the Book of Mormon. Why? Because the Book of Mormon was written as a missionary tract, complete with born-again experiences, conversion stories, altar calls, baptismal challenges, and explanations of the common doctrinal disputations of the early 1800's in America. At that time, it was quite common for religious societies to produce and sell religious tracts – small booklets. Where there were seeming contradictions between the Old and New Testaments and between the New Testament writers, themselves, the Book of Mormon settles these questions.

Also consider the Book of Mormon as a religious tract for our day. Its purpose is to teach you and me and convert us to the fullness of the Gospel. To understand what's happening in the Restoration today, put yourself back in the place of the people who lived in Joseph Smith's time. They were hungry for the truth, but were confused by the wrangling sects, and looked forward to the true Gospel upon the earth, but knew not where to find it. Then, somebody put a Book of Mormon in their hands, and they read it as if they had never read it before. Reading the Book of Mormon with new eyes will lift your vision from the stale, flat, impotent hand-me-down version of the Gospel which fills the bellies of people today, but sends them away wanting more nourishment. You will discover the fullness of the Gospel that will enable you to commune with gods and angels and take you right to the very gates of Heaven, itself. According to Isaiah 28, our "tables are filled with vomit": half-digested food that has been regurgitated and spoon-fed to babies. Its milk given to spiritual infants who are never allowed to grow up and taste meat, nor experience the real fruits of the fullness of the Gospel.

### **The Life and Character of Joseph Smith: Can an evil tree bring forth good fruit?**

We mention Joseph Smith because he claimed to be the original "author and proprietor" of the Book of Mormon. Though the focus is on the contents of the Book and the principles taught therein, we must take a glance at Joseph and Oliver.

We must not forget that Joseph Smith was a man, and like all men, he had his virtues along with his character flaws. Churchill also had flaws, while Hitler has his virtues. But it takes the crucible of history to reveal the flaws and the virtues in each of us. There is no argument that Joseph Smith not only lived history, he made history. And, with the history that he made, there came many crises of his own making, which revealed both his strengths and weaknesses.

The LDS church has a vested interest in portraying him as an illiterate farm boy, the better to show that the Book of Mormon and Doctrine & Covenants that came forth from him were none other than the product of a divine intelligence. Joseph Smith was much brighter and more educated than people gave him credit for. He came from a family of preachers and knew the Bible backward and forward. He was in correspondence with many of the popular ministers and knew the doctrinal issues of the day. He was familiar with the popular fancies of the day -- that the Indians were from the ten lost tribes of Israel, and



that America was to be the gathering place for Zion. Many religious groups established religious communities throughout the mid-West with varying degrees of success. Furthermore, Joseph Smith surrounded himself with bright and highly-educated (for the times) individuals like Oliver Cowdery and Emma Hale, (not to mention Rigdon, the Whitmers, and numerous scribes who were constantly at his side) who could have assisted him in the work, and helped polish his words and ideas to the point that when viewed through the Mormon lens of history, they glow brighter than they normally would, had they come straight from the lips or pen of Joseph Smith.

In order to make any teaching attract the attention of the public, it needs to be presented with a little glamour and panache. Even Jesus knew that by riling the establishment and by showing signs and wonders, people would be drawn to him and want to hear more. However, the sincere seeker of truth is not impressed by the glitz, but the truths of the teachings resonate with his soul. Peter, for example, when asked whether the disciples would also leave Christ because his teachings were too hard to bear, said that the disciples would not leave, because Christ taught “the words of eternal life”.

In the Book of Mormon, the honest seeker also hears the words of eternal life.

Modern-day teachers and writers follow a similar pattern to attract readers and listeners. Nobody wants to hear an ordinary, but honest man speaking the simple truth. The public prefers to hear stories about angels and gold plates, spiced up with sex and controversy; about immortals bearing ancient teachings; about being overshadowed by higher entities; about hidden teachers claiming to be Christ or an eastern master claiming to reveal secret doctrines; about ET’s from the Siberian wilderness bringing intergalactic teachings; about people claiming to have conversations with resurrected beings or interstellar beings which contradict the LDS teachings, right under their nose – in the Salt Lake temple of all places! But this is like opening a fancy restaurant. People will be attracted by all the publicity and the celebrities who turn out. They may return to the restaurant to “see and be seen”, but those who know quality food will return only if the restaurant serves good food. Then there are those quiet “hole in the wall dives” that don’t have a nice ambience. They just serve good food and their only publicity is word of mouth. Those seeking glamour will never eat there, but true lovers of food keep the place constantly busy.

I think the discussions of Joseph Smith often get sidetracked on the character of the man – whether he was a charlatan, liar, and deceiver, or whether he simply made a few mistakes – yet not looking at the teachings and whether they accomplish what they claim to do. Truth stands independent of its messenger.

## Oliver Cowdery

We take a brief look at the character and background of Oliver Cowdery. Though Oliver did not play a role in obtaining the plates, the translation of the Book of Mormon did not begin in earnest until he appeared on the scene. Also, the translation we now have is a product of the collaborative work of Joseph and Oliver, and the manuscript was written almost entirely in Oliver’s hand,

People tend to build up Joseph Smith at the expense of Oliver Cowdery. There are only two people whose best interest was furthered by dissing and dismissing this man. (1) Sidney Rigdon coveted a seat on Joseph’s right hand and stopped at nothing to get it. Eventually the Saints saw through him and

wanted to oust him. Even Joseph wanted to oust Rigdon, but Rigdon had so packed the Church with his supporters, that they overruled the other votes in Conference, and Rigdon stayed. Keep in mind that Church Conferences were much more democratic back then than the LDS conferences are now. The RLDS church (Community of Christ) still runs a true democratic conference: members are informed of the proposal (new revelations and leadership changes) ahead of time, and there is a vigorous debate in conference before a vote takes place. Leadership can even be voted out of office if the membership does not continue to sustain them. A practice like this is unheard of in the modern LDS church.

Though in the beginning Joseph and Oliver were considered equals by the Lord, (2) Joseph also sought to diminish Oliver and grab a greater share of the glory for himself. Several revelations that actually came through Oliver were appropriated under the name of Joseph Smith, and Oliver was never given proper credit. Oliver was instructed by revelation to admonish Joseph Smith in his faults, but when he did so, Joseph Smith punished him for speaking out and for fulfilling the duty he was commanded to perform.

Oliver Cowdery had a vision of the gold plates before he ever met the Smith family or came to Palmyra as a school teacher. Cowdery was an educated man. Teaching school was the least of his abilities. He was an attorney and later ran for state office. He offered at one time to be the Church's legal representative in Washington. He established newspapers and printing shops. He had the charge of the Book of Mormon manuscripts after they were translated. He was charged with editing the revelations that were to be published, so it is reasonable to assume that he also edited the Book of Mormon manuscripts before they were published.

Oliver Cowdery and his family came from the same area of Vermont as the Smith family. In fact, there is some evidence that his father knew Joseph Smith Sr. Oliver must certainly have been familiar with the book *A View of the Hebrews* by Ethan Smith. The Cowdery family was members of his congregation. The book claims to exhibit: "The Destruction of Jerusalem, the Certain Restoration of Judah and Israel, the Present State of Judah and Israel, and Address of the Prophet Isaiah relative to their restoration". Many people had similar ideas at the time, and Joseph and Oliver could not at least have been influenced by some of the ideas in this book.

Oliver Cowdery had been working in the anti-Masonic movement before he met Joseph Smith. He could have been responsible for the anti-Masonic passages in the Book of Mormon, which describes "secret combinations", the term used by anti-Masonic newspapers in the 1820's. Imagine his disappointment in Joseph Smith when he found out that the church was secretly sponsoring the Danites.

