

Archaeology and Science Against Book of Mormon

The Mormon Church, and its offshoots, claim that their scripture The Book of Mormon is a record of ancient America. This book appeared in 1830 as the result of an alleged miracle from God. There should be archaeological evidence. There is none. But Mormons choose to disagree with all the experts. Some Mormons say that since the book records great cataclysms at the time of the death of Jesus and after that there should be no evidence left. Without the evidence, there is nothing to convince that the book simply is nothing more than a nineteenth century hoax.

EVIDENCES FOR THE BOM EXAMINED

The Jeff Lindsay pages on Mormon apologetics are the best places to go to see the Mormon answers to anti-Mormon complaints about Mormonism and to see the evidence for the Book of Mormon.

The Mormon Church has to get proof for the Book of Mormon that supports it better than any other sacred book is supported by evidence. It has to be able to do better than them in the evidence stakes if it is the word of God.

It is certainly true that the Book of Mormon has worse evidence in its favour than the Bible. “And now as I have said concerning faith – faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (Alma 32:21). If faith is to have any hope of being accepting of the truth it has to have evidence for it and good evidence. The evidence for the Book of Mormon being true is poor now but it was worse in the 1800’s when the book appeared. That would mean that if good evidence turns up it is too late for the fact that it was not there from the start would mean that this verse was discredited and the Book of Mormon is anti-evidence for it expects us to take as true what has no evidence for it.

Among the commonest arguments he uses is that the critics moan about there being no evidence for the Book of Mormon characters and cities and places. He says there is some evidence that some of the places mentioned in the book have been found. He brushes off the objection that there is no evidence for the characters on the basis that there is no evidence for the existence of Cain, Noah, Moses and countless other Bible characters either. Many of the places in the Bible have never been found. The good thing about his reasoning is that if the absence of evidence is a basis for rejecting the Book of Mormon it is a ground for rejecting the Bible as well. It is nonetheless certain that if you cannot prove the existence of Jesus or Moses then you cannot prove that they are prophets of God. They could exist and still not be prophets so knowing for sure that they exist would still leave plenty of room for religious faith in them. Depending on possibly legendary prophets is like using water as an antibiotic instead of the tablets.

It is far more important for the Mormons to prove that the journey of the Lehites in First Nephi in 600 BC happened than anything else because it is reported to have happened in a region which gets more detail than anywhere else in the Book of Mormon. We know for a change where the author is talking about. It is the Holy Land and Arabia and the Red Sea. It is correct also to assume that if say where the river Laman and the Valley of Lemuel are assumed by Mormons to be cannot be the right place then the Book of Mormon is untrue. The same goes for the other places.

Mormons think the Lehites departed for America from Arabia.

Lindsay says that Lehi and his companions went south south-east of Jerusalem and near the borders they found Nahom and they buried Ishmael there and then they went east to a paradise place called Bountiful and there they built the ship that was to take them to America. The Mormon scholars think these places have now been located. They make a lot of the fact that anti-Mormons sneered at such a nice place like Bountiful existing where the Book of Mormon said and have been proved wrong. But think of it this way. Smith knew the area through which he said the Lehites travelled was desert. But he needed to have them build a ship so he had to invent the paradise for he had to explain how the Lehites survived and how they got the wood for the ship and how they got strong enough to build it. He knew that paradises come and go a lot in the desert. The Book of Mormon description is vague enough to show that Bountiful could have been in many other regions. It fails to tell us exactly how far the site was away from Jerusalem which shows that Smith was being careful.

The fact that a place just for burials has been found in the area where the Lehites supposedly were before they went to America called Nhm or Nehem can be put down to coincidence for there were many such places. Yet the Mormons say this place is Nahom. The Book of Mormon only says that Ishmael was buried at Nahom and not that Nahom was just a place for burial so the Mormons are stretching things. Smith knew from his Bible that Nahom or Nahum meant mourning and that was why he chose the name for the burial place of Ishmael which he made up for he said there was great mourning there over Ishmael. It stands to reason that the gentile neighbours were not going to call the place Nahom over Ishmael. The Jews

at that time believed in ethnic cleansing and did not like Gentiles. Thus the Gentiles would not have liked them either!

