

What if the Book of Mormon was True?

by Paul Barker | Feb 16, 2016 | Book of Mormon, Featured | 27 comments



Some of the hardest questions come when our belief system is challenged. It can be really uncomfortable. But some of the best learning takes place when we ask those questions. The object of asking the right questions is not necessarily to find answers or to come to a conclusion, but in doing so we tend to grow and to learn about ourselves. I hope to do so here in the most respectful way possible as we discuss The Book of Mormon.

So let's jump into this: What if The Book of Mormon was true? And by true I'm talking about what if the events described in the book actually happened from conception to translation. For Mormon believers and for those that have left the LDS Church, this question might seem silly. Growing up Mormon in the '80s, I remember everything Book of Mormon was literally related to the Mayans or the Native Americans. Book of Mormon artwork was also depicted this way, heck even singing the Book of Mormon song we made the signs with our hands that depicted feathers

in our heads. There was always this strong tie to anyone with brown skin as a "Lamanite". Islanders of the Pacific were tied to the explorations of Hagoth. (Alma 63:5-8) There has always been a strong push to make the Book of Mormon a literal historical book. I remember watching LDS films of archeologist in Central America showing the "Great White God" or calling holes in the ground baptismal fonts, etc. There are even several LDS-themed cruises in which instructors take tourists to Mesoamerican sites and introduce them within a Book of Mormon context. Just recently a group of Mormon archeologist headed by Dr.F. Richard Hauck will go on a dig to "Nephi's Bountiful" at the edge of the Arabian Peninsula. This location is said to be where Nephi built the boat that carried his family across the ocean. I could go on and on about how much time and money the LDS Church and it's members put into making the Book of Mormon a literal historical read.

Historicity, geography, and methods of authorship continue to be hotly debated among Mormons and Ex-Mormons as a way to prove that the book is true or false.

It has been set up to be an all or nothing campaign, where if the book is true, then Joseph Smith was a prophet and if he was the prophet, then he restored the only true church. If the book is false (or not historical), then everything is supposed to fall down in shambles. I'm not going to spend time on how this line of reasoning is terrible or how this sets members up for failure. This essay is about how proving the Book of Mormon is true or false by historical landmarks or by authorship is a huge waste of time. Historical or not, its value lies in its message. I'm not going to go over certain implications, like why a need for the plates if Joseph didn't use them during the translation process, or text that may or may not be plagiarized from the Bible, I am going to focus my efforts on the morality of the book. Please don't comment... "but you don't have an eternal perspective". This just dismisses any kind of intelligent discussion and quite frankly is just intellectually lazy. And for the history fans, I'm not saying we should ignore history completely. History gives a story context and deeper richer meanings. History, in my opinion, shouldn't be used to prove if a book is "true".

If the events of The Book of Mormon actually took place what are the moral implications? Let's say it was historically true that there was an actual group called the Nephites and Lamanites—what do the contents of the book say about God and his relationship with his children? I am not going to address every single good or bad thing that one might find in the book, but I will try to balance out with "the greatest hits" of the book. Feel free to add your own in the comments section.

Nephi vs. Laban – Thou shall not kill

Why not just tie Laban up, strip him down and be on your way without killing? OR if

God can relate the whole Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith through stones in a hat, why couldn't he do the same thing for Nephi? Was this just an obedience test? Where was the angel to stop Nephi's actions once God knew he was committed to killing? Why couldn't God just cause a deep sleep to come over Laban?

Take Care of The Poor

Throughout the Book of Mormon, there is a very strong, very clear call to take care of the poor. According to The Book of Mormon, if you are not making an effort to take care of the poor you just might be morally bankrupt.

"And now, ... for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants." (Mosiah 4:26.)

"And now behold, my beloved brethren... do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith." (Alma 34:28.)

"Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just—

"But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God." (Mosiah 4:17-18.)

Ammon avoids being killed

We all know the great missionary story of Ammon, it is read over and over again how he chopped off people's arms. Yes, that Ammon. Did you ever think about that one guy that was mad at Ammon because he chopped off his friends' arms? When the group is gathered together to see the king, the queen and Ammon passed out on the floor, that guy sees the opportunity to get his revenge on Ammon. But before he gets his chance, God strikes him down dead.

