



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL

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Hidden Records

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Chapter 4

HIDDEN RECORDS

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. (Title Page of the Book of Mormon)

When the Book of Mormon was first published in 1830, it seemed rather an anomaly, despite its biblical tone. No one had ever heard of ancient books being written on metallic plates and hidden in stone boxes. But all that changed in the mid-twentieth century.

BURIED AND SEALED RECORDS

In 1945, several leather-bound volumes of Christian writings from the fifth century A.D. were found at Chenoboskion, Egypt, also known as Nag Hammadi. Their contents included books purportedly composed by some of the early apostles. Like the Book of Mormon, these books had been hidden away in the ground, buried in a large pottery jar.

Two years later, a larger set of documents was found

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concealed in caves near the Dead Sea. Some of them had been placed inside fired clay pots. In all, fragments of approximately 800 separate scrolls were found. These Dead Sea Scrolls included multiple copies of all of the books of the Old Testament except Esther, along with many other ancient religious texts. The scrolls had been written 2000 years ago.

METAL RECORDS

One of the most important of the Dead Sea Scrolls is a document inscribed on a copper plate that had been rolled up and hidden away. But this is just one of many examples of ancient texts that, like the Book of Mormon, had been written on sheets of metal.

Since the 1930s, nearly a hundred ancient and medieval documents written on metal plates or leaves have been found in various parts of the world. The ones that interest us most are the metallic records from the ancient Near East, the original homeland of the Book of Mormon peoples.

Three copper tablets containing a temple inscription from ancient Adab and dating to the third millennium B.C., were found in Iraq. A copper plate with Sumerian writing from the same time period has also been found. A small gold plate with an Akkadian inscription from the twenty-fifth century B.C. was found at Djokha Umma, Iraq, and is housed in the Louvre in Paris, along with several other inscribed metal plates. A bronze tablet with a fourteenth-century B.C. Ugaritic inscription was found in Lower Galilee. Silver and lead plates with Hittite inscriptions were found in 1950 in the Beritz valley of Lebanon. Six bronze tablets written in pseudo-hieroglyphic and dating to 2000-1800 B.C. were found at the ancient Phoenician site of Byblos, in Lebanon.

Egyptian examples are also not lacking. the treaty between Ramses II, king of Egypt, and the Hittite king Hatusilis, drafted in 1287 B.C., was written on silver plates. A decree of king Ramses III (1198-1167 B.C.) was found written on silver and gold tablets.

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Thin gold plates that appear to have remnants of hieroglyