

CHAPTER XIX

Some Miscellaneous Problems involving the Book of Mormon: The Spaulding Theories Alleged Anachronisms Did Joseph Smith Obtain His Ideas for the Book of Mormon from Contemporary Books?

Of the many theories of the origin of the Book of Mormon,¹ none has survived critical examination except the one that Joseph Smith himself tells about, namely, that he brought it forth by the gift and power of God. Even those critics who deny the divine origin of the Nephite record generally credit the book to Joseph Smith. We shall take notice here of none of the theories of human origin except two which credit the book in part to Solomon Spaulding, a graduate of Dartmouth College (B.A., 1785). The only reason we take notice of these is that they have been so often spoken of (particularly the first one). Spaulding left off as a preacher about 1800, went into merchandising, at which he failed, and then moved to New Salem, Ashtabula County, Ohio, in 1807 or 1808. New Salem was located on the banks of Conneaut Creek and was sometimes known as "Conneaut." Here Spaulding failed also in the iron foundry business. About 1809 he started to write a religious romance which "he called the 'Manuscript Found,' from the circumstance of his romance being based upon the pretended finding of a manuscript in a cave in the vicinity of New Salem It feigned also to give an account of the migration of a colony to America in ancient times."² To make a long story short, years after the death of Solomon Spaulding in 1816

the notorious "Doctor" Philastus Hurlburt, an excommunicated member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, secured the Spaulding manuscript and collected stories about its alleged connection with the Book of Mormon. These materials were purchased by E.D. Howe of Painesville, Ohio, and used by him in his anti-Mormon book, *Mormonism Unveiled* (1834), in which it is alleged that Sidney Rigdon was responsible for the religious parts of the Book of Mormon and that the manuscript of Solomon Spaulding supplied the historical materials. Howe seems to have suppressed vital facts, leaving the impression that the manuscript in his possession bore no resemblance to the true "Manuscript Found." By Howe's suppression of the truth that he really had the "Manuscript Found," he made it possible for critics to get by with the false thesis for many years that the Book of Mormon was based on a Spaulding manuscript not as yet located. About the year 1840 Howe sold his paper, the *Painesville Telegraph*, together with a large collection of books and manuscripts, (including "Manuscript Found") to Mr. L. L. Rice. In later years Mr. Rice sold his business interests in Painesville and made his home in Honolulu in the Hawaiian Islands. There he was visited by President James H. Fairchild of Oberlin College, Ohio, in 1884. President Fairchild suggested that Mr. Rice look through his numerous collection of old papers for antislavery documents. In his search, Mr. Rice came across the "Manuscript Found" of Solomon Spaulding, completely unaware, heretofore, that it was in his possession. At last the real truth came to light; the Spaulding manuscript bore no resemblance to the Book of Mormon. President Fairchild said these words:

The theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon in the traditional manuscript of Solomon Spaulding will probably have to be relinquished.... Mr. Rice himself and others compared it with the Book of Mormon and could detect no resemblance between the two, in general or in detail. There seems to be no name or incident common to the two....³

Mr. Rice was even more emphatic than President Fairchild:

I should as soon think the Book of Revelation was written by the author of "Don Quixote," as that the writer of this manuscript was the author of the Book of Mormon.⁴

Mr. Rice presented the original Spaulding manuscript to Oberlin College, where it now lies free for public inspection. So died the main Spaulding theory which had done yeoman service against the Book of Mormon for so many years.

Despite the fact that the one and only Spaulding manuscript was found, we occasionally hear of some critic who claims that the Book of Mormon is based, at least in part, on another Spaulding manuscript, more antique in style than the other, but now lost. This theory, or a variation of it, was made possible, of course, by E. D. Howe's implying that there was a second Spaulding manuscript.⁵ We need pay little attention to those persons who use this theory. Let them first produce the manuscript in question; then we shall be glad to consider their claims.

Alleged Anachronisms

Critics have attempted from time to time to point out anachronisms or incongruities in the Book of Mormon consisting of statements about events that are out of line, chronologically speaking. One of the alleged anachronisms pointed out by them is the use made by the early Nephites of the word "Bible" hundreds of years before the word was used by Christians of the Fifth Century A. D. to express the idea of united scriptures, the Old and New Testaments. The use of the word "Bible" in the Book of Mormon is confined to one chapter. (2 Nephi 29:3, 4, 6, 10.) An examination of the use of the word in the chapter reveals that the prophet Nephi is quoting words of the Lord relative to the attitude of the Gentiles of our own day to new revelation and to the Bible which has come to them from

the Jews. Actually the words quoted by Nephi form a prediction by the Lord himself relative to future events! Notice these words:

And because My words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible. But thus saith the Lord God: O fools, they shall have a Bible; and it shall proceed forth from the Jews, Mine ancient covenant people. (2 Nephi 29:3, 4, etc.)

The use of "Bible" is perfectly consistent in the chapter. Why should it be considered an anachronism? Can't the Almighty see into the future? Apparently the critics don't think so.

The Nephites of the Book of Mormon, long years before the coming of Christ, seem to have used the words "gospel," "church," and "Christians,"—so Joseph Smith translated from the Gold Plates—and these words are also looked upon by certain critics as anachronisms. That is to say, these words came into use only after the advent of our Lord into mortality; hence the Nephites before that time, say the critics, could not have known about them. For some reason, many so-called Christians can't seem to get the idea through their heads that God's people from Adam's day to that of Christ might have had a formal organization equivalent to the "Church" in our Lord's age through which they fellowshiped and proselyted other people into the faith. Why is it so hard to believe, for example, that Abraham belonged to the Church in his day, the Church headed by Melchizedek, the "priest of God Most High," (Gen. 14:18) the one to whom the Father of the Faithful paid his tithing? (Gen. 14:20) And in Genesis 12:5 we suggest the reading "and the souls that they had converted [to the Church] in Haran" for the Hebrew "and the souls that they had made in Haran." But getting directly to our problem, let it be realized that the Book of Mormon teaches it was the pre-existent Christ who was the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and

that He was the one who gave the law to Moses and who covenanted with His people Israel. (3 Nephi 15:4-5) This teaching gives substance and meaning to our Lord's words to His disciples on the road to Emmaus:

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

And let us not forget these words of Paul to the Corinthians:

Our fathers . . . were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat [food]; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (1 Cor. 10:1-4)

Jesus and Paul seem to teach that Moses and the children of Israel knew about Christ and His Gospel (spiritual food and drink). No matter how one interprets the above passages of scripture, the fact remains that the Book of Mormon is consistent in its teaching. The pre-existent Christ appeared personally to Nephi (1 Nephi 2:16), to Jacob (2 Nephi 2:3-4; 11:3), to Isaiah (2 Nephi 11:2); in fact, all of the prophets had a hope of His glory, believed in Him and worshipped God in His name. (Jacob 4:4-6) The Nephites therefore knew about the *gospel* long before Christ's coming and knew about His Church. As a matter of fact, the word "gospel" is used about fourteen times in the Book of Mormon in narratives which deal with events prior to the appearance of the resurrected Christ among the Nephites, and the word "church" is used dozens of times in the same general context. Since the Nephites, prior to Christ's coming, knew the gospel and worshiped God in His son's name, why should "gospel" and "church" be considered anachronisms? And since they were followers of Christ, why shouldn't Joseph Smith call them "Christians" when he translated Alma 46:13, 15, 16; 48:10? A translator is bound to use terminology that is in common use in his own day. So the

words "gospel," "church," and "Christians" are not real anachronisms at all in the Book of Mormon; they are simply anachronisms in the minds of critics who refuse to accept the Nephite record's premise and teaching that Christianity was in the world before Christ came in the flesh. Why is it so hard to accept its noble and liberal doctrine that God wanted His children in all ages of the world to be exposed to the teachings of His son Jesus Christ and come into His Church?