Joseph and Oliver remained in correspondence after Oliver was excommunicated. Joseph begged Oliver to return. On his last night in Carthage jail, Joseph had in his possession a letter from Oliver. Later, after the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum, when the church was ready to move out west, Oliver Cowdery asked to be rebaptized. He addresses the members of the church as follows:

I wrote with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated it by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummim, or, as it is called by that book, "Holy Interpreters."

I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was translated. I also saw with my eyes and handled with my hands the "Holy Interpreters."

That book is true! Sidney Rigdon did not write it; Mr. Spaulding did not write it; I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the Prophet. It contains the everlasting Gospel, and came forth to the children of men in fulfillment of the revelations of John, where he says he saw an angel come with the Everlasting Gospel to preach to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. It contains the principles of salvation; and if you, my hearers, will walk by its light and obey its precepts, you will be saved with an everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God on high.

What more can honest men ask?

Millennial Star, vol. 27, p. 57.

The Book of Mormon constantly refers to lawyers, judges, and forms of government.

3 Nephi 6:4 says that there was **"great order in the land ...formed their laws according to equity and justice"**. Please note that we are talking about *equity*, NOT equality.

This concept of equity vs. justice goes back to arguments made by Aristotle. How would people who migrated to America before the time of Aristotle have any concept of "equity and justice", and be familiar with that term? How could anybody who was not a lawyer be familiar and use their term as they wrote the Book of Mormon, or reading from the interpreters, and putting the text in their own words, be familiar with the term "equity and justice"?

It is probable that only Oliver Cowdery, who was an educated man and a lawyer, would be familiar with that term. What would Jewish law know about the concepts of law as understood by the Greeks? There are courts of equity today. Look up "Maxims of Equity" on wiki. The maxims of equity evolved in Latin and eventually translated into English, as the principles applied by courts of equity in deciding cases before them. A court of equity is a court that is authorized to apply principles of equity as opposed to law, to cases brought before it. See "Court of Equity" in Wikipedia. Would Rigdon, Smith, Spaulding, or any other alleged writer of the Book of Mormon understand this difference and set them up as legal opposites?

Would the Hebrews know and understand Latin law? Only Oliver Cowdery, the modern attorney, understood the difference, and would have the phrase come readily to his mind.

### **A Possible Explanation of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon**

This section is pure speculation on my part, and is an attempt to give several alternative, but logical explanations of how the Book of Mormon came about other than the fanciful story of the golden plates. Some of these alternatives still involve divine or supernatural participation.

There are a number of possible reasons why Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery wanted to organize a church and attract followers to it.

Perhaps they had some inspiration from God to do so. Perhaps they did so simply out of a desire to make the world better by starting a church that more truly patterned itself after the practices and beliefs of the early Christians. Perhaps they just wanted to write down a synthesis of their own views of the Bible – something done by numerous writers in those days. Another possibility is that they wanted to write a book and start an organization simply in the hopes of earning money.

Regardless of the motivations, the two men got together and decided to create a book. They felt that people would be more attracted to it if the book ran like a historical narrative, like the Bible, that it was uniquely American in nature, and had a popular appeal by referring to the current theories of the day – that the American Indians were long lost Israelites. They also sought to set straight several of the religious controversies of the day, including the doctrines of personal salvation, and views about the Masons. Or, perhaps they just felt a surge of inspiration and began to write. Or perhaps, they sought to write a book of fiction, but in their seeking for ideas and inspiration, several inspired ideas from God crept in unawares. They drew on the Bible for much of their inspiration, and it could have happened that amidst their speculation and soul-searching, they tapped into some real spiritual resources and actually did wind up writing the Word of God.

They needed a little back story in order to surround the book with glamour and attract more readers, so rather than just state that they received the book by revelation, either by divine impression or by dictation from higher beings, or by ascending to a higher plane and reading the divine records which were stored there on akashic golden plates, they told the people they received the book on literal, physical, golden plates which they translated by literal, physical crystalline stones.

This is not a far-fetched explanation. Many inspired books have come to light that were inspired from a higher source, but without resorting to using interpretive stones and golden plates, but using simply the power of the intuition to receive the communication, and the mind to interpret it.

These impressions do not necessarily originate in the mind, but could come from an outside, higher source. There are many sources: sub-conscious, higher mind, logic and reasoning, but some actually come from an external source. Some, though probably fewer than people realize, come from a high spiritual source, such as God.

Joseph Smith taught that these impressions were not just given in the form of words, but that the person receiving them must study them out in his mind, work up an interpretation, then ask God if the impression was correct.

These impressions do not usually come in the form of distinct words, but in pictures, or in multi-dimensional impressions, which the receiver must register with the finite human mind and attempt to express a multi-dimensional communication which came in an instant into a one-dimensional string of words that people will then read and study over time. One way to compare it is to an instantaneous Internet download. So, there is a multi-step process. (1) Preparation for and recognition that a higher communication is coming. (2) Receiving the actual communication. (3) Interpreting the communication.

Oliver Cowdery was promised the gift of translation. The record does not say that he failed to receive the soul impressions. In fact, the record shows that God had spoken to him by the impressions of the

soul on previous occasions. What Oliver needed to learn, however, was how to correctly **interpret** the impressions he received.

In a revelation given to Oliver Cowdery at the time the Book of Mormon was being translated, he was reminded that he couldn't just expect to be given the words, but must "study it out in his mind", come up with an interpretation, and that ask God if the interpretation be correct.

An effective prophet is not only able to receive divine communication, but it able to clearly interpret the communication in a way that people can understand and receive it, relatively free of his personal influences. This is very difficult. It is also very difficult when the correct interpretation involved concepts which we personally don't believe in, or don't understand, or might be embarrassing to relate to others.

A woman received the book "A Course in Miracles" from a higher source who claimed to be Jesus. She, herself, was a trained clinical psychologist and self-proclaimed atheist. Another woman received a number of books from a source claiming to be a Tibetan master. She was originally a fundamentalist Christian. I know a man who received a revelation that mentioned, among other things, "cave dwellers". He didn't want to publish this, but I told him, he should take what the Lord gave him and not change a thing. Later, when people read the revelation, they had several interpretations as to what "cave dwellers" meant, and it was no longer an embarrassment to him.

To help you understand what I mean by these soul impressions. Here is a view of how I personally experience soul impressions.

You can feel it coming, and building up to a point of tension. You feel it coming and building and building, then the dam will burst whether you are ready for it or not. You had best be ready to record all you receive, or else you may forget much of it after the moment is gone. During that moment, you feel pure intelligence flowing into you. You feel like you could ask any question of God, and he would answer you. Or even better, it feels as if you could know a thing inside and out simply by casting your attention on it. Everything is so clear. You feel calm, yet excited at the same time. You understand more than you can explain. But you must try to record as much as you can, while in the Spirit, because, when the moment is gone, the world closes in around you again, the vision closes, and all you have is a memory. And, there is a huge difference between remembering God and experiencing God.

All this can happen while a person is fully awake and aware of his surroundings. There is no hidden control. The receiver has his personal freedom of choice throughout the entire experience.

All of this can be understood by any person who reads the earliest sections of the D&C, or any person who is properly taught in LDS doctrine, and who is experienced in the principle of personal revelation. This principle was not clearly understood by the people in the early 1800's. Oliver needed to be instructed in it before he understood it, but for the average consciousness, it was easier to provide the simpler to understand explanation of the golden plates and the stones. It could also be that even the minds of Joseph and Oliver could not conceive of the idea of writing under direct inspiration from God, so in their minds they fabricated the idea of translating gold plates through the medium of an interpreter.

