

adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire. . . . Everything that God gives us is lawful and right." (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 256.)

7. It would seem, finally, that obedience to divine revelation, not death, is the focal point of this story. God can restore life in time and eternity; he can do almost nothing with willful disobedience. The quality of our obedience to God's commandments is still the clearest expression of the quality of our faith in him.

Ultimately, what we come to through all of this (and the list of justifications for the incident could be much longer) is at least a partial answer to the first question posed—why is the story told at all? In addition to any of the above-mentioned plausible meanings and legitimate reasons, this account does at least one more truly essential thing: it underscores the monumental—yes, even life-and-death—importance of sacred scripture, of records which contain "words which have been spoken by the mouth of . . . holy prophets." (1 Ne. 3:20.)

One who does not understand Nephi's relentless determination to enter that city and obtain those records, no matter what the cost to his own life or others, will never understand why it was so fundamentally necessary to bring forth the Book of Mormon in this dispensation, or why the forces of hell tried so to wrench those plates from the boy prophet, or why every one of us must search the scriptures and live by every word of God. As with Nephi's people traveling through their wilderness, it is "wisdom in the Lord" that we, too, should carry the sacred records with us on our own journey toward the promised land. (See 1 Ne. 5:22.) Our only alternative is to "dwindle and perish in unbelief." (1 Ne. 4:13.) □

Would you respond to the theories that the Book of Mormon is based on the Spaulding manuscript or on Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*?

Bruce D. Blumell, senior historical associate, Church Historical Department Historically, the most popular anti-Mormon or non-Mormon explanation of the origin of the Book of Mormon has been that it was based on a manuscript written by Solomon Spaulding. In spite of its weaknesses, this theory continues to surface from time to time even in our day. Another more recent theory, also open to criticism, suggests that Joseph Smith used Ethan Smith's (no relation) *View of the Hebrews*, which

was published during the 1820s, to help him write the Book of Mormon.

Solomon Spaulding was born in 1761 in Connecticut, and lived in New England and New York until he moved to Conneaut, Ohio, in 1809. Because his business there was unsuccessful, he decided to write a story about some of the original inhabitants of America which he hoped he might be able to publish and sell. While working on the story he read extracts of it to several of his neighbors from time to time. In 1812 he moved to the Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, area where he died in 1816, never having found a publisher for his manuscript.

In 1833, Philastus Hurlbut, a former member of the Church who had been excommunicated for immorality, was employed by an anti-Mormon committee in Ohio to collect derogatory evidence against Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. In the process of attempting to secure such information, Hurlbut interviewed a number of people who claimed to have known Joseph or known of him. Among those Hurlbut said he talked to were eight people from the Conneaut, Ohio, area who signed affidavits claiming that the Book of Mormon was based on Solomon Spaulding's unpublished manuscript written more than twenty years previously. Hurlbut sold these affidavits to Eber D. Howe, who published them the next year in his vitriolic exposé entitled *Mormonism Unveiled* [sic]. Howe argued that Sidney Rigdon, while still a Reformed Baptist preacher, had come across the manuscript and had used it to help him write the Book of Mormon, which he then secretly conveyed to Joseph Smith, who published the book as his own production.

After Philastus Hurlbut gathered his affidavits, he found one manuscript among Solomon Spaulding's papers; but neither he nor Howe published it. About fifty years later, in 1884, L.L. Rice found this manuscript among papers he had inherited from Howe. He turned the manuscript over to Oberlin College in Ohio, and it was published the next year.

The manuscript, entitled "Manuscript Story—Conneaut Creek," bears no relationship to the Book of Mormon in either style or content. It is written in modern English and is only about one-sixth the length of the Book of Mormon. The story commences with a group of Romans during the reign of Constantine who were blown off course on their way to Britain and landed in America. In this novel one of the Romans served as the narrator of what the group observed. The major part of the chronicle is the description of two Indian nations who have the Ohio River as a common border. A romance between a prince of one nation and a princess of the other leads to a great war between the two groups which is described in some detail.

Most writers who mention this subject, both nonmembers of the Church and members, either directly indicate or appear to assume that the Spaulding manuscript claimed the American In-

dians were the lost ten tribes of Israel, or remnants of these tribes. This it does not do. In fact, the manuscript makes no attempt to explain the origins of the Indians.

