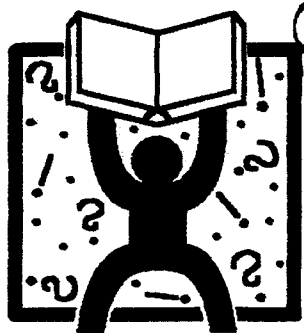


A RESPONSE TO CRITICS

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And I know that
the record which I
make is true; and
I make it with my
own hand

The Book of Mormon
was written by Joseph
Smith.



A RESPONSE TO CRITICS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Introduction. In our last study we demonstrated that recent archaeological discoveries in Central America, studies of ancient Native American traditions and a multitude of internal structures within the book itself which point to ancient Hebrew authorship all meet the criteria established for determining if a book is of ancient origin. Even more convincing is the fact that the evidence referred to was absolutely unknown at the time of the publication of the Book of Mormon. Yet critics of the Book of Mormon still rage against it. Their writings are voluminous and their arguments vilify the book and their supposed author, Joseph Smith.

On the political front, one's opponent is often vilified on the eve of the election. All kinds of charges are brought against him. It matters not whether they be true or false; the bad image is placed before the electorate and the damage is done: the poor candidate has no time to defend himself. This tactic is also used against the Book of Mormon. Misinformation is reported as scientific fact, and millions accept as valid what they read or hear from those they trust or consider to be authorities.

But are these arguments against the Book of Mormon really valid? Gratefully, this isn't a matter for popular vote: God's word would always lose if placed on the ballot. Oddly, time is on the side of the Book of Mormon. One argument against this book after another has been silenced with continued research in the field and on the academic front. In this study we shall take some of the charges made against the Book of Mormon to show that it is of faulty human origin and examine them in the light of recent research.

A. The First Criticism: From the time of its publication in 1829 until this day, the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith have come under attack because of this prophecy by Alma in the 1st century BC: "*And behold, he shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem, which is the land of our forefathers...*" (Alma 5:19) Since every Christian child knows Jesus was born in Bethlehem, this constitutes a false prophecy say its critics.

Our Response: When we attempt to determine that an ancient document is in reality, a writing of antiquity, it must be demonstrated that it accurately represents the cultural and historical setting of the period from which it was purported to have come. Certainly Joseph Smith knew Jesus was not born in the city of Jerusalem; certainly he knew that Jerusalem was a city and not a land, so why did he include such a questionable statement as he dictated to Oliver Cowdery? It was precisely because he was not authoring this manuscript, but was translating an ancient document. This oft-criticized statement casts the book perfectly into the cultural and historical setting which is described.

1. We begin by pointing to the simple fact that this prophecy does not say Jesus was to be born in the city of Jerusalem. Remember, it had been 500 years since these people had left the Old World. Certainly, all the little towns and villages about the area would have been long forgotten, so what the prophecy really speaks of is the "land of Jerusalem". It does not say "in" Jerusalem; rather, it says "at Jerusalem ... the *land* of our forefathers."
2. The crucial point in this matter is to determine whether or not such an expression, "**the land of Jerusalem**", was in common usage among Hebrew-speaking peoples of that day. Is it consistent with Biblical and Hebraic writing of that period? Let's turn to some authorities for an answer.
3. Merrill F. Unger, in his book *Archaeology and the New Testament*, points out: "Many parallels from western Asia may be cited where the name of a country and its capital become identical."
4. Walter Harrelson, writing in *Biblical Archaeology* an article entitled "Shechem in Extra-Biblical References", says this: "...the land of Shechem must be taken to refer to the city and the adjacent

territory under its control. Shechem includes sufficient territory adjacent to it to be referred to as the *land* of Shechem.”

5. The Amarna letters, written in the 14th century BC and not discovered until 1887, referred to “a town of the land of Jerusalem, Bit-lahmi by name.” Professor William F. Albright regarded this to be “an almost certain reference to the town of Bethlehem.”

6. So we can see that Alma’s prophecy indicating Jerusalem as the land of our forefathers fits perfectly into the cultural and historical setting in which he was writing. However, even our response brings yet another criticism.

B. A Second Criticism: An outspoken critic of the Book of Mormon, Bill McKeever in his book, *Mormonism Researched*, takes exception to our use of the Amarna letters as evidence.

