

communication between distant parts of the Americas, the pre-columbian history of the Americas shows the opposite: widely disparate racial types (almost entirely east Asian - definitely not Semitic, as proven by recent DNA studies), and many unrelated native languages, none of which are even remotely related to Hebrew or Egyptian.

The people of the *Book of Mormon* were supposedly devout Jews observing the Law of Moses, but in the *Book of Mormon* there is almost no trace of their observance of Mosaic law or even an accurate knowledge of it.

Although Joseph Smith said that God had pronounced the completed translation of the plates as published in 1830 "correct," many changes have been made in later editions. Besides thousands of corrections of poor grammar and awkward wording in the 1830 edition, other changes have been made to reflect subsequent changes in some of the fundamental doctrine of the church. For example, an early change in wording modified the 1830 edition's acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity, thus allowing Smith to introduce his later doctrine of multiple gods. A more recent change (1981) replaced "white" with "pure," apparently to reflect the change in the church's stance on the "curse" of the black race.

Joseph Smith said that the *Book of Mormon* contained the "fulness of the gospel." However, its teaching on many doctrinal subjects has been ignored or contradicted by the present LDS church, and many doctrines now said by the church to be essential are not even mentioned there. Examples are the church's position on the

nature of God, the Virgin Birth, the Trinity, polygamy, Hell, priesthood, secret organizations, the nature of Heaven and salvation, temples, proxy ordinances for the dead, and many other matters.

Many of the basic historical notions found in the Book of Mormon had appeared in print already in 1825, just two years before Smith began producing the *Book of Mormon*, in a book called *View of the Hebrews*, by Ethan Smith (no relation) and published just a few miles from where Joseph Smith lived. A careful study of this obscure book led one LDS church official (the historian B. H. Roberts, 1857-1933) to confess that the evidence tended to show that the *Book of Mormon* was not an ancient record, but concocted by Joseph Smith himself, based on ideas he had read in the earlier book.

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Pamphlet 529

To Those Who Are Investigating "Mormonism" Part Two

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If you are investigating Mormonism (the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" or "LDS Church"), you are probably studying it in private meetings in your home with missionaries from that church.

WHAT THE MISSIONARIES WILL NOT TELL YOU

Until recently, the missionaries were required to present Mormonism in six "discussions", which were a series of memorized sales talks. They are now encouraged simply to "follow the spirit" in their presentations. The basic message and approach, however, is still essentially the same. A thorough, thoughtful and balanced discussion of each of the six "official" lessons as the missionaries formerly presented them to investigators is at <http://www.lds4u.com>, together with the techniques and strategies which the missionaries are instructed to use. (The actual texts of the discussions were also on this site at one time, but the Mormon church threatened the webmaster with a lawsuit, and he removed them; click on "next" at each window to read a summary and commentary.)

Here is a summary of important facts about the Mormon church, its doctrine, and its history that the missionaries will probably not tell you. We are not suggesting that they are intentionally deceiving you --most of the young Mormons serving missions for the church are not well educated in the history of the church or in modern critical studies of the church. They probably do not know the all the facts themselves. They have been trained, however, to give investigators "milk before meat," that is, to postpone revealing anything at all that might make an investigator hesitant, *even if it is true*. But you should be aware of these facts before you commit yourself.

Each of the following facts has been substantiated by thorough historical scholarship. And this list is by no means exhaustive!

The "First Vision" story in the form presented to you was unknown until 1838, *eighteen years* after its alleged occurrence and almost ten years after Smith had begun his missionary efforts. The oldest (but quite different) version of the vision is in Smith's own handwriting, dating from about 1832 (still at least *eleven years* afterwards), and says that only *one* personage, Jesus Christ, appeared to him. It also mentions nothing about a revival. It also contradicts the later account as to whether Smith had already decided that no church was true. Still a third version of this event is recorded as a recollection in Smith's diary, fifteen years after the alleged vision, where one unidentified "personage" appeared, then another, with a message implying that neither was the Son.

They were accompanied by many "angels," which are not mentioned in the official version you have been told about. Which version is correct, if any? Why was this event, now said by the church to be so important, unknown for so long?

Careful study of the religious history of the locale where Smith lived in 1820 casts doubt on whether there actually was such an extensive revival that year as Smith and his family later described as associated with the "First Vision." The revivals in 1817 and 1824 better fit what Smith described later.

In 1828, eight years after he supposedly had been told by God himself to join no church, Smith applied for membership in a local Methodist church. Other members of his family had joined the Presbyterians.

Contemporaries of Smith consistently described him as something of a confidence man, whose chief source of income was hiring out to local farmers to help them find buried treasure by the use of folk magic and "seer stones." Smith was actually tried in 1826 on a charge of money-digging. It is interesting that none of his critics seemed to be aware of his claim to have been visited by God in 1820, even though in his 1838 account he claimed that he had suffered "great persecution" for telling people of his vision.

The only persons who claimed to have actually seen the gold plates were eleven close friends of Smith (many of them related to each other). Their testimonies are printed in the front of every copy of the *Book of Mormon*. No disinterested third party was ever allowed to

examine them. They were retrieved by the angel at some unrecorded point. Most of the witnesses later abandoned Smith and left his movement. Smith then called them "liars."

Smith produced most of the "translation" not by reading the plates through the Urim and Thummim (described as a pair of sacred spectacles), but by gazing at the same "seer stone" he had used for treasure hunting. He would place the stone into his hat, and then cover his face with it. For much of the time he was dictating, the gold plates were not even present, but in a hiding place.

The detailed history and civilization described in the *Book of Mormon* does not correspond to anything found by archaeologists anywhere in the Americas. The *Book of Mormon* describes a civilization lasting for a thousand years, covering both North and South America, which was familiar with horses, elephants, cattle, sheep, wheat, barley, steel, wheeled vehicles, shipbuilding, sails, coins, and other elements of Old World culture. But no trace of any of these supposedly very common things has ever been found in the Americas of that period. Nor does the *Book of Mormon* mention many of the features of the civilizations which really did exist at that time in the Americas. The LDS church has spent millions of dollars over many years trying to prove through archaeological research that the *Book of Mormon* is an accurate historical record, but they have failed to produce any convincing pre-columbian archeological evidence supporting the *Book of Mormon* story. In addition, whereas the *Book of Mormon* presents the picture of a relatively homogeneous people, with a single language and