The similarities between this manuscript and the Book of Mormon are general and superficial at best. In the introduction to his novel, Spaulding described finding the manuscript buried in the earth, but it was a parchment written in Latin, not metal plates with a Middle Eastern language. Spaulding developed his own unique nomenclature for his story, but none of these names bear any resemblance to Book of Mormon names. The story has in it a transatlantic migration, although the group came from Rome, not Jerusalem. And there is a great war between two civilizations, both Indian, although neither succeeds in completely annihilating the other. Yet these vague similarities could have led Spaulding's neighbors, especially with prompting from Hurlbut, to believe the Book of Mormon was lifted from Spaulding's manuscript.

The affidavits that Hurlbut gathered are very similar in style and content, which suggests that if Hurlbut did not write them himself, he strongly influenced their composition. There is a similarity of syntax and phrasing and an amazing uniformity of details in the various statements. These eight witnesses had just read or were recently familiar with the Book of Mormon, while it had been twenty-plus years since they had heard excerpts from the Spaulding manuscript. With this time differential, these witnesses unconsciously could easily have transposed some details of the Book of Mormon, which was fresh in their minds, to the broad general story Spaulding wrote, which was distant and dim to them.

In his *Mormonism Unveiled*, Howe argued that Joseph Smith did not possess enough education or understanding of theology to have written the more religious parts of the Book of Mormon. He decided

it must have been done by Sidney Rigdon, who had been a skilled and influential Reformed Baptist or Campbellite preacher in northeastern Ohio before joining with the Latter-day Saints. Howe claimed that Sidney Rigdon had come upon the Spaulding manuscript and had copied or stolen it and subsequently added the theology to it to produce the Book of Mormon. During all of this, Howe argued, Rigdon secretly communicated with Joseph Smith to palm the book off as Joseph's creation.

This part of the theory breaks down for several reasons. First of all, the style of the Book of Mormon is very different from the embellished rhetoric Sidney Rigdon exhibited in his sermons. Second, there is no proof to show that Sidney Rigdon ever came in contact with the Spaulding manuscript. And third, the attempts to show him secretly communicating with Joseph Smith are simply unfounded. During the writing and printing of the Book of Mormon, from 1827 to 1830, Sidney Rigdon was a popular preacher in northeastern Ohio, and his whereabouts were known to a number of people. Yet none ever indicated that he was involved in such a conspiracy, and neither did any of Joseph's associates. Such a complicity would have been virtually impossible to carry out, especially since it would have involved either Joseph Smith or Sidney Rigdon periodically traveling about 300 miles to see the other, and consequently being gone from their areas of residence for long periods of time, taking into account the primitive modes of travel in those days.

Sidney Rigdon continued avidly to teach his Reformed Baptist faith until he heard the message of the Restoration from the first Latter-day Saint missionaries in his area, almost eight months after the publication of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church. This, of course, would have been extremely unlikely if he had really been the author of the book and thus the originator of much early Latter-day Saint theology. In fact, if Sidney Rigdon had written the Book of Mormon, it is improbable that a man of his prominence would have let Joseph Smith found the Church and be the leader, and then later let Joseph publicly censure him several times when he opposed the Prophet's policies. Even when Rigdon was excommunicated in August 1844 because of his opposition to Brigham Young's leadership of the Church, he made no intimation that he was the author of the Book of Mormon. Late in his life, long after parting with Brigham Young and the body of the Latter-day Saints, Sidney Rigdon forcefully reiterated to his questioning son that he had nothing to do with writing the Book of Mormon. He added that he knew Joseph Smith was a prophet and that the Book of Mormon was true.

At the end of his book *Mormonism Unveiled*, Howe reported briefly that a Spaulding manuscript had been found; but since it was so different in language, style, and detail from the Book of Mormon,



Illustrated by Dale Kilbourn

he conjectured that Spaulding had produced a revised version that was similar to the Book of Mormon before his death in 1816. Howe felt it must have been this purported revised manuscript from which Spaulding read extracts to some of his neighbors.