The words "dissenter," "dissenters," and "dissenting," as used in the Book of Mormon about twenty-two times altogether (Helaman 1:15; Alma 31:8; 47:35, 36; 3 Nephi 3: 11, etc.), are pointed out as anachronisms by some critics. John Hyde, Jr., in his book *Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (2d Ed., New York, 1857), claims that "dissenters" was not employed until the time of Wycliffe (*circa* 1380 A.D.) and not generally until 1662. Hence, Hyde must have reasoned, the use of the word by the Nephites long before the advent of Christ, applied by them to apostates from the Church or separatists from one organization or another, stamps the Book of Mormon as an imposture. But such reasoning is completely wrong. What we said above concerning the words "gospel," "church," and "Christians" applies here also. Since the Nephites had the gospel and the Church, they had to apply some term to members who were excommunicated or who separated themselves from the organization. What the term was we don't know, but Joseph Smith as translator had to use some equivalent word in common English usage. Hence his use of "dissenter," "dissenters," and "dissenting" is perfectly justified. These words are not anachronisms as used in the Book of Mormon. The book is again proved consistent in its use of words.

Still another apparent anachronism is pointed out by the critics in Helaman 12: 15 where it says, "for surely it is the earth that moveth and not the sun." They assert that

Nicolaus Copernicus, great Polish astronomer, physician, and churchman, (1473-1543) was the author of the heliocentric view of the motions of the heavenly bodies, in which it was postulated that the sun was the center around which the planets revolve. How could the Nephites know, therefore, that it was "the earth that moveth and not the sun" hundreds of years before the days of Copernicus and the men who supported his hypothesis, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton? We do not want to detract an iota from the great contribution of Copernicus to astronomy, but it should be pointed out that he was perfectly aware of the fact that Greek thinkers centuries before Christ had suggested that the sun and not the earth was the center of the universe. For example, Heracleides, a younger contemporary of Aristotle, had made the discovery that the earth turned on its axis and that Mercury and Venus revolved round the sun. Following this lead, Aristarchus of Samos (c. 310-230 B.C.) did some thinking which led him to conclude that the sun's mass was about three hundred times that of the earth. It was probably for that reason he reached the conclusion that the geocentric theory was impossible; and he subsequently propounded the view that the earth and all the planets revolved about the sun in circles, while the sun and fixed stars were stationary, the latter being an enormous distance away.⁶ Tarn and Griffith conclude:

In the realm of thought the suggestion, though he could not prove it, should have been epoch-making.⁷

And the Greeks in turn were heavily dependent upon the Babylonians before them for their knowledge of astronomy. Indeed, the Babylonians were famous for their empirical studies of the heavenly bodies. It is possible that some heliocentric thinking may have been "in the air" at the time that the Nephites left Jerusalem about 600 B.C., but we are not dependent upon the history of science to refute

the view that Helaman 12:15 is an anachronism. The faith of the Mormon people, like that of the ancient Hebrew worthies of the Old Testament, is based upon actual revelation from God. And in our modern scripture, *The Book of Abraham*, the Father of the Faithful tells us this interesting fact:

But the records of the fathers, even the patriarchs, concerning the right of Priesthood, the Lord my God preserved in mine own hands; therefore a knowledge of the beginning of the creation, *and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers*, have I kept even unto this day.... (Abr. 1:31. Italics ours.)

By means of the Urim and Thummim, given him by the Lord, Abraham was able to learn fundamental facts about the heavenly bodies on his own account. (See Abr. 3:1-14 and especially facsimiles from the original document, cuts No. 2 and No. 3 with accompanying explanations.) According to this record, Abraham even reasoned upon the principles of astronomy at the court of Pharaoh. And Josephus agrees that Abraham taught in Egypt. (*Antiq.*, I, 8, 2) Thus the true knowledge of the motions of the heavenly bodies was revealed early to the Hebrew people and came into their records. A very full history from the creation (including the five books of Moses) and the Hebrew people came into the hands of the Nephites in the form of the Brass Plates. (See 1 Nephi 5:10-22.) This record was much more complete than the Old Testament record which we have up to about the year 600 B.C. (See implications of 1 Nephi 13:23.) There can be little doubt, therefore, that the Nephites were in possession of the fundamental facts concerning the movements of the planets as revealed by the Lord to their patriarchal ancestors. Besides, they had their own prophets to whom the Lord could have revealed the essential facts about the heavenly bodies.

It will be of interest at this point to examine the context in which Mormon brought up our problem by ex-

plaining that "it is the earth that moveth and not the sun." Evidently Mormon's words were inspired by the account on the Brass Plates of Joshua's commanding the sun to stand still, the Nephite equivalent of our Joshua 10:12-14. Here are his words:

Yea, and if He say unto the earth—Move it is moved Yea, if he say unto the earth—Thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours—it is done; and thus, according to his word the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still; yea, and behold this is so; for surely it is the earth that moveth and not the sun. (Helaman 12:13-15)

An examination of this passage would seem to reveal either that the miracle brought about by Joshua was explained in the Brass Plate account—which it isn't in our Bible or that Mormon was inspired before or at the time he wrote his commentary to give the true explanation of the miracle. Now that we have raised the matter of Mormon's explanation, our critics are sure to attack it on the grounds that it violates the laws of physics! At any rate, the presumption is that Helaman 12:15 is not an anachronism. The passage is perfectly consistent with the revelations given to our Church.

Another alleged anachronism pointed out by John Hyde, Jr., is that Jesus had to die in order for His disciples to obtain the gift of the Holy Ghost (John 14:26; cf. 20:22), whereas the Nephites had it hundreds of years before Christ. What we have already explained above about the Nephites having the gospel and the Church is also a sufficient answer to this problem. Having the gospel and the Church, it would be expected, of course, that the Nephites had the Holy Ghost to administer unto them. The book is perfectly consistent on this point. But if this isn't a sufficient answer, let it be noticed that in the days of Moses, hundreds of years before the time of the Nephites, this event happened:

And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him [Moses], and took of the *spirit* that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the *spirit* rested upon them, *they prophesied*, and did not cease. But there remained two of the men in the camp, . . . and the *spirit* rested upon them; . . . and they *prophesied* in the camp. (Num. 11:25-26. Italics ours. Cf. also verses 27-29.)

Now, if the "spirit" mentioned in this passage isn't the Holy Ghost, what is it? And in Revelation 19:10 we are told that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Why, of all things, should our Lord confer the blessings of the Holy Ghost upon His saints after the resurrection and withhold it from the faithful in the ages before that event? The Mormon people have always looked upon God as impartial. If He shows any favoritism, it is to the righteous. (1 Nephi 17:35)

*Did Joseph Smith Obtain His Ideas
for the Book of Mormon from Contemporary Books?*

Some critics of the Nephite record have suggested that Joseph Smith got his ideas for writing the Book of Mormon from contemporary books which mention the ancient Israelites and try to connect them with the American Indians. It was not uncommon in Joseph Smith's day, and even before, for pious and sincere men to speculate upon the origin of the American Indians and attempt, one way or another, to show that they were of Israelite lineage; indeed, some writers even suppose they were descendants of the "Lost Ten Tribes." Thus, James Adair in his *History of the American Indians* (London, 1775) attempts in some detail to demonstrate that the American Indians are of Jewish descent.⁸ He even says that "*the Indian language, and dialects, appear to have the very idiom and genius of the Hebrew.*"⁹ But Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews; or the Tribes of Israel in America*, published and printed by Smith and Shute in

Poultney, Vermont, in 1823 (second edition, 1825), is the book most used by critics in their attempts to show close parallels between the ideas of the Book of Mormon and current views in Joseph Smith's day. The critics have to show, one way or another, that the ideas in the Book of Mormon come from books already known to the prophet and not from a divine source. We think that Dr. Ariel L Crowley, in his brochure *About the Book of Mormon* (1961) pp. 111-133, has already deflated the critics in admirable fashion in his chapter giving an analysis of Ethan Smith's book and a comparison with the Book of Mormon. It will not be necessary, therefore, for us to go over the entire ground again. We are quite familiar with Ethan Smith's book, and the second edition, improved and enlarged, is before us as we write. On the title page of the book, Smith exhibits its general content under four chapters:

Chap. I. The Destruction of Jerusalem.