Joseph Smith claimed that he translated the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery claims that he wrote the entire Book of Mormon, save a few pages, as it fell from the lips of Joseph Smith. They were both

correct. Oliver Cowdery was also blessed with the gift of translation, and not only that, with the ability to reveal and expound mysteries.

Could it also be that Oliver and perhaps also Emma helped Joseph Smith in interpreting the words that he received, and in coming up with the best way to express them?

How much difficulty would Joseph have had in interpreting the impressions he received? He was much better educated than Joseph Smith, and probably had a better command of words, though Joseph Smith, as most people in those days, and perhaps better than most, since he came from a family of ministers, knew the Bible backwards and forwards, and could probably easily find the words to express the impressions that came to him mind.

This section is theory and speculation on my part, but I have seen for myself and noticed in others that when a person sincerely seeks to commune with God, and seeks to draw on God for inspiration, the heavens can and often will open themselves while great knowledge and hidden truths distill upon our hearts and minds, and clothe themselves in the words and images with which we are most familiar.

Whatever the explanation for the Book of Mormon came about, anybody who honestly reads it and prays about it with a pure heart and practices the precepts taught there in must admit that the only certain explanation for its origin was that claimed by its witnesses: it came about "through the gift and power of God".

## Book of Mormon Teachings

### The Fall and then Nature of Man

Is the nature of man basically good or basically evil? Most Protestants and Catholics believe that man is inherently evil, citing Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?", while ignoring Ecclesiastes 7:29 "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."

Joseph Smith teaches in the Articles of Faith "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression." This is a profound truth. The Church insists that every child in Primary memorize this passage, not realizing the profound import of this passage for if a man is separated from the Presence of God, that is his own personal doing, and he cannot lay responsibility on the transgressions of Adam and Eve, which caused Adam and Eve to be shut out from the Presence of God.

This principle places each person in a clear position to act for himself.

The D&C clearly teaches this:

93:38-39 "Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, **men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God.**

"And that wicked one cometh and **taketh away light and truth, through disobedience**, from the children of men, and because of the **tradition** of their fathers."

Therefore, a person can be redeemed from the effects of the fall, by repenting of the sins and the traditions which got him into trouble in the first place.

The Book of Mormon teaches that by following the "Doctrine of Christ" (more about this later), we must listen to the words of Christ, and the words of Christ will tell us all things that we must do. Some interpret hearing the "words of Christ" as simply reading the scriptures or listening to church leaders. But, the words of Christ also include His direct words to you, tailored to your life, your experience, and your specific needs. Christ has a program of growth suited to you. He wants to be your personal coach. He wants to save you, and by obeying all the commandments which he gives you, you will be redeemed from your own sins and false traditions.

The Book of Mormon teaches that through obedience to the principles of the Gospel, the plan of redemption will immediately swing into action, and we can, even in this life, be brought back into the Presence of God. The Book of Mormon even provides an example of this: the brother of Jared, because of his great faith, was redeemed from the fall and beheld God in the flesh.

Ether 3:13 "And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: **Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore, ye are brought back into my presence**; therefore, I show myself unto you."

I realize that I am taking this much further than the Church officially teaches, but isn't it obvious that both the D&C and the Book of Mormon teach this?

Alma 34:30-32 "And now, my brethren, I would that, after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testify of these things, ye come forth and bring fruit unto repentance."

"Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, **immediately** shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.

"For behold, **this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God**; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors." Except for his experience with the Lord, the brother of Jared was quite an ordinary man. But, the Book of Mormon is full of accounts of ordinary people who also met the Lord. Even in our day, we can actually prepare to be redeemed from the fall and meet God in this lifetime, while in the flesh.

Also, the Pearl of Great Price:

Moses 5:9 "And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and

forever, **that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will.**

Moses 5:10 "And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, **and again in the flesh I shall see God.**

Moses 5:11 "And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and **the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient."**

Because of their fall, Adam and Eve were put in the place where they could, by obeying the laws of the Gospel, be brought back into the Presence of God, see God in the flesh, and know the joy of redemption and eternal life -- in this mortal life. And this privilege was extended not only to Adam and Eve, but because of the atonement of Christ, to all mankind.

Think about Christ's parable about the woman and the lost coin. Before she lost it, she never gave much thought for it, but once she lost it, she turned her house upside down doing everything she could to recover it. When she regained it, how great was her joy in its recovery! While Adam and Eve were in the garden, basking in the Presence of the Father and the Son, they never truly appreciated the experience and how they would feel should they lose it, But because they lost it, and regained it, they experienced not only the joy of redemption (recovery of that which was lost), but the joy of again being in the Presence of God, and appreciating it more than they ever had before.

The Book of Mormon agrees with other latter-day scripture about overcoming the effects of the fall, and together the Book of Mormon, D&C, and P of GP support one another and add light to the many passages in the Gospel of John concerning eternal life.

In Mosiah 3:19, the Book of Mormon seems to condemn all men, women, and even little children as "enemies to God"

Mosiah 3:19 "For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord..."

But, in other passages, little children seem to be the exception.

Mosiah 3:21 "And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent."

Mosiah 15:25 "And little children also have eternal life."



Notice he says "**have**" not "**will have**". Everywhere else, "eternal life" is spoken of as something to be earned or obtained in the future, but little children have it now.

Moroni 8:8 "Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; **the whole need no physician**, but they that are sick; wherefore, **little children are whole**, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me."

So, were little children once under the curse of Adam, but the curse was removed by Christ, or were they never under the curse in the first place, since they were incapable of sin, i.e. incapable of disobedience? This is not clear, but coupling this with D&C 93, we understand that the curse of the fall was removed from ALL of us, but once we began to disobey, our OWN sins kept us out of the Presence of God. And this it means by "the natural man" – man left to his own devices.

### Kingcraft and Priestcraft

Many people don't realize it, but Nephi's people wanted him to be their king. He doesn't directly state that he became their king, but he does state that "he did what he could do for them", and writes of his "reign and ministry".

Future Nephite kings were required to be descendants of Nephi, so Nephi also set up a dynasty.

Nephi and his people separated themselves from the people of Laman and Lemuel. Nephi's people wanted him to be their king. He acquiesced in spite of knowing the problems that having a king caused for the people of Israel. In fact, establishing a kingdom proved to be the downfall of the Jews, from which Lehi and family were fleeing. Nephi then set up a theocracy by appointing his brothers Jacob and Joseph as priests. Nephi laid the foundation for the destruction of his own people. With his prophetic vision, he saw their destruction coming, so Nephi must have reluctantly given in to his peoples' demands for a king.

Notice that after Nephi established his kingdom, built a temple, and appointed priests, he left most of the teaching duties to Jacob. Contrast this with Alma, who left the duties of chief judge to look after the needs of the church. Apparently, Nephi preferred to devote most of his time to kingly duties and to recording the secular activities of his people on the large plates, with a few writings on the small plates, and leave the preaching and teaching to others.

Mosiah was a prophet in land of Nephi, warned by God to flee the land. He found the people of Zarahemla and became king over them. Only descendants of Nephi were ever kings, so Mosiah must have been a descendant of Nephi. We read also that Mosiah possessed the interpreters and knew how to translate ancient records.

Mosiah finally does what should have been done in the first place and allows the people to elect judges. For doing this, he was greatly beloved by his people. He gives a great discourse on government and weighs the pros and cons of a democracy vs. a monarchy.