Those anti-Mormon writers who have bothered to read *Mormonism Unveiled* and the Spaulding manuscript found in 1884 have usually accepted Howe's belief in a still lost revised Spaulding manuscript. Solomon Spaulding wrote other stories, according to several acquaintances including his widow and daughter, but they never claimed there was a second version of the manuscript. Hurlbut himself believed there was only one manuscript, the one he obtained from Mrs. Spaulding, which was the one later published in 1885. He also believed it had served as the basis of the Book of Mormon, although, after examining it, Howe realized it had not, as noted above.

If there had been a revised second version of the manuscript, one would logically expect some of the facts, details, and incidents in it to be similar to the original version. Yet none of the affidavit witnesses recalled details from the extant Spaulding manuscript, only from the Book of Mormon. For example, the names they remember are Book of Mormon names; yet Spaulding had created a lexicon of his own names in his manuscript. If he had revised the story, certainly he would have kept some of the original names in the second edition, and surely several of the witnesses would have remembered at least one or two if their memories (of events over twenty years previously) really served them as well as they claimed.

Furthermore, since no writer can easily change his style, one could assume that the revised version of Spaulding's story, had there been a revised version, would be at least somewhat comparable in style to the first. And if the Book of Mormon had really been plagiarized, as claimed, from Spaulding's supposed second edition, then one might logically expect similarities in style between the extant manuscript and the Book of Mormon. But the Book of Mormon is much different in style from the flowery figures of speech and romantic rhetoric which Spaulding employed.

If there were a second version of the manuscript there would still be the problem of getting it to Sidney Rigdon and finally to Joseph Smith. As noted earlier, this is the weakest link in the conspiratorial chain of improbabilities and unlikely events that attempt to show the Spaulding manuscript as the basis for the Book of Mormon.

While Spaulding's manuscript said nothing about the origin of the American Indians, there were many people during Joseph Smith's lifetime and earlier in American history who believed that the Indians were the descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel. A number of books had been written on the subject. As settlers from Europe came in

contact with the Indians of North America, they were naturally curious about the origins of these people. Theologians especially looked to the Bible for answers, and some speculated that the lost tribes were the ancestors of the Indians. Joseph Smith might easily have been familiar with this theme.

Therefore, during the past thirty years some non-Mormon scholars, realizing the weakness of the Spaulding manuscript theory, have postulated that Joseph Smith might have gained some of the ideas for the Book of Mormon from a book by Ethan Smith entitled *View of the Hebrews*, first published in Vermont in 1823, with a revised, enlarged edition published in 1835. In this book Ethan Smith endeavored to show, on the basis of scientific research of the time, that the American Indians were the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel.

But although the Book of Mormon does report several migrations of small groups of Israelites to the western hemisphere, it does not say that the native peoples of America were of the lost ten tribes. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Joseph Smith was familiar with the *View of the Hebrews* before 1842, when he quoted from an 1833 book which quoted from the *View of the Hebrews*. He published the passage in the *Times and Seasons*, apparently to show that there were at least some authorities who believed ancient Hebrews had come to America. (*Times and Seasons*, June 1842, 3:813-14.) If the Prophet had originally used Ethan Smith's book to help him write the Book of Mormon, almost certainly he would not have later published a quote from it to illustrate a point, since plagiarists normally keep their sources a secret.

Out of the multitude of ideas and events in the Book of Mormon and in the *View of the Hebrews* there are several broad similarities, but many more significant differences; and a correlation at some point between two things does not prove one caused the other; it may mean, for example, that both things were the result of an independent third factor. If Joseph Smith were going to borrow material to help him write the Book of Mormon, there were certainly sources other than Ethan Smith's book to which he could have gone. Everything that is common or even vaguely similar between the Book of Mormon and the *View of the Hebrews* could have been borrowed more easily from the Bible or from prevailing beliefs at that time. In fact, this would have been much more likely, since Joseph Smith and his family were avid readers of the Bible.