The Book of Mormon says that Nahom is to the south southeast of Jerusalem and a place called Nahem has been found there which Lindsay finds very impressive. But the name is just pure luck. The directions are not good enough and why could the Book of Mormon not mention some town or city and how far it was from it if it wanted to give its location? Directions like that could lead one anywhere. Critics have found that the name of the place goes back to 900 AD contradicting the Book of Mormon which would need it to go back to 600 BC. An artefact from around 600 BC has turned up referring to a tribe called Nihm. But the tribe does not prove that the place name existed then or that it existed where the Book of Mormon said.

Jeff Lindsay's boast that Smith could not have fabricated the Book of Mormon when a site matching Bountiful has been found to the right of Nahom as the Book of Mormon said is childish because the book does not say how far away. There are paradises all over the place. The place is Wadi Sayq but even the Mormon apologists use a lot of maybes when they say this is the place. One reason they say it is Bountiful is because there is plenty of timber there and the Lehiters could have learned about shipbuilding there. Lindsay says that it is the place for it was reasonably easy to get to from Nehem ignoring the fact that the Book of Mormon says that the journey between the two places was very long and arduous and there was much affliction and the women had children there meaning that they must have got pregnant on the journey for they would not have travelled on a hazardous route if they had been pregnant in Nehem (1 Nephi 17:1). And one wonders what the Lehiters were doing staying in tents at Bountiful if Lindsay is right about it being a shipbuilding place (1 Nephi 17:6). God says he will show them how to build the ship ruling out Lindsay's claim that they could have learned from the people there and Nephi even wonders where the tools are going to come from and God directs him to find ore. All this refutes what the Mormons are saying. They are using the Book of Mormon to fake the evidence for their religion just like Protestants use the Bible to get one another to hate Catholics. It is simply untrue that since the timber at the site the Mormons say is Bountiful is plentiful that it must be the place mentioned in the Book of Mormon for there was no way the Lehiters needed much wood for it would not have been a large ship.

Lindsay then says the site supposed to be Bountiful has a mountain nearby and that there would have been plenty of drinking water available when the Lehiters were able to stay there and there were cliffs nearby and ore and flint just like in the Book of Mormon. But when Smith located the spot near the sea for the sake of the ship he naturally said there were cliffs as well for there usually are near the sea. And as for Lindsay and his drinking water, the Book of Mormon does not say there was any but he just assumes it which is untoward because the Book of Mormon has them travelling through the desert and forgets to say what they did for water. The mountain could have been anywhere. The Book of Mormon does not say it was near the site.

Lindsay has the nerve to admit that Nehem was in some European geography books but argues that Smith was too much a farm boy to look up the books and come up with Nahom. So Smith looking up a book would be a greater miracle than supernaturally learning of the place? I don't think so! Lindsay says the critics say Smith saw it in a book while they hold he was ignorant enough in geography to think that Jerusalem was a land not just a city.

Lindsay alleges that Smith did not know that there were walls around Jerusalem on the basis that Emma Smith said so. But Smith knew that there had to be walls around cities long ago. Emma misunderstood or lied and it is hard to believe that of all the things Smith would have said that she would remember that one. And when he said about the caves he could have meant caves any distance away so he did not have to know how near the caves were to put references to the caves in the Book of Mormon. He would have assumed that there were caves there anyway since he knew from the gospels that Palestine was a hilly and stony country.

Lindsay says a plausible site for the Valley of Lemuel and the River Laman has been found in Arabia. He admits the river is not much more than a stream that flows certain times of year but argues that the Book of Mormon like the Hebrew fashion calls streams rivers. But God would be more accurate than that when he translated the Book of Mormon through Smith. The Book says it took them three days to get there and Lindsay says the 70 mile distance could have been covered by camel in that time though it would not be easy. The implausible thing is that they would not have been in that big of a hurry! The Book of Mormon does not say they were on the run from pursuers? When the river was named Laman it must have been a permanent river for it was meant to be a permanent tribute to Laman. Lehi said he wanted Laman to be like the river and flow continually into the fountain of righteousness so it was a permanent river for a temporary one would be a bad picture of what he wanted Laman to do. It was a big big gushing wide and permanent river. Only a river like that would inspire Lehi's thought!

