Introduction to the Book of Mormon

**Reading One: Introduction to the Book of Mormon**

Background information on the scripture passage:

The Book of Mormon begins with this general introduction to the sacred text itself.  The Book of Mormon has a complicated structure and history - like the Christian Bible, it has several "books" or chapters, and those books are written by different people.  Furthermore, some of those authors are telling the stories of other people and the prophecies that they received.  So, in order to understand the Book of Mormon, you really do need to read this introduction so that you can follow who is speaking, when they are speaking, and whose story they are telling.

Remember that the word "Gentile" means anyone who is not Jewish.

The "Nephites" and "Lamanites"  who are mentioned in the Introduction, are the people who are the main subjects of the Book of Mormon - they are Jews who left Jerusalem and made their way to the Americas because of prophecies they received from God.  The Book of Mormon is the story of these people, their lives and the civilization they built in the Americas, and how Jesus came to visit and teach them for a period of time.

Every Book of Mormon begins with this introduction as well as the "Testimony of Three Witnesses" and the "Testimony of Eight Witnesses."  These testimonies are signed statements by some of Joseph Smith's early supporters who claimed that they had seen the "plates" that the Book of Mormon was written on.  Be sure to watch the video lecture on the origins of the Book of Mormon to hear about the story of Joseph Smith finding and "translating" these plates.  These men claimed that they had seen the plates.

What is really interesting is that all 3 of the "three witnesses" and 3 of the "eight witnesses" later left the LDS Church and were excommunicated, but they never took back their statements here.

Scripture Passage:

THE BOOK OF MORMON

An Account Written by

THE HAND OF MORMON

UPON PLATES

TAKEN FROM THE PLATES OF NEPHI

Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of

Nephi, and also of the Lamanites--Written to the Lamanites, who

are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and

Gentile--Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of

prophecy and of revelation--Written and sealed up, and hid up

unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed--To come forth by

the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof--Sealed

by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in

due time by way of the Gentile--The interpretation thereof by the

gift of God.

An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a

record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the

Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were

building a tower to get to heaven--Which is to show unto the

remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath

done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of

the Lord, that they are not cast off forever-- And also to the

convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the

ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations--And now, if

there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn

not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the

judgment-seat of Christ.

TRANSLATED BY JOSEPH SMITH, JUN.

THE TESTIMONY OF THREE WITNESSES

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto

whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the

Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which

contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi,

and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people

of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken. And

we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power

of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know

of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we

have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have

been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we

declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down

from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we

beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we

know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord

Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things

are true. And it is marvelous in our eyes. Nevertheless, the

voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it;

wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear

testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful

in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and

be found spotless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall

dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the

Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God.

Amen.

OLIVER COWDERY

DAVID WHITMER

MARTIN HARRIS

THE TESTIMONY OF EIGHT WITNESSES

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto

whom this work shall come: That Joseph Smith, Jun., the

translator of this work, has shown unto us the plates of which

hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many

of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with

our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which

has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship.

And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said

Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of

a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have

spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto

the world that which we have seen. And we lie not, God bearing

witness of it.

CHRISTIAN WHITMER

JACOB WHITMER

PETER WHITMER, JUN.

JOHN WHITMER

HIRAM PAGE

JOSEPH SMITH, SEN.

HYRUM SMITH

SAMUEL H. SMITH

# Lehi Receives a Prophecy

**Reading Two: Opening Verses of the Book of Mormon**

Background information on this scripture passage:

The following passage comes from the very first book of the Book of Mormon, which is 1 Nephi.  In these opening verses Nephi tells us who he is and what he is doing - he says that he is going to write a record of what has happened in his family.  Nephi is the son of Lehi, and they are both Jewish and live in Jerusalem.  Lehi receives a vision from God that includes a warning that the Jews should leave Jerusalem because it will soon be destroyed.  In the Book of Mormon Lehi takes his family and others who believe him away from Jerusalem and they move around the Middle East for several years, before leaving for the Americas.  Nephi receives his own revelation from God to record the events that are happening to his father and his family.