He shoots back the following criticism: “...when the Armana tablets were written (1400 BC) Jerusalem was a city-state.... It would make no sense for Alma to use this phrase 1300 years later when the political situation had changed so drastically from the time the Armana letters were written.”

Our Response: We hasten to add that not only Alma, but at least nine Book of Mormon authors in dozens of passages used this same expression. Was this a grave error on the part of Joseph Smith?

1. First, let’s consider Lehi’s time, for it was the last Hebraic setting with which Book of Mormon authors such as Alma would be familiar, since that is when they left Jerusalem and its culture behind as they traveled to the New World. So how did they speak? Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi, used this same Hebraic idiom: “**The voice of them that flee and escape out of the land of Babylon**” (Jeremiah 50:28)

2. Noteworthy is a recently published fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls, known as “Pseudo-Jeremiah” (4Q385). In this fragment it speaks of the Jews being as “... taken captive from the land of Jerusalem.”

3. Eisenmen and Wise, in their book *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered*, comment that this terminology “...greatly enhances the sense of historicity of the whole (fragment - dem)” In the same manner it greatly enhances the historicity of Alma’s prophecy.

4. I would hate to leave this subject without mentioning that in the Book of Mormon no lesser authority than Jesus Christ used this same terminology, and that a hundred years later than Alma. He said, “**I would give unto them again the land of their fathers, for their inheritance, which is the land of Jerusalem**” (3 Nephi 9:68) Now did Jesus misspeak himself as the critics would have us believe? We have only to turn to His words in Matthew to find the answer: “**But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.**” (Matthew 11:24)

5. Knowing the birthplace of Jesus, how easy and natural it would have been for Joseph Smith to change that questionable phrasing to read Bethlehem. But the fact that he accurately translated what was given by the Urim and Thummim certainly places the Book of Alma in the proper cultural and historical setting of an ancient Hebraic record. It also speaks strongly of the courage and honesty of the young translator who had already encountered sufficient hostility and criticism to discourage many of us.

C. The Third Criticism: Gordon Fraser is one of those well-known critics of the Book of Mormon. In 1978 he wrote a book entitled *Joseph and the Golden Plates*. In this book he claims that the Book of Mormon is in serious conflict with the findings of archaeologists. Let’s examine some of these serious conflicts. Then we must determine who is on the side of truth.

Fraser writes, "There were no Semites in ancient America. There is 'no hint' of any ancient transoceanic crossings to the New World by Semites." In this position Fraser is supported by a statement from the Smithsonian Institute, whose word is "law" to critics of the Book of Mormon (we must add when it suits their own purposes). Their statement is this: "Present evidence indicates that the first people to reach the continent from the East were the Norsemen who briefly visited the northeastern part of North America around A.D. 1000 and then settled in Greenland."

Our Response: Of course, we must repeat that such criticism completely ignores the written and verbal testimony of many ancient indigenous peoples, as we have brought forth in a previous study. What evidence can we present concerning this serious charge?

1. In 1931 Dr. Alfonso Caso, a Mexican archaeologist, discovered the ancient city of Monte Albán in southern Mexico had been occupied in three distinctive time periods. The people of each period left graphic carvings which portrayed the occupants during that time period.

2. This carving, which clearly shows a Semitic countenance, is from Period II, about the third century B.C. Not until the Christian era did any typical "Indian" types appear in Monte Albán. These earlier people are thought to have immigrated northward from Guatemala. I would have you remember that in Guatemala we find the Quiché Maya who wrote this: "These, then, were the three nations of Quichés, and they came from where the sun rises, descendants of Israel, of the same language and same customs."

3. An interesting and quite relevant sidelight occurred December 11, 1997 in Canada when their Supreme Court ruled that the claims of native peoples to vast areas of Canadian territory are far broader than current law recognizes.... The *Arizona Republic* reports, "One of the most important aspects of the judges' opinion is the way it clears up a longstanding dispute over traditional claims...."

"The Supreme Court specifically rejected a lower court ruling in which native claims to land in British Columbia were denied. In the course of those proceedings, native people came to court to perform traditional ceremonies, chanting and dancing in ancient ways to relate the histories that had been passed down for untold generations about how they came to be on the land. Thursday, the justices made it clear that the lower court had erred in rejecting the oral evidence."

Let the proud men of science take special note of this legal opinion!