The Book of Mormon introduces the terms *kingcraft* and *priestcraft*. Kingcraft is where a monarch taxes the people to provide him a living and doesn't labor for it with his own hands. Priestcraft is ministers getting paid to preach – turning what should be a voluntary fulfillment of a calling from God into a paid profession. Also, priestcraft is to set oneself up as a light (not as a *representative* of the light – i.e. God) and not seek the welfare of the people (Zion).

### Suppressing History

In Alma 37, Alma instructs his son Helaman to tell the people about the abominations of the Jaredites, but not about the secret oaths which caused them to commit such abominations. He is instructed to **incorrectly** teach that the Jaredites were destroyed on account of these abominations, and not on account of these oaths, signs, and wonders. Perhaps the reason for this was so that these secret combinations would not spread among the people. However, they did spread anyway.

### Priesthood in the Book of Mormon vs Authority in the Church

As we all know, the LDS church claims exclusive Priesthood authority, or the power to act in the name of God. These claims are so exclusive that, according to the claim, no other religious sect, not even the Catholic Church which claims authority through Peter and a line of popes, nor any other restoration church which can trace their lines of authority back through the same lines that the LDS church uses has any claim to authority. They also claim exclusive use of the Priesthood within the church, under the direction of church leaders who have the “keys” to direct the use of said Priesthood. Further, the LDS church claims the right to revoke Priesthood authority from any male who is excommunicated from the Church. This is a false claim because one can only take away that which one has given, and the Church never “gave” anybody the Priesthood; they only ordained and conferred.

Let us see how these claims stacks up against the early revelations of Joseph Smith and the teachings of the Book of Mormon.

Before the church was formally organized in 1830, Joseph Smith was instructed in the First Vision to join **none** of the churches existing at the time. Why did the Lord say this? There are two possible reasons.

- (1) Joseph was told not to join any church was because none of the churches was true, and that he would later be instrumental in organizing the true church.
- (2) Joseph was told not to join any church was because none of the churches was true, nor could such an organized church ever be true.

Let's examine each theory in light of a revelation given in April 1829, a full year before the church was formally organized. Did the Lord command Joseph to organize a church, or did the Lord suffer Joseph to organize a church?

D&C 10:67-68 “Behold, this is my doctrine--whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church.

“Whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me, but is against me; therefore, he is not of my church.”

There is no mention of ordaining to priesthood or conferring authority in the early portions of the Book of Mormon. Nephi says that he obtained his authority from the Holy Ghost. No mention is made of any authority that Lehi might have had, other than his direct calling from God as a prophet. (Nephi states that Lehi received power from the Holy Ghost because of his faith on the Son of God.) This is typical of prophetic callings in the Bible. Prophets came not from the ranks of the leading priests, but were called directly by God and ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood by God. For example, Amos was not a prophet, nor a prophet's son, but God called him.

Lehi, even as a prophet, did not possess the brass plates, the record of his people, and so had to get them from Laban. Later, in the Book of Mormon, the leader of the people was typically a prophet who had claims of authority, and was also in charge of keeping the sacred records. So, apparently, Lehi did not hold a position of authority among the Jews, or even among his own tribe, which we are later told was Manasseh, or else he would have already had custody of the brass plates.

Here is how Lehi and Nephi obtained their authority.

1Ne 10.17 And it came to pass after I, Nephi, having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, **which power he received by faith on the Son of God** - and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come - I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men.

1Ne 10.18 For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him.

**1Ne 10.19 For he that diligently seeketh shall find and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.**

1Ne 10.20 Therefore remember, O man, for all thy doings thou shalt be brought into judgment

1Ne 10.21 Wherefore, if ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your probation, then ye are found unclean before the judgment seat of God and no unclean thing can dwell with God wherefore, ye must be cast off forever.

1Ne 10.22 **And the Holy Ghost giveth authority that I should speak these things**, and deny them not.

Today the Church teaches that God is a God of order and that authority is to be obtained only through the recognized channels of authority in the Church. God is indeed a God of order, but that "order" of a God who is the same "yesterday, today, and forever" is laid out by Nephi. **The power and authority of the Holy Ghost is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, not the sole property of a church.**

Priesthood authority is later mentioned in the Book of Mormon as a requirement to administer baptism and to give the Gift of the Holy Ghost. Alma, though he was among the wicked priests of King Noah, was the only one who possessed authority to baptize and found a church during the days of King Mosiah. How could Alma have obtained his authority except in a line going back to Nephi, who obtained it through the Holy Ghost?

Alma speaks of a priesthood "after the Holy Order of God". Alma does not teach that bearers of this priesthood are members of any particular church. Instead, the members of this order are called by God on account of their "faith, repentance, and holy works", and that they are ordained with a holy ordination, after a manner in which men could look forward to the calling and mission of Jesus Christ. Christ, himself, who was and is a High Priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, was called not by man, but by God; not through any organized religious body, but by the Voice of God, speaking directly from the heavens, proclaiming that this was "My beloved Son".

According to Alma, we should expect that all true priests after this "Holy Order of God" to be called and ordained in a similar manner. Contrast this with the practice with the Church today. High Priests are called in a manner no different than that of Deacons or Elders. They serve as Church lay ministers without any of the attendant gifts of the Spirit ascribed the Melchizedek and the ancient members after his order.

The Book of Mormon states that Alma had "authority from God" (Mos. 18:18), but doesn't state specifically how he obtained this authority, though we do know that before Alma baptized Helam, his first baptism, I prayed and asked God for authority, after which he baptized both himself and Helam. Alma was one of the priests of the wicked King Noah, but who believed the words of the prophet Abinadi. The book later states that Alma was their "high priest, the founder of their church". He also had authority to ordain others to preach and teach. (Mos. 23:1617)

There is no doubt that Alma, as a priest, operated outside of the organization of King Noah and his corrupt priesthood because he was accused of turning the people against the king. It is also evident, that even when operating outside the established organization, that God recognized the work of Alma by evidence of the Holy Ghost falling upon him and his flock, and God blessing and protecting his people.

When Alma brought his church back to the land of King Mosiah, Mosiah granted to Alma the authority to ordain priests and teachers and to establish the church, and be high priest over it. (Mos. 25:19, 26:7) From this we learn, that Alma had authority to operate on his own in the wilderness, but needed to be given authority from King Mosiah to operate within Mosiah's kingdom. Apparently, Mosiah had the necessary authority to accomplish this. The real confirmation of Alma's authority comes in Mosiah, chapter 26, when Alma inquires of the Lord concerning how to deal with transgressors in the Church. In a revelation to him, the Lord basically recounts the experiences of Alma in teaching and baptizing the people, and in establishing a church. In Mosiah 26:20, God declared that Alma is his servant and promises him eternal life. At this point, Alma was surely recognized as a member of the "Holy Order of God", since his works and calling were acknowledged by God himself, and by receiving the promise of eternal life, he "entered into the rest of God" (Alma 13:6).

It is noteworthy that when Christ appears to the Nephites that he found it necessary to again confer the priesthood and authority to baptize. If the priesthood was already to be had among the Nephites, and was handed down from father to son, along with the records, why was it necessary to do what amounts to a RESTORATION of priesthood authority?

In 3 Nephi chapter 11, Christ descends from heaven and appears before the people.