Critics who have recognized that the Book of Mormon could not have been plagiarized from any single source claim that Joseph Smith was a skilled eclectic who borrowed ideas from all over his social and intellectual environment and thereby was able to create the potpourri called the Book of Mormon. This "environmentalist" approach is usually the most satisfying for scholars who in some measure conscientiously examine the question of the book's origins but cannot admit the possibility of divine in-

tervention. However, Dr. Hugh Nibley of Brigham Young University has most successfully argued that there are ideas and material in the book different from the prevailing beliefs of Joseph Smith's era, and different from any other source extant in the 1820s, including the Bible. It is, he adds, significant that since the publication of the Book of Mormon there have been such things uncovered as ancient Middle Eastern sources which in no case contradict, but rather parallel, many Book of Mormon ideas and word usages. He concludes that guesswork on the part of the Prophet Joseph could not possibly account for all these parallels, which were unknown at the time of the Book of Mormon translation. For able presentation of these points of view one may examine such books as *Lehi in the Desert, An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, and *Since Cumorah* by Brother Nibley.

In short, the simplest and most accurate assumption about the origin of the Book of Mormon is that it is exactly what Joseph Smith said it was—an ancient work translated “by the gift and power of God.” (See Testimony of the Three Witnesses.) □

Why is the Book of Mormon the “most correct book,” and how does it contain the fulness of the gospel?

Monte S. Nyman, associate professor of ancient scripture, Brigham Young University. It was the Prophet Joseph Smith who said that the Book of Mormon was the “most correct book of any book on earth.” (*History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4:461.) Unfortunately, people sometimes believe that the word *correct* is synonymous with *perfect*, and they expect the Book of Mormon to be perfect in grammar, spelling, punctuation, clarity of phrasing, and in every other mechanical way. When they discover that there have been numerous changes made in the text since the first edition, they become disillusioned. The changes that have been made are understandable when one considers that the original manuscript was written by dictation and then sent to the publishers without any punctuation. The Prophet himself oversaw two revisions to correct these and other mechanical errors and to clarify certain phrases. (See the article by Stan Larson in this issue.)

So when he said the Book of Mormon was the “most correct book,” he was referring to something far more important than the superficial mechanics, a fact that is underscored by the remainder of his statement. The Book of Mormon, he said, is “the keystone of our religion, and a man would get

nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” (*HC*, 4:461.) Taken in its entirety, the Prophet's statement refers to the correctness of the book in its religious setting. It is correct in that it contains the fulness of the gospel.

What is the fulness of the gospel? Some might argue that because the Book of Mormon does not contain every doctrine of the *restored* gospel (i.e., eternal marriage, the three degrees of glory) it therefore cannot contain the fulness of the gospel.

But the angel Moroni told Joseph Smith that “there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, . . . that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants.” (See Joseph Smith 2:34.) Furthermore, in the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord says several times that the Book of Mormon does contain the fulness of the gospel. (See D&C 20:9, 27:5, 35:17, 42:12.)

What does the Lord mean by the fulness of the gospel? As defined in 3 Nephi 27:13-22, it is that Jesus Christ came to the earth to do the will of the Father in providing the atonement in order that man repent and come unto Him. Therefore, those who meet the conditions set forth by the Savior will be held guiltless before the Father at the judgment day. These conditions are (1) to exercise faith in his atoning sacrifice; (2) to repent of all their sins; (3) to be baptized in his name, which implies the authority and proper method which he has outlined for them; and (4) to be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, which involves being purified and overcoming all evil. Thus, the fulness of the gospel is the plan or the principles and ordinances necessary for man to regain the presence of the Father.

These same principles are taught in the Bible, but not as clearly as they are in the Book of Mormon. President Harold B. Lee said, “There is nothing better that we can do to prepare ourselves spiritually than to read the Book of Mormon. Many doctrines of the Bible that are only partially covered there are beautifully explained in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.” (*Improvement Era*, January 1969, pp. 13-14.)

The Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price provide additional understanding of the doctrines that are necessary for man to be exalted within the celestial kingdom. But the basic precepts, the fulness of the gospel, are in the Book of Mormon. We must come to an understanding of these precepts before we can walk the path to exaltation.

Through identification and application of Book of Mormon precepts, I have witnessed great changes in the lives of people. If we will but study the Book of Mormon we will see that it is the most *correct* book, and it will bring us nearer to God if we will observe and live its precepts. □