4. But what do other scholars have to say about this serious charge of no Semites appearing in ancient America?

Dr. Cyrus Gordon, a Professor of Mediterranean Studies, in his book, *Before Columbus*, elaborates on such carvings as this: "There is no basis for saying ... they are simply descendants of Paleolithic hunters who wandered south from the Bering Straits We know who they are racially from countless portrayals by ancient American sculptors. They definitely came across both oceans in pre-Columbian times. In fact, prior to A.D. 300, there is hardly any trace of types that we call 'Indian' among the ceramic portraits" On page 26 Dr. Gordon writes, "In the private collection of Alexander von Wuthenau is a Mayan head, larger than life-size, of a pensive, bearded Semite. The dolichocephalic ("long-headed") type fits the Near East well. He resembles certain European Jews, but he is more like many Yemenite Jews."

5. In the Museum of Natural History in Mexico City is found this carving, known as the "Phylactery Stone", found in Veracruz, Mexico. Dr. Gordon comments on this stela in his book, *Riddles in History*: "The main bearded figure holds his right arm half-raised. A strip (of leather?) is wound spirally around the forearm and palm, and then fastened around the thumb and the other fingers. (It is) worn ceremonially by observant Jewish males while reciting their daily morning prayers. The personage has wrapped the phylactery strip around his arm seven times as Jews still do."

6. An excellent basis for Dr. Gordon's conclusion that ancient portraits and carvings truly reveal the nature of America's first settlers is seen in this statue from the highlands of Guatemala. It is simply identified as a "Figure of Stone", but the model's heredity is apparent, is it not?

7. To make sure, let's compare our American "Figure of Stone" with a modern Jewish scholar. Facial features, hair, beard, hat; the modern Jewish scholar could have posed for the early American artist who carved this likeness of a citizen of ancient America. Could we say with a straight face there is no evidence of a Semitic people having lived in ancient America?

8. If ancient America had been the homeland of Semitic Hebrew pilgrims, there should be some residual effects of the Hebrew language on the native dialects found in those areas they had inhabited.

Dr. Gordon, the authority on Mediterranean languages writes of the similarities between the Aztec language, Nahuatl, and the Egypto-Semitic language: "In ... Nahuatl, *wa* means 'and' as in Semitic. ... we know that an earlier form was *iwa*. Again quite independent of Nahuatl evidence, final *-n* is sometimes suffixed, so that a complete form in Egypto-Semitic would be *iwan* identical with regular Nahuatl *iwan* 'and' (often spelled in Spanish fashion, *ihuan*). Now Dr. Gordon states, **"Sooner or later Old World philology (the study of written records, especially literary texts - dem) will have to reckon with linguistic phenomena from the New World."**

9. And so they have! Dr. Morris Swadesh, once regarded one of America's foremost authorities on tracing the origin and development of words, had been working at the National University of Mexico before his untimely death in 1968. John Phillip Cohane, in his book, *The Key*, tells us that Swadesh was working on "a comparative study in depth between, on one hand, the Aztec and Mayan dialects and, on the other, the Hebrew language. The most recently published summary of this study indicates a relationship of approximately 20 percent between the two native dialects and Hebrew, an extraordinarily high figure in view of the geographic and time factors involved."

10. A recently published book, *The Nexus, Spoken Language, The Link Between the Mayan and Semitic, During Pre-Columbian Times*, by David Deal graphically records hundreds of such relationships. Let's consider one of them:

From the *Popol Vuh*, an ancient Maya history, we read the following statement:

"After forty years of wandering they finally reached Chichén Itzá."

Maya - Chichén Itzá

Hebrew - s s n y s

(*sheshen* - joy) (*ytza* - brought forth)

"And he brought forth his people with joy..." Psalms 105:43

D. A Fourth Criticism. In Mosiah 5:35 we read, **"And behold, we at this time do pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites, to the amount of one half of our corn, and our barley ..."**

This Book of Mormon statement has long been criticized by its opponents. Their basis is a statement by the Smithsonian Institute - "American Indians had no wheat, barley, oats, millet ... before 1492."

Our Response. Work on a new freeway in central Phoenix during the 1980s uncovered an ancient Hohokam village. New laws require that when work projects reveal pre-historic sites, work must be delayed until salvage archaeologists can make a thorough study of the site. Archaeologists working this ancient Hohokam site have made a startling discovery which turns this simple Book of Mormon statement into a strong testimony about the inspired origin and nature of the book.