In this passage Lehi starts his narrative by describing why he is writing and swearing that what he is writing is true.  Then later in the passage he describes what happens to his father when he tells his community about the revelation he received from God about leaving Jerusalem.

**1 Nephi 1-3, 17-20**

I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.

Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians.

And I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge.

For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.

Wherefore it came to pass that my father, Lehi, as he went forth prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.

And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.

And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen.

And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day.

And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read.

And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem -- that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.

And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth, and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him.

And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account.

But I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days. Behold, I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life.

Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard.

And it came to pass that the Jews did mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of the Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.

And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away. But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.

# Jesus Visits the Americas

**Reading Three: Jesus' Appearance in the Americas**

Background Information on the Passage:

This passage describes the appearance of Jesus in the Americas among the Nephites and Lamanites, the descendants of Lehi and Nephi who left Jerusalem and eventually made their way to the land that became the Americas.  You should note that contemporary Mormons do not claim to know where the events in the Book of Mormon took place, other than that they took place somewhere in North or Central America.

Mormons believe that after Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and ascended to heaven, as described in the New Testament, that he then descended in the Americas and performed teachings and healings there among the Nephites and Lamanites.

In this passage you will see the moment when Jesus descends from the sky and all the people recognize him.  Earlier in the Book of Mormon, Nephi receives a prophecy from God about Jesus Christ: that the Jewish Messiah will appear in Jerusalem, die, and then come to visit his descendants (the Nephites and Lamanites).  So  in this scene, you can see that the Nephites and Lamanites already know about Jesus, expect him to come, and recognize him when he appears.

**3 Nephi 11:1-17**

And now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together, of the people of Nephi, round about the temple which was in the land Bountiful; and they were marveling and wondering one with another, and were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place.

And they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death.

And it came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.

And it came to pass that again they heard the voice, and they understood it not.

And again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came.

And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:

Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name -- hear ye him.

And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.

And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven.

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto them saying:

Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.

And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.

# Book of Mormon Video Lectures

Please watch the following video lectures on the Mormon scriptures:

# Mormon Scriptures Power Point Outline

Mormon Scriptures

Introduction to Mormonism

* Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
  + Christian Denomination or New Religion?
* Sacred texts other than the Bible
* Similarities:
  + Jesus Christ, sin, salvation, eternal life
* Differences:
  + Jesus and God are physical entities
  + Once practiced polygamy
  + No alcohol, other intoxicants
  + Continuing revelation to prophets
* Joseph Smith (1805-1844)
  + Translated the Book of Mormon
    - Published 1830
  + Began LDS Church in 1830
  + Murdered in 1844
* Church moved westward
  + Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, Utah
  + Tensions with the US
* 16 million members worldwide

Introduction to Mormon Scriptures

* The Bible
  + One revelation from God among many
  + “other sheep”
* The Book of Mormon
  + “Another Testament of Jesus Christ”
* The Doctrines and Covenants
  + Collection of revelations to Joseph
  + Doctrine, commandments, instructions for church organization, etc.
* The Pearl of Great Price
  + By Joseph Smith
  + Writings, revisions of the Bible, autobiographical essays, translation of Tan ancient Egyptian papyri

The Origin of the Book of Mormon

* September 21, 1823
  + Angel Moroni appears to Joseph Smith
    - Metal plates buried on a hillside
  + Smith finds the plates and “seer stones”
    - Moroni tells him the time is not right
* 1827 takes plates home, begins translation
  + Seer stones, dictation, scribes
  + First 116 pages which are then lost/stolen
* New scribe, finishes the Book of Mormon
  + Published in 1830
* Moroni takes the plates back
* Affidavits by the 3 and 8

Contents of the Book of Mormon

* Begins in 600 BCE in Jerusalem
  + God gives a revelation to Lehi
  + Flee Jerusalem before Babylonian Conquest
    - Eventually build boats and sail to the Americas
* Continuing revelations to Lehi and son Nephi
  + Prophecies about Jesus Christ
  + Some believe and some don’t
* Jesus comes to the Americas after his resurrection and ascension
* Several-hundred year history of these families, clans, societies
  + Eventually the whole civilization is destroyed