If God can do this, why not do the same thing today? Here would have been some good opportunities:

Mao Ze-Dong (China, 1958-61, 1966-69, Tibet 1949-50) 49-78,000,000 killed

Adolf Hitler (Germany, 1939-1945) 12,000,000 plus 3,000,000 Russian POWs left to die

Leopold II of Belgium (Congo, 1886-1908) 8,000,000 killed

Jozef Stalin (USSR, 1932-39) 6,000,000 killed, including Ukraine's famine

Hideki Tojo (Japan, 1941-44) 5,000,000 killed (civilians in WWII)

Pol Pot (Cambodia 1975-79) 1,700,000

Kim Il Sung (North Korea, 1948-94) 1,600,000 killed (purges and concentration camps)

Menghistu (Ethiopia, 1975-78) 1,500,000 killed

Yakubu Gowon (Biafra, 1967-1970) 1,000,000 killed

...just to name a few. How can God single out just one person, in one instance and yet leave millions to their death?

Anti-Priestcraft

Mega Churches beware!

Priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the Welfare of Zion... But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish" (2 Ne. 26:29, 31)

Racism

"And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them." (2 Nephi 5:21)

"And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression and their rebellion against their brethren, who consisted of Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph, and Sam, who were just and holy men." (Alma 3:6)

Therefore, all the Lamanites who had become converted unto the Lord did unite with their brethren, the Nephites.

And it came to pass that those Lamanites who had united with the Nephites were numbered among the Nephites;

And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites; (3 Nephi 2:12,14-15)

White good, Brown bad. Now—some may dismiss these verses and say they are talking really about their spiritual countenance, but it does specifically say in multiple

verses "skin".

What percentage of Mormons think their skin actually changed? That's speculation, but I bet you are thinking lots of Mormons think the Lamanite skin changed.

Probably because they are taking their notes from President Spencer W. Kimball's statements about Native American children adopted into LDS families:

"I saw a striking contrast in the progress of the Indian people today as against that of only fifteen years ago. Truly the scales of darkness are falling from their eyes, and they are fast becoming a white and delightsome people....
The day of the Lamanites is nigh. For years they have been growing delightsome, and they are now becoming white and delightsome, as they were promised. In this picture of the twenty Lamanite missionaries, fifteen of the twenty were as light as Anglos;...The children in the home placement program in Utah are often lighter than their brothers and sisters in the hogans on the reservation.
At one meeting a father and mother and their sixteen-year-old daughter were present, the little member girl...was several shades lighter than her parents...
There was the doctor in a Utah city who for two years had had an Indian boy in his home who stated that he was some shades lighter than the younger brother just coming into the program from the reservation. These young members of the Church are changing to whiteness and to delightsomeness. One white elder jokingly said that he and his companion were donating blood regularly to the hospital in the hope that the process might be accelerated.
The day of the Lamanites has come....today the dark clouds are dissipating."
(Improvement Era, December 1960. pages 922-23)

White good. Brown bad.

Anti-Polygamy

"Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord." (Jacob 2:24) Whether you think polygamy is immoral or moral, concubines and polygamy, according to Jacob 2:24 is an abomination.

Women

Aside from references to Biblical figures like Mary, the Book of Mormon refers to a total of three women by name: Abish, the servant of Lamoni's unnamed wife, Isabel the harlot and Sariah, Nephi's mom who is most famous for complaining in the wilderness. Compare this to the endless throng of named men (no matter their importance to the story). The Book of Mormon nearly completely dismisses women's

importance as individuals and solely refers to the female gender in sweeping statements of "faith of women" or being producers of offspring for the men. And I almost forgot about the seductive dancing Lamanite daughters!

Anti-Arrogance, Pride

"Seek not after the riches of this world nor the vain things of this world; for behold, you cannot carry them with you." (Alma 39:14) This idea is also a strong theme throughout the book.

The Gospel of Prosperity

Simply described like this: if you obey the commandments you will be blessed, and most of that time those blessings come in the form of riches. You have probably heard "The Book of Mormon Pride Cycle" where a certain group is poor, repents, obeys, becomes wealthy, then becomes prideful, forgets God and then God strips away everything away from them in the form of a natural calamity or another group taking it in order for that group to become humble again. Rich = obedient and good, (until their pride sets in of course) and Poor = Result of being humbled by God after being sinful.