1. In the December issue of *Science* 83 an article called "Last Ditch Archaeology" by Daniel Adams appeared. Adams wrote, "Perhaps the most startling evidence of Hohokam agricultural sophistication came last year when salvage archaeologists found preserved grains of what looks

like domesticated barley, the first ever found in the New World. Wild barleys have a fibrous husk over each grain. Domesticated barleys lack this. So does the Hohokam barley.”

2. John Welch in his book, *Re-exploring the Book of Mormon*, writes, “Professor Howard C. Stutz of the BYU Department of Biology tells us that three types of *wild* barley have long been known to be native to the Americas.” The same sort of barley “was seen years ago in the Snaketown excavation by Dr. Emil Haury (University of Arizona, now retired). The Snaketown samples and more recent samples from archaeological contexts in Southern Illinois are said to be dated from A.D. 1 through 900.”

E. The Fifth Criticism. “And I did teach my people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which were in great abundance” (2 Nephi 4:21). Of course, objects displaying fine workmanship in wood, precious stones and metallurgy are found in abundance in the ancient cultures of America. However, the inclusion, by Nephi, of iron and steel in this list illicit a lot of criticism of the Book of Mormon, since most authorities deny its existence in ancient American cultures. The Smithsonian Institute goes on record: “Iron, steel, glass and silk were not used in the New World before 1492 (except for occasional use of unsmelted meteoric iron).”

Our Response. As we respond to this criticism we shall move from indirect evidence to reasonable hypothesis, to definite scientific observations. We begin with the first contact of the Spanish with the indigenous tribes of Mexico. The Indians from a large city in the forests of coastal Tabasco had only seen Spaniards one time when Cortés and his army arrived in March of 1519. Yet the soldier, Bernal Diaz, wrote in his history, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico*, that these people already had a word in their vocabulary for iron: “...they call iron *Tepustle* in their language ...”

1. C.W. Ceram, in his book *The First American*, recorded this: “...the engineer Arlington H. Mallery arrived at a fantastic theory, which he presented in book form in 1951. In the space of 238 pages, Mallery seemingly proved irrefutably, on the basis of innumerable pictures, radio-carbon dates, microscopic and metallurgical analyses, that North America had had an iron age.” (p. 223)

2. In the bulletin of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, John Witthoft and Frances Eyman wrote an article entitled “Metallurgy of the Tlingit, Dene and Eskimo”. They write, “We have been amazed to discover that Eskimo technology in this area has been based upon steel tools since the time of Christ.”

3. A. J. Conant, a member of the St. Louis Academy of Science, writes in his book, *Footprints of Vanished Races in the Mississippi Valley*, that in the right hand of a skeleton was a large iron or steel weapon which crumbled upon handling.

4. Finally, from the noted archaeologist and author, A. Hyatt Verrill, comes this testimony found in his book, *The World's Work*: “Indeed, less than two years ago, I was scoffed at for suggesting that an entirely new and unknown culture of great antiquity had existed in Panama, but we now have undeniable proofs of the fact. Moreover, at a depth of five and one half feet below the surface, at the temple site, among broken pottery and embedded in charcoal, I found a steel or hardened iron implement. The greater portion is almost completely destroyed by corrosion, but the chisel-shaped end is in good condition. It is so hard that it is scarcely touched by a file and will scratch glass, and with such an implement it would be a simple manner to cut and carve the hardest stone.” (p. 286)

(Demonstration: Steel has a hardness of 5 while glass is 5.5)

F. Criticism Number Six. In the Book of Mormon we read Nephi's account of an activity basic to this narrative: “And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make

plates of ore, that I might engraven upon them the record of my people (1 Nephi 5:218).”

Were it not for this command there would be no Book of Mormon. But this simple statement also calls forth another criticism of the book. Again, it is Gordon Fraser, among others, who states that nowhere are there to be found writings on metal plates in the New World.

Our response. First of all, did the ancient inhabitants of America really have books?