Chap. II. The Certain Restoration of Judah and Israel.

Chap. III. The Present State of Judah and Israel.

Chap. IV. An Address of the Prophet Isaiah to the United States Relative to the Restoration.

Now it is true that the first part of the Book of Mormon speaks of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 1:13), but that destruction has reference mainly to the one by the Babylonians, not to the later Roman destruction of which Ethan Smith speaks. It is true that the Book of Mormon deals at times with the restoration of Israel and Judah, but there is nothing on that subject that Joseph Smith couldn't have gotten from the Bible. He didn't have to get his ideas on the subject from Ethan Smith. In his third chapter Smith argues that the "Lost Ten Tribes" are to be identified with the American Indians and cites the views of many others to the same effect. "They are *the aborigines of our own continent*," says he. (p. 79) The

Book of Mormon, on the other hand, would identify our American Indians as descendants of the Nephites and Mulekites who left Jerusalem about 600 B.C., not as descendants of the "Lost Ten Tribes" whose ancestors were taken captive by the Assyrians after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. Ethan Smith makes much of Isaiah 18 as an address "apprehended to be of deep interest to America" (p. 228), but the Book of Mormon does not quote that chapter, though it does quote extensively from the prophet.

It is true that there are some obvious parallels between Ethan Smith's book and the Book of Mormon, but parallels can be drawn between the Nephite record and many other early American books. These parallels prove nothing concerning the origin of the Book of Mormon. Attention should be called to the numerous differences between ideas found in the Book of Mormon and those found in Ethan Smith's book and other books similar in purpose to his. Where in Smith's book can be found a discussion of the atonement as distinctive as found in 2 Nephi 9:6-9? Where in Smith's book can be found a treatment of the doctrine of an opposition in all things and the meaning of the fall such as in 2 Nephi 2:11-25? How could Joseph Smith possibly extract the ideas pertaining to Lehi's dream of the tree, the river, and the rod of iron (1 Nephi 8) from *View of the Hebrews*? Or where in this book could he possibly get the ideas found in Alma 32 pertaining to faith? Certainly Joseph Smith could not have found ideas in *View of the Hebrews* to compose what is said about the state of the soul between death and the resurrection in Alma 40:11-14. And is there anything comparable in Ethan Smith's book to the dramatic three-day ministry of Jesus in 3 Nephi 11-26? Such examples may be multiplied. We submit that the style and purpose of *View of the Hebrews* is so different from that of the Book of Mormon that any fair-minded person who examines the two must have grave doubts that Joseph Smith was any more dependent upon Ethan Smith's book than

upon a dozen other early American publications dealing with the American Indians. Besides, there is no documented evidence that Joseph Smith had ever read *View of the Hebrews* before translating the Book of Mormon. Supposition and some parallels from *View of the Hebrews* don't prove that the critics are correct.

[Notes:]

¹ Dr. Francis W. Kirkham distinguishes "ten different explanations for the human origin of the Book of Mormon." See his *A New Witness for Christ in America*, Enlarged Third Edition, pp. 263-264.

² B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, III, 355. A detailed account of the main Spaulding theory is given in pages 354-387.

³ *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Jan., 1885, Oberlin, Ohio. As quoted by Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 375-376.

⁴ Roberts, *op. cit.* p. 377.

⁵ See Roberts, *op. cit.* pp. 380-381.

⁶ See Tarn and Griffith, *Hellenistic Civilization*, Third Edition, p. 296-297. London, 1959.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 297

⁸ See the modern edition edited by Samuel Cole Williams, LL.D., published by the Watauga Press, Johnson City, Tenn., pp. 16ff.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40. See also the footnote on p. 50.