This also brings up an interesting question on how God punishes a group. Is God in cahoots with the evil group so that God can punish the good people when necessary?

Alma and Amulek

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3:17) In this verse from the Bible it sounds as if Jesus is in the business of saving folks. But Alma and Amulek have a different experience that is recorded in Alma 14. In this chapter, all the woman and children that they taught and believed are being burned alive by the non-believers.

9 And it came to pass that they took Alma and Amulek, and carried them forth to the place of martyrdom, that they might witness the destruction of those who were consumed by fire.

10 And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames.

11 But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this

thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day.

A brutal scene, indeed. So is God in the business of condemning? And if he is, exactly how many people does he need to do that? 1? 2? 100? "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (Doctrine & Covenants 18:10) If we take this scripture on what it says, you would think that God would have just needed one soul to condemn these people, if he/she is actually in the business of condemning.

Jesus gets all Old Testament

Remember right before Jesus comes to the Americas – the pinnacle of the Book of Mormon, there are a lot of earthquakes, floods, and destruction. Could it be just natural causes? Nope—Jesus personally takes direct credit for this one in 3 Nephi 9.

4 And behold, that great city Moroni have I caused to be sunk in the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof to be drowned.

5 And behold, that great city Moronihah have I covered with earth, and the inhabitants thereof, to hide their iniquities and their abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them.

6 And behold, the city of Gilgal have I caused to be sunk, and the inhabitants thereof to be buried up in the depths of the earth;

7 Yea, and the city of Onihah and the inhabitants thereof, and the city of Mocum and the inhabitants thereof, and the city of Jerusalem and the inhabitants thereof; and waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come up any more unto me against them.

8 And behold, the city of Gadiandi, and the city of Gadiomnah, and the city of Jacob, and the city of Gimgimno, all these have I caused to be sunk, and made hills and valleys in the places thereof; and the inhabitants thereof have I buried up in the depths of the earth, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up any more unto me against them.

9 And behold, that great city Jacobugath, which was inhabited by the people of king Jacob, have I caused to be burned with fire because of their sins and their wickedness, which was above all the wickedness of the whole earth,

because of their secret murders and combinations; for it was they that did destroy the peace of my people and the government of the land; therefore I did cause them to be burned, to destroy them from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up unto me any more against them.

10 And behold, the city of Laman, and the city of Josh, and the city of Gad, and the city of Kishkumen, have I caused to be burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof, because of their wickedness in casting out the prophets, and stoning those whom I did send to declare unto them concerning their wickedness and their abominations.

11 And because they did cast them all out, that there were none righteous among them, I did send down fire and destroy them, that their wickedness and abominations might be hid from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints whom I sent among them might not cry unto me from the ground against them.

12 And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations.

I think this is rare in scripture. Most scriptures of destruction could be blamed on the people writing their own story down, many times justifying their own actions of killing—the play the “God told me to do it” card. But here we have Jesus taking direct credit for killing thousands, millions(?) of people, for wickedness (including children). What were these people doing? Anything worse than the list of murders mentioned above? Most of the examples I mentioned could be passed off to the racism or sexism or maybe human error of the author, but with a literal reading, this story belongs to Jesus alone.

Does one have to believe all of it, though? Can one still find value in it? Or is it all or nothing?

I recently read the book “Slumdog Millionaire”. It is a lot different from the movie although I liked both. I liked the book, but it came across as very homophobic. Every child abuser that was portrayed in the book was homosexual. But because it is just a book – I can say the author has some serious homophobic issues and continue to read the book. OR if I am deeply offended by it, I don’t have to read the book at all. I can call out the author for it without any backlash to my spiritual status. I can take the good parts—the serve others, be kind, be thoughtful and throw out the bad parts, just like I can with any other book.

Can we do the same with scripture? Can we allow it to challenge us, without challenging the book back? I say no, you can't have one without the other. Scripture and religion, in general, is at it's best when it challenges and pushes us to be better moral human beings. Literal-ism just doesn't allow for such behavior. Literal-ism is death.

So 0-10 (10 being super moral) where does the Book of Mormon land on your moral compass?

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