1. An early Aztec historian in his book, *Obras Historicas*, relates this history of his people: “...the king of Texcoco (seen here in model form at the National Museum of Mexico) gathered together all the chronicles of the Toltecs in a ‘Divine Book’ ... which contained the legends of the creation of the world, the emigration from Asia of these peoples, the stops on the journey, the dynasty of their kings, their social and religious institutions ... and so on.” Sadly all these books fell victim to the Spanish conquistadors. Of entire libraries, only three books have survived the conquest. But, yes, they certainly did have books!

2. Any book found on precious metal would have immediately melted down to help fill the King’s treasury. Sadly, even books on leather and parchment were also destroyed. Here in the ancient city of Mani in Yucatan, not a building of the ancient city remains today. A few mounds can be seen in back yards. Here was the great library of the Mayan people. In 1562 Bishop Diego de Landa came here to destroy the religion of the Maya. To do so he burned all the sacred books and histories of the Mayan people.

3. We can easily see the value of an ancient Toltec legend, as recounted by anthropologist L. Taylor Hansen in her book, *He Walked the Americas*. They say that long ago they were warned by the bearded white God, “Carry your great books into the jungles. Place your histories deeply in caverns where none ... can find them. Keep hidden your books, oh my children, all during the Cycle of the Warring Strangers. The day will come when they will be precious.”

4. Joseph Smith’s testimony is that the metal plates given into his hand had been kept in a stone box, buried in the earth; perhaps similar to this box found at the base of an ancient temple. But were there ancient records kept on metal plates as Joseph and the witness to the Book of Mormon tell us?

5. Dr. Karena Shields, an anthropologist who is a Roman Catholic, was raised in the jungles of Mesoamerica among a branch of the Maya. She was a close friend to Leon Yates and an intimate associate of the Maya people. She also lectured to a group of people who believe in the Book of Mormon. She told them, “... while on a research study among the Maya she examined herself gold plates bound by leather and gold rings which were sacred and known only to the Mayan people.”

G. A Common Criticism. We recognize the Book of Mormon to be a record of God’s dealings with a people in ancient Mesoamerica over a span of about one thousand years. This record was begun by Nephi about 600 B.C. and finalized by Moroni near 400 A.D. During the intervening years a large number of carefully chosen men maintained the history of their people. However, one of the most common accusations we hear is that the Book of Mormon was really authored in its entirety by Joseph Smith.

Our Response. Over the years there have been many responses to this false claim, but today modern science can provide a unique and unrefutable response.

In the remote past Chinese had discovered that no two individuals have identical **fingerprints**. For more than one hundred years police detectives have used this knowledge to identify criminals. In recent years studies have shown that because of small differences in our vocal organs, no two individuals produce exactly the same sounds in their speech. New technology now allows scientists to convert spoken language into visual records that can be analyzed and measured;

- thus, **voice prints** can be used to identify a person who made a recorded telephone call. Now modern computers have provided history detectives with a new technique called the **word print**.
2. With wordprint analysis it is now possible to tell which authors **did not** write a particular piece. This is based on the discovery that every author who has been studied so far uses one of sixty-five identifiable patterns. These are patterns which involve the use of simple filler words like "**and**", "**of**", "**the**" and "**that**". Let me show you an example from my writing:
 3. There was no inequality in **the land and** all enjoyed (**the blessings of God**).
There was no inequality in the land for all enjoyed God's blessings.
 4. These four key words are found four times in this one line I wrote, but just once as I rewrote the sentence. Phrases such as "the blessings of God" are called the "construct state" and are found abundantly in Hebrew, in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon where possessive forms are very uncommon. Perhaps that is why I have a tendency to use them often. I also have a tendency to over-use the word "that". If I were to write a four-page article, upon reading it over, I would have to remove half a dozen unnecessary "that's".
 5. Thirty-six tests were run in which the writings of Joseph Smith, Solomon Spaulding and Oliver Cowdery were compared with the writings of Alma and Nephi. The group which developed these tests came from varied religious and philosophic backgrounds. The bottom line of these studies is that the writers of the Book of Mormon were not Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery nor Solomon Spaulding. Furthermore, the studies show that the books within the Book of Mormon were written by a number of original authors and translated by a single translator with a limited vocabulary.
 6. As understanding of this new technique increases and reliance upon its accuracy grows, this old standby argument against the Book of Mormon must slowly disappear into the dusk as has many another with new discoveries being made on many scientific and scholarly fronts. But I am confident the critics will not tire in their search for new arguments to use in their battle against truth.