Verse 21 - he gives them power to baptize and explains how to baptize so that there will be no more disputations. This is at odds with the earlier portion of the Book of Mormon. Nephi says that the Spirit gives his authority. Alma was a priest of King Noah, but he had authority to baptize and form a church and teach the Gospel. In fact, he claimed to have the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood after the Holy Order of God, and does a commendable job explaining the nature of this priesthood. Also, Christ had to put down disputations and contentions which had arisen. He also re-explains the doctrine of Christ. But we are told that the purpose of the Book of Mormon was to put to rest all doctrinal contention, but we see constant contention over doctrine and belief from the beginning of the book until now. But, why did the Lord need to re-ordain to the priesthood? Was the chain of authority broken? Did he give them additional authority?

The question is probably moot because the Lord can do whatever he wants to. It could be that the Nephite church had, because of disputations and contentions, corrupted the teachings about baptism and the Priesthood, and the Lord had to reinstitute everything in order to put to rest any misunderstandings.

### **The Great and Abominable Church**

In 1Ne 13.4 is reads "And it came to pass that I saw among the nations of the Gentiles the foundation of a great church." The Church changed this to read "the FORMATION of a great church" This changes the meaning. We should also keep in mind that the prophecy does not refer to the Catholic Church, or to Christianity as the "great church", but only as the FOUNDATION of what was to BECOME the great and abominable church its daughter churches, all referred to here as a single "great and abominable church".

### **Sacrament**

The Church is not following the model laid out by Christ, himself, in administering the Sacrament. Should the Church of Jesus Christ not follow the model given by Christ himself in passing out **bread in abundance**, so that all could eat **until they were filled**, and should the Church not pass out wine, more symbolic of the blood of Christ, or at least grape juice? Christ taught that this ordinance and the symbols thereof were to be performed in remembrance of Him, and his body which he freely gave, and his blood which he freely spilt. But how can the saints properly remember Christ with "watered down" symbols: with little portions of stale, lifeless bits of bread that are devoid of all nutrients and tiny cups full of city tap water?

Read the Book of Mormon account in 3 Nephi 18:3-5

"And when the disciples had come with bread and **wine**, he took of the bread and brake and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples and commanded that they should eat.

"And when they had eaten and were **filled**, he commanded that they should give unto the multitude.

"And when the multitude had eaten and were **filled**, ..."

Much symbolism is missed in the "sanitized" version of the Sacrament. It is much easier to visualize breaking a body when large, crusty loaves are used, and which can only be broken with much effort. Water is a life-giving substance, but one which we obtain so easily that we do not appreciate the effort going into obtaining it. Wine, on the other hand, is the product of the fruit of the grapevine, carefully tended in a vineyard until the harvest, then violently crushed so as to obtain the juice, which is then aged and fermented in order to impart the special qualities of alcohol, the common ingredient of drinks known as "spirits". These symbols are used freely throughout the scriptures. Why should they be ignored or "watered down" during that ordinance in which we symbolically do that which the Gospel urges us in reality to do: to take upon ourselves the Name of Christ, and all that that entails, and to REMEMBER his sacrifice of his body and blood, as we symbolically eat of that flesh and drink of that blood, and thus have part with him in sharing that great Name?

And as a side note, should not the entire congregation kneel when the Sacrament is administered, as per the instructions given in the D&C?

"And the elder or priest shall administer it; and after this manner shall he administer it -- **he shall kneel with the church** and call upon the Father in solemn prayer..." (20:76.)

## **New Principles Taught by the Book of Mormon**

I once believed that the majority of the Book of Mormon was a rehash or a reinterpretation of Biblical principles and verses. I came to realize that I was wrong after I was taught by people who read the Book of Mormon and assumed that God and the writers of the Book of Mormon meant what they said. I was already familiar with the dreams and revelations of Nephi, and the importance that we each seek after personal revelation. But, reading books like Denver Snuffer's *Conversing with the Lord Through the Veil* demonstrated for me that the Book of Mormon had far greater value for me than I had ever supposed. The Book of Mormon is full of accounts of people who ascended to the Lord and conversed with Him. The Book of Mormon is a virtual manual about how to experience contact with the Lord, how to develop faith, and how to active the gifts of the Spirit in your life. The most important thing we can do in this lifetime is to develop a relationship with the Lord. You haven't received the fullness of the Gospel until you have met the Lord. This is not only an invitation. It is a requirement. It is also a plea from the Lord. He is eager and anxious to meet with each of us. He is more interested in you than you are in him. Joseph Smith promised that the Book of Mormon would "bring a man closer to God than any other book". The Book of Mormon delivers.

There are a number of other unique principles and doctrines taught by the Book of Mormon. Here are a few that I have discovered, presented for your consideration. You may be familiar with others. These are

either new teachings, or they shed light on prior teachings. The Book of Mormon, itself, teaches that “many plain and precious things” were removed from the Bible, but were added back in the Book of Mormon.

To claim that the Book of Mormon is just another book of scripture “comparable” to the Bible and it contains no new or unique truths, when it clearly contains new truths, is tantamount to the people in Lehi’s dream partaking of the fruit (the love of God), and then feeling ashamed because of the ridicule of the people in the great and spacious building (the pride of the world), who were mocking them.

If the claim that the obeying the precepts Book of Mormon will bring man closer to God, then they will surely bring man closer to experiencing the love of God, as described in Lehi’s vision of the Tree of Life.

1 Nephi 8.24-28 :And it came to pass that I behold others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

**“And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree, they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.**

“And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.

“And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceeding fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.

**‘And after they had tasted of the fruit, they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.’**

### **A Choice Seer**

Lehi repeats the prophecy of Joseph about one of his descendants being a choice seer. A careful reading reveals that this seer could not be Joseph Smith, as some in the LDS church claims, because the seer is to be a descendant of Lehi. Fundamentalists believe that this seer is clearly to be a Lamanite prophet. This does not eliminate the possibility that Joseph Smith or another ancient prophet will return as a Lamanite, but Lehi’s prophecy is clear that the coming seer will come through the loins of Lehi’s son Joseph.

### **Prayer**

The Book of Mormon teaches how to pray, where to pray, and what to pray about. It even describes the principle of praying continuously in one’s heart, whether one is physically praying or not. When Christ came among the Nephites, he asked them to pray. The record states that they did not wax many words because the Spirit prompted them in how to pray and filled them with desire. This teaches us that we should not only pray for answers to our questions, but to seek inspiration in what to pray for. One of the

Nephi's in Helaman 10:5 was so in tune with the Spirit that God knew that all his desires were in harmony with God's will, and the Lord promised him that all his prayers would be answered.

We are also taught that even in the performance of our daily tasks, our performance should be sanctified to the glory of God.

2 Nephi 32.9 "But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul."

### Passions

Alma's advice to one of his missionary sons was to bridle his passions that he might be filled with love. It might not be readily apparent how suppressing one's emotions can lead to an increase in love. However, when the mind controls the emotions, and not the other way around, the emotions are more effectively channeled, and the emotion of love is transformed from lustful passion into godly charity.

### A Sober Lad and Quick to Observe

When Amaron the prophet was looking for somebody to hand the Nephite records over to, he took the boy Mormon aside and told him: "I perceive that thou art a sober lad and quick to observe." (Mormon 1:2) In other words the attributes the Mormon possessed that lead Amaron to believe that he could be trusted with the sacred records of his people was that the boy was in control of his emotions, and in tune with the world around him. These are invaluable assets to have at any time, and especially so in the midst of the crisis in which Mormon found himself.