Lindsay proposes that there was a connection between ancient America and Egypt for Egypt got imports of tobacco and coca from America. But this has nothing to do with proving that the Book of Mormon is true. The Book of Mormon is not about Egyptians but only claims to have been written in Egyptian.

Lindsay boasts about the Bat Creek inscription found in Tennessee proves that Hebrews were in America like the Book of

Mormon says for the inscription to be Hebrew. But then he quotes the authority for this statement as saying the inscription fits Paleo-Hebrew the best. So it only fits Hebrew so it might not be Hebrew. The inscription was so short that it was once thought to be Cherokee (J. Huston McCulloch, "The Bat Creek Inscription: or Hebrew?"). And items found with the inscription have been found dating from between 32 AD and 769 AD. Mormon said that the Hebrew was altered like the Egyptian. He said that the Hebrew was hard to write with and the altered Egyptian was smaller and that was why it was used instead. If they altered the Egyptian that much then what did they do with the Hebrew? When they changed the Egyptian to the extent that picture writing takes up less space than Hebrew then the Hebrew would have been changed beyond recognition so finding real Hebrew in America would undermine the Book of Mormon.

He says the reason for the difference between the Mesoamerican and Egyptian hieroglyphs is that the former were inspired by the Egyptian ones but formed hieroglyphs of their own. So the concept came from Egypt but not the content. Lindsay admits that there is no causal connection between the two systems at all for the meaning and grammar and characters have nothing in common but argues that this does not matter as long as some of the same ideas lay behind the creation of both. If the meaning and grammar and symbols are so different then the only thing they have in common is using pictures to represent things and the way they liked to inscribe their texts on walls. This shows how mistaken Lindsay's logic is. Some parallels are not enough. We need evidence that they shared at least some characters and meanings and grammatical structure. Lindsay says that nobody can argue from the non-existence of Nephite inscriptions that the Nephites did not exist for there are no inscriptions from the time of Moses or David.

This shows us that Lindsay is unable to give any good evidence and concentrates mainly on a pile of maybes, for example, maybe there are no Nephite inscriptions for the Europeans destroyed them and maybe there is a reason why there is no genetic evidence that Native American Indians have descended from the Jews, to refute the critics of Mormonism. When you depend on too many maybes there is something amiss. That is what evidence is for getting rid of the maybes so that the whole thing becomes believable. The Book of Mormon cannot be the word of God when that is all that Mormonism can do. Using Lindsay's logic you can defend belief in anything.

Lindsay accepts the view that the entire Book of Mormon story in American took place in Central America. He gives no quotations from the Book to prove this and why did the Mormon Church not believe that until nowadays? The Mormons have looked for a place that might be the most plausible candidate for being the Book of Mormon land and have read all this back into the book. It's just an interpretation, a rationalisation. It's no good. Anybody can write a book along the lines of the Book of Mormon say about Ireland and then make it look like it fits what archaeologists have found.

Lindsay claims that the prophecy by Nephi made centuries before Christ that there would be cities that sank and were burned and there would be great disasters with exploding mountains and a cloud of darkness left by the disaster before the heavens open and the Lamb of God appears to the people. The Mormon Church thinks that evidence of these volcanic disasters at the time of Christ has been found in Meso-America. Lindsay says that since Smith did not have this evidence and it has turned up today it shows that Smith was sincere and Nephi was a true prophet. But this is based on the assumption that the Book of Mormon land is in that part of America. You need very serious and powerful evidence before you can say that a prophecy was fulfilled. God in Deuteronomy 18 says the evidence has to be perfect which is logical enough when God said before that that he comes first. There is no evidence at all that anybody in the Book of Mormon had prophetic power which is why according to the standard implied in Deuteronomy 18 it has to be discarded. The fact is that the Book of Mormon never hints that the disaster was volcanic in nature. It speaks of a storm, a tempest, lightning and says that the city of Zarahemla took fire and does not say that lava did it and says the earth swallowed Moroniah meaning that it fell into a hole and was replaced by a high pile that became a mountain and it says the disaster affected the land northward the worst (3 Nephi 8:12). Lindsay says it means the north part of Central America. But when the book is not clear on this it probably means the whole of North America. One thing is for sure, the claim of the Book of Mormon that the entire land was changed and reshaped forever because of the disaster is false even if you assume it is just Central America it is about. The book even goes as far as to say that any big rocks about were smashed to pieces. It means a supernatural disaster not a natural volcanic upheaval. Lindsay is being selective like all Mormon apologists. Lindsay admits that the disaster could have happened according to many scholars up to fifty years after 70 AD. If he was not so prejudiced he would know to wait until he was sure first. Lindsay doesn't realise that he is accusing God of being an awful teacher. A book of history that is so unclear is poor history.