### Baptism / Overshadowing of Christ

Some teach that when Jesus was baptized and the Holy Ghost descended upon him, that this was actually another being known as "the Christ", and that this literal, physical, in-dwelling being was regarded by the man Jesus as his "father". The teaching also says that other superior life-form descended upon Jesus and took up residence in the same body throughout the remaining three years of Jesus' life. There are a number of isolated scriptures that can be construed to support this idea, however weakly. However, here is a passage in 2 Nephi 31:12 which seems to dismiss this notion.

**"Those who are baptized in the name of Christ will the Father give the Holy Ghost - LIKE UNTO ME".**

In other words, to all those who are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, the Father will give them the Holy Ghost, in the same manner in which he gave the Holy Ghost to Jesus, at his baptism. And, since the Father dwelt with Christ, and took up his habitation with him. This was not only Jesus' baptism of water, baptism of fire, and Gift of the Holy Ghost. Jesus received his Second Comforter. The same as he promised to us in John 14:23.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."



Did Jesus have any special advantage over the rest of us in this lifetime? If so, that would be unfair to expect the rest of us to even try to measure up to his stature. I don't believe that he did, other than he was more obedient, and because of that he developed a connection to his Father that we can all develop with Him. His Father took up his abode with Christ, just as Christ and the Father can take up our abode with us. Wouldn't it be wonderful if any of us could say "If you have seen me, you have seen Christ? Just as Christ told Philip, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father".

Another fact is that John the Baptist did not recognize the need for Jesus to be baptized except as an outward sign of what had already occurred inwardly. John knew that Christ was clean every whit, and that he had already been baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost. But Jesus stated that, in order to "fulfill all righteousness", this baptism of water and fire needed to be formally recognized and witnessed. Jesus saw a higher purpose in this baptism than just an empty show to impress people. In order for an act to be completely righteous, it must take place on both an inner, spiritual level, and on an outer, physical level. Also, Jesus saw this as an example to teach people, so that by all mankind following this example, all righteousness would be fulfilled.

Also, here is reference to three distinct personages, not two. If we are to be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost like unto Christ, would that mean that we are all to be overshadowed by the same indwelling entity? No, but we are to have a Companion, or a Comforter – an inner Teacher to teach us the words of Christ, and bring all things to our remembrance.

### **The Parable of the Vineyard**

We hear little bits about vineyards, grapes, and harvests throughout the Bible. It is a good analogy for God's dealings with mankind. There are many lessons to be learned from understanding this parable, even in part. But the Book of Mormon presents the parable in full. Thanks to a renewed interest in the Book of Mormon, many people are understanding and teaching this parable and likening it to the covenants of God and the gathering of Israel in the last days.

### **Personal Revelation and other Gifts of the Spirit**

The Book of Mormon is full of examples of people obtaining revelations and performing miracles because of their faith. Jacob wrote this:

"Because of the many witnesses of the prophets, and because of our revelations and the spirit of prophecy, we obtain a hope, and our faith is unshaken in so much that we truly command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea."

"Despise not the revelations of God." "Why not attain to a perfect knowledge of Christ." "Truth is a knowledge of things as they really are, and as they really will be."

God takes away plainness because the people desire it.

The story of Enos teaches us how, through prayer, one can gain a remission of their sins. Enos, through faith, obtains a knowledge that God cannot lie. This was the same knowledge that redeemed the

brother of Jared from the fall, and brought him back into the presence of Christ. As Enos came to be right with God, his sphere of concern broadened from his own personal salvation to the concern for his people down through history. Through faith, one obtains covenants with God.

Jarom wrote that “many have revelations according to their faith”. The gift of revelation was not limited to the chief prophet or church authorities.

In Alma 36 we read that the people, after having been born of God, in fulfillment of Alma 34, many people had seen God and had the same experience as Alma.

Mormon taught that if miracles and gifts of the spirit cease in the Church it is because of lack of faith, and it is as if no atonement had been made.

In the beginning, the Church was much more charismatic than it is now. Miracles were common. Many spoke in tongues, among them Brigham Young, while others interpreted. Many members received revelations or heavenly confirmations of the principles taught them.

Where is that today? When was the last time a member of the Church stood up in Sacrament Meeting and told about a dream or a vision they had? And remained a member in good standing? I grew up in a small branch of the Church in the 50's in Washington State. We used to sing “though the world upon us frown”, and meant it. We were different, and we were almost proud of being different. There was much more enthusiasm in church meetings.

And, yes, as a teenager and in college, I heard church leaders speak about dreams and revelations. They spoke about how the future Zion would be established, about the trials of the saints between before Zion could be established, and about how to bring a little “Zion” into our lives right now. When was the last time you witnessed a miracle? A *real* miracle, not just something that *seemed* like a miracle. Years ago, I saw them: fevers instantly abated; missing persons were found; bones instantly mended; seizures and spasms instantly calmed; people rose from their sick beds.

...for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain.

For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name; wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made. (Moroni 7:37-38)

### Meaning of Restoration

In Alma 41, he lectures his son about "restoration". It's also the definition of, or the law of cause and effect. Otherwise known as karma.

### Male Bonding

Alma 53:2. “Now behold, this Lehi was a man who had been with Moroni in the more part of all his battles; and he was a man like unto Moroni, and they rejoiced in each other's safety; yea, they were beloved by each other, and also beloved by all the people of Nephi.”

Sounds a little like David and Jonathan.

### Ripening in Iniquity, Ripe for Destruction

We hear these terms a lot in the Book of Mormon, but how do we know when a people or a church is “ripe for destruction”? What has to happen before the Lord allows destructive forces to come in and effect a long-overdue cleaning?

Samuel the Lamanite has the answer in Helaman 13:14: “But behold, it is for the righteous' sake that it is spared. **But behold, the time cometh, saith the Lord, that when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you, then shall ye be ripe for destruction;** yea, wo be unto this great city, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in her.”

This defines the point at which a city, a nation, or a church is ripe for destruction -- when they cast out the righteous from among them. Could we say that a Church has reached this point where they cast out the righteous from among them – good and faithful members whose only sin is thinking for themselves and questioning the established authorities?

### True Humility

It is easier for people to be humble in poverty than in wealth. It is easier to stay faithful under great trials than under great wealth. But it is best is to be humble in whatsoever circumstance you find yourself in. So teaches Alma to the poor who were cast out of the synagogues of the Zoramites on account of their poverty and ragged appearance.

### Translation, Like Moses

In Alma 45:18, it says that Alma departed out of the land of Zarahemla and was never heard of again.

In 3 Nephi 1:2-3 Nephi, son of Helaman also "departed" out of the land and was never seen or heard from again. Could it be that these two men were taken up to heaven without tasting death, as was Moses, who was “buried by the hand of the Lord”.

### One of the Greatest Examples of Faith

Nephi had great power and faith. He raised his brother from the dead. He had so much faith that angels ministered to him daily, and people could not disbelieve his words. 3 Nephi 7:18-19. His brother's name was Timothy (3 Nephi 19:4) Nephi and his brother Timothy was among the 12 disciples that Jesus chose. Later, three of these were granted the same wish of John the Beloved -- to remain in the flesh and not taste of death, bring souls unto Christ, and witness the doings of men, until the Savior returned. According to Chris Nemelka, one of the Three Nephites' names was Timothy, although the Book of Mormon doesn't reveal their names. If one of them was named Timothy, he would be the brother of Nephi, son of Nephi, who was raised from the dead by his brother. “Anonymous” the author of *How to Receive Your Second Comforter* has revealed that the names of the Three Nephites were Nephi, Timothy and Isaiah. And that Isaiah was actually a Lamanite.

### Sermon on the Mount: Book of Mormon Style

There are significant differences in the Sermon on the Mount, which shed new light on these teachings from the Bible.