The Book of Mormon reveals that the ancestors of the Native American Indians are the Lamanites - rebel Jews. The American Indians have never been found to be carrying Jewish DNA. Lindsay says that the Book of Mormon does not rule out loads of mixing with other races that could have led to this DNA becoming unavailable. He says that in Rebecca L Cann's DNA study that no Native Americans were involved so there is still no evidence one way or the other.

The next claim is that Smith could not have known about farming olives the way it is described in Jacob 5. Any encyclopaedia could have told him that. We must remember as well that the account is a parable and Smith did not care if he made a mistake - say if an olive branch cannot be grafted on to another tree - for the olive tree was not a tree but a symbol of Israel. It was not about biology. Lindsay is fooling himself and us again. If Smith turned out to be right that was

just a coincidence. Lindsay says the Nephite did not grow olives but one wonders how this parable could be any good if they didn't because they needed to know what an olive tree was and why it was a good symbol for Israel. They needed to know that it was a symbol of preciousness because olive oil is so precious and useful. By implication then Jacob 5 implies that they did have olive trees and that is against the archaeological evidence.

The Book of Mormon wars were fought after harvest in winter and the winter was said to be warm in one place. Lindsay uses this evidence to show that the book is plausible because harvest time needs to be kept free for the sake of the food and people don't fight the best when too well fed and that the Book of Mormon land was in central America which is warm in winter. Lindsay offers Alma 51 as proof of the latter assertion though there is not a hint in it that it was not just the mild part of winter it had in mind. And most wars are fought at harvest time for the enemy likes to attack the food source. Lindsay seems to think that the Nephites and Lamanites lived on rich food and were not very mobile when it was plentiful! Not right. Both sides could fight when both sides are well-fed for as long as both are in the same boat they can have a good chance of fighting their best.

Lindsay argues that a sign of authenticity is that the Book of Mormon knew of the unknown until recently tradition of the Jews centuries before Christ of putting their records in their treasury. But he does not tell us that most people do put their records where they will be safe and that is usually where the money is. And he does not remind us that the records in question were the brass plates of Laban. Metal items naturally go where other metal items are. The plates were treasure for Heaven's sake!

The fact that temples had two pillars in Mesoamerica and a place the people could not enter is assumed to have been inspired by knowledge of Solomon's temple. You need more than that to establish a connection for all temples consist of priests changing rooms, rooms for placing the deity in, altars and courts. The Jews believed that there could only be one true Temple for the Temple was the later version of the Tabernacle that the people of Israel made in the desert and there was only one Tabernacle and one holy place in it for communing with the deity so probability is against the Mormon claim. When the main trait of a Jewish temple isn't shared with it by these temples then it is very likely that the other things they have in common are just coincidence. After all, temples are supposed to be houses of worship ad sacrifice and there is a room for the God so they must have lots of things in common anyway.

Lindsay says that since Helaman 7:10 speaks of a tower in the middle of a garden that this shows knowledge of the recent discovered fact that the ancients in America used urban gardens and towers. But this is dishonest for the tower in the book could have been wood and the ones found by archaeologists are stone. And the Book of Mormon never says the garden was in a city.

Conclusion

There is no convincing evidence from archaeology or science that the Book of Mormon is true.