We are enjoined to be perfect, even as the Father, **and Christ** are perfect. Christ was not perfect in the beginning, but **became** perfected as he completed the work his father sent him to do. A correct definition of the Greek word translated “perfect” in the New Testament refers not to moral perfection, but to being finished, whole, or complete.

The Book of Mormon makes clear that the instruction: "Take no thought for your life ..." was given to the 12 disciples, not to the general crowd.

The Book of Mormon sheds additional light on the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. Contrast these verses from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the sermon given in the New World.

Matt 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**3Ne 12:3 Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Matt 5:6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

**3Ne 12:6 And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.**

Matt 5:18 For verily I say unto you, though heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

**3Ne 12:18 For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled.**

Matt 5:19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

**3Ne 12:19 And behold, I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Behold, ye have the commandments before you, and the law is fulfilled.**

Matt 5:20 For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

**3Ne 12:20 Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

Matt 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

**3Ne 12:48 Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.**

The Sermon on the Mount was not just blindly copied from the Bible to the Book of Mormon. The writers considered the differences in Christ's ministry before and after His crucifixion and resurrection.

### **The Order of Worship Among the Nephites**

This is described by Moroni. The meetings were free-form and lead by the Spirit. They almost sound like Quaker meetings

Moroni 6:5-9 "And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.

"And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.

"And they were strict to observe that there should be no iniquity among them; and whoso was found to commit iniquity, and three witnesses of the church did condemn them before the elders, and if they repented not, and confessed not, their names were blotted out, and they were not numbered among the people of Christ.

"But as oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with real intent, they were forgiven.

"And their meetings were conducted by the church after the manner of the workings of the Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Ghost; for as the power of the Holy Ghost led them whether to preach, or to exhort, or to pray, or to supplicate, or to sing, even so it was done."

I can picture a small band of saints, meeting quietly in someone's home. The meeting is less a formal gathering than a small discussion group where people teach one another, confess their sins to one another, express forgiveness to one another, and discuss their goals and progress along the path toward the Kingdom. Interspersed with the discussion are prayers, songs, and partaking of the sacrament, as the Spirit directs. The saints come to the meeting fasting, and following the meeting is a group meal I see this functioning similar to a support group, as we know them today. I have been in similar situations in small college Christian groups, where somebody brings a guitar, and the student crowd around on the floor singing the psalms, set to music. The spirit was there much more abundantly than in a sterile LDS mcChapel.

### **Infant Baptism**

Anybody who has read the Book of Mormon is familiar with Mormon's teachings on infant baptism. He lays out a rather convincing case which we are probably all familiar with, so I won't repeat it here. If you want to get into this subject in depth, I can point to no better reference than this:

<https://purerevelations.wordpress.com/2019/11/13/a-letter-to-moroni-mormon-81-30/>

### **Charity is the Pure Love of Christ and a Gift of the Spirit**

The King James Bible uses the word "charity", which is translated in most other Bibles as "love". But the Greek recognizes three kinds of love *eros* (erotic lust), *phileo* (brotherly love, or the love which gives in hopes of getting back), and *agape*, which is properly defined in the Book of Mormon as the pure

unselfish love of Christ. It is typified by the type of love a mother has for her child, the love Christ has for all, and the type of love a true disciple of Christ ought to cultivate.

The Book of Mormon defines charity as a gift of the spirit and urges us to “pray with all the energy” of our souls that we may be filled with this gift. The Book of Mormon takes the view that by receipt of the Holy Ghost, a person’s nature is changed. A natural man is an enemy to God unless he yields to the enticings of the spirit. King Benjamin’s audience received the Spirit *en masse* and had no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. We read of numerous Lamanite conversions with people who were suddenly touched by the Spirit, going into trances, seeing visions of Christ and angels, and then waking up with a changed nature.

## Shedding Light on Old Principles

### The Doctrine of Christ

The Doctrine of Christ includes the first two principles of the Gospel: faith and repentance, and the first two ordinances: baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. But the doctrine also includes the following:

“Do ye not remember that I said unto you that after ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels? And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the Holy Ghost?

“Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, **feast upon the words of Christ**; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

“Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark.

“For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and **receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.**

“Behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and there will be no more doctrine given until after he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh. And when he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh, the things which he shall say unto you shall be observe to do.”

Not only **can** we receive personal revelation; we **must** receive personal revelation. Every person who in this modern day who has testified of having received the Second Comforter states that the pathway to receiving it begins with following the Doctrine of Christ, following the Beatitudes and of entering into an ongoing daily dialog with the Lord. This is what Alma meant:

“Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.” (Alma 34:27)

I can testify from person experience that when I embarked on my journey to receive the Second Comforter, I asked the Lord for revelation about how to start the journey. I often ask the Lord for revelation, and He always answers me. This time, he gave me a short and simple answer that at first sounded crazy: **“Talk to me.”** Following that advice all day every day has improved my life in an incredible way. It has made me a better person, made me more charitable, more prayerful, and provided me with a constant flow of new revelations, new insights, and new commandments to follow several times a day. This is not just a mere euphemism. This is real and powerful, and other people notice the difference in your life, too. You might bristle at the thought of “more commandments”, but these are more like little nudges along the path. They are gentle and sweet, and a joy to obey.

The Doctrine of Christ is explicitly taught by Nephi in 2 Nephi 31, 32, and repeated by Christ himself in 3 Nephi 11:31-41. John the apostle urges believers not to fellowship with any who believe not the doctrine of Christ. (2 John 1:9-10)

### **The Vision of All**

Foreseeing a time when those called “prophets” would have distanced themselves so far from God that they would be unable to discern God’s sweeping plan for the world, Isaiah speaks of “the vision of all”. He compares the vision to a book that is sealed, which even the prophets are unable to open, because they have strayed from God. However, the Book of Mormon presents many prophets in the past who have received this great vision that sweeps from one end of history to the other, implying that this is a “standard” revelation that God gives to all who are prepared to receive it.

Many prophets in Israel during Isaiah’s time, and many Book of Mormon prophets saw this great vision. Lehi received a great revelation, a panorama of history. Nephi prayed to God and received the same revelation. He explained the principles by which all men may come to learn the mysteries of God for themselves. We later learn that this revelation was the same as the revelation of John in The Revelation of St. John. We are later promised in the Book of Mormon, that in the last days, this revelation will be unfolded in the eyes of all the people.

1Ne 10.19 “For he that diligently seeketh shall find and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.”

In the Book of Ether, the brother of Jared received this same revelation, and was commanded to write it down, but also to seal it up. The revelation was recorded in a sealed book to be kept until Christ manifested in the flesh, but other prophets were privileged to behold the same revelation before the time it was to be revealed to the public.

Ether 4:7. “And in that day that they shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are.”

Ether 4:16 “And then shall my revelations which I have caused to be written by my servant John be unfolded in the eyes of all the people. Remember, when ye see these things, ye shall know that the time is at hand that they shall be made manifest in very deed.”

The question is this, and this has great bearing on the coming forth of The Sealed Portion, do all the people have to have faith like the brother of Jared, or just the prophet to whom the revelation is given, or to whom is given to translate the sealed portion of the plates? Many would argue that Joseph Smith had faith like unto the Brother of Jared, yet he was commanded to not even touch the sealed portion of the record. So, I am inclined to that that these two passages refer to the general level of faith among all the people, and that when they are ready as a group, or as they are ready as individuals, God will unfold this revelation personally to them. There are individuals alive today who claims that they have received this revelation.

The Book of Mormon presents the same panorama of history as does the Bible, but from an American perspective. One sees the roles on the Gentiles and the native Americans in playing out their covenant roles in the Restoration and gathering of the remnant of Israel.

### **Passages from Isaiah**

These passages are copied directly over from the King James bible, but the surrounding narrative interprets these passages for us, and is key to our understanding of the words of this prophet. Isaiah is difficult to understand but seen in the context of the Book of Mormon, and assisted by the modern translation of Isaiah by Avraham Gileadi, his words will come alive, and literally sing to you. You will see Isaiah vision of the latter-days, and suffer and rejoice with the Lord’s prophesied servants, some of whom could well be us.

### **The True Nature of the Original Twelve Apostles and Their Mission**

The true church of Jesus Christ is built on a foundation of apostles and prophets. The wall of the City of New Jerusalem will have twelve foundations, containing the names of the twelve apostles of the lamb.

The Book of Mormon seems to indicate that there is something special about the original twelve, who were with Christ in his ministry and who will return with him to judge the twelve tribes of Israel at the second coming.

Of all the men who ever held this office, or claimed to hold this office, these twelve alone had the unique privilege of living and working with Christ, or being eyewitnesses of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. All of them save John gave their lives as a witness of their unique testimony of Christ. John tarried on the earth and gave his life (lives) as a living sacrifice of service. We have the written testimony of the apostles coming down to us in corrupted form in the Bible, but with the plain and precious truths which were removed have been restored via the Book of Mormon and will be restored in other hidden records which are promised to come forth, among which are the fullness of the record of John.

From 1 Nephi:



1.9 And it came to pass that **he saw one descending out of the midst of heaven**, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day.

1.10 **And he saw twelve others following him**, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

The Twelve (and it is proper to capitalize their name in order to distinguish them from any other quorum of “twelve”), were with Christ in the pre-mortal existence, and if you believe in reincarnation, probably reincarnated with him and served with him many times before on this planet, in various capacities.

11.28 And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them.

11.29 And I also beheld twelve others following him. And it came to pass that they were carried away in the Spirit from before my face, and I saw them not.

11.34 And after he was slain, **I saw the multitudes of the earth, that they were gathered together to fight against the apostles of the Lamb; for thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord.**

11.35 And the multitude of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building, like unto the building which my father saw. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Behold the world and the wisdom thereof; yea, **behold the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

I want to especially call attention to this because I missed it in all my early readings of the Book of Mormon. Even the very House of Israel, the modern-day descendants of Ephraim, who should have known better, who of all people should have recognized the Christ, will fight against Him and against his Twelve Apostles. And how will they fight against them? By persecuting them and by rejecting their words. And, also, by distorting their words, by taking away the plain and precious things that they taught. Also, by making light of them and their mission, or by making light of their testimony. Another way to fight against the twelve apostles of the lamb would be to set up the equivalent of an anti-Christ – an anti-twelve. Or, in other words, set up a quorum of twelve men which claims to be true apostles, as a substitute for the real thing, but lacks the power of their testimony – men who preach on the evils of the lottery, and political issues, instead of being living eyewitnesses of the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Christ.

11.36 And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: **Thus, shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

12.7 And I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen.

12.8 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed.

12.9 And he said unto me: **Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel;** wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel.

12.10 And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood.

13.24 And the angel of the Lord said unto me: **Thou hast beheld that the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the plainness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; and they beared record according to the truth which is in the Lamb of God.**

13.25 Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God.

13.26 And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the gentiles, thou seest the foundation of a great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.

13.27 And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harder the hearts of the children of men.

13.39 And after it had come forth unto them I beheld other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.

13.40 And the angel spake unto me, saying: **These last records which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them;** and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.

13.41 And they must come according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; and the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed, as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; wherefore they both shall be established in one; for these is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth.

14.18 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me saying: Look!

14.19 And I looked and beheld a man, and he was dressed in a white robe.

14.20 And the angel said unto me: **Behold one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

14.21 **Behold, he shall see and write the remainder of these things;** yea, and also many things which have been.

14.22 **And he shall also write concerning the end of the world.**

God has a “video library” of revelations which he shows to many prophets.

14.23 **Wherefore, the things which he shall write are just and true;** and behold they are written in the book which thou beheld proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew; and at the time they proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, or at the time the book proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, the things which were written were plain and pure, and most precious and easy to the understanding of all men.

It is significant to note that whenever reference is made to the writings of John, the reader is reminded that his writings are “just and true”. A commentary, appended to the Gospel of John, attests to the truthfulness of his record. In the JST version of the Bible, John is called the “the faithful witness”, and in all versions of the Bible, the reader is cautioned not to add to nor take away from the words of his Revelation – the same revelation that Nephi received.

14.24 **And behold, the things which this apostle of the Lamb shall write are many things which thou hast seen; and behold, the remainder shalt thou see.**

14.25 But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them.

14.26 And also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity, according to the truth which is in the Lamb, in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel.

14.27 And I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel.

14.28 And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw.

## Conclusion

So, *is* the Book of Mormon true? As always, that’s for the individual to decide. If it isn’t true *for you*, then it *isn’t* true.

By that, I mean that it doesn't matter what I or anybody else thinks about the Book of Mormon. My testimony, or anybody else's testimony, about the Book of Mormon will not save you or bring you closer to God. Only **you** living the precepts taught in the book can do that, and that is the only sure test of truth that you can rely on. Alma, in chapter 30 of his book, describes this test as an experiment with truth. Only by doing the experiment, planting the seed, and nourishing it can the true fruit be seen.

What is the fruit? Getting "closer to God". How close can you get? According to the Book of Mormon, as close as you want. This book tells of people who experienced a mighty change of heart, experienced the love of God, experienced many gifts of the spirit, experienced many revelations, saw God face to face, overcame death, and were redeemed from the fall and brought back into His Presence. Close enough for you?

The new full title of the Book of Mormon, which was not given by Mormon, Moroni, or Joseph Smith is *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*.

I would half-heartedly like to propose an alternate title: *The Book of Mormon: Here's how by Who's Who*.

I started this treatise by asking a lot of questions. I'll end it by asking a lot of questions – the same questions that were running through the minds of the people in upstate New York in the 1820's and 1830's – questions which should have been asked then by Joseph Smith, but weren't.

Times have changed a lot since we are told that the Book of Mormon or The New Testament was written. Two thousand years between us and them is a greater distance between the Nephites and the Jews 200 years ago. If God speaks to all peoples, as the Book of Mormon claims, then don't we deserve our own Testament of Jesus Christ today? Where is it? Has it been written? Who is capable of writing it? Who could claim to write it? If their claims are legitimate, why haven't they written it?

In the journals of many people around the world, this witness is being written even at this very moment. People are writing their own personal testaments of the dealing of Christ in their lives.

Denver Snuffer teaches, and I agree, that God is working a work through each of our lives, and that each of us could write our own testament of that work in our own lives.

Someday, when the temple is built in Zion, there will be a treasury into which will be gathered the life testimonies of all those who are witnesses of Christ, from the greatest to the least. But in Zion we will be equal, and from the tiniest to the mightiest testimony of Christ, all will have equal weight.

We will have the "great cloud of witnesses" spoken of in Hebrews.

"And because of the righteousness of his people **[The people who dwell in Zion and whose witnesses will be recorded in the temple treasury]**, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth." (1 Nephi 22:26)

I can bear you my witness that the Book of Mormon contains the word of Christ and his prophets (which are anybody who comes to Him in faith and experiences Him and His love), and that it will change your life in a radical way if you approach it with the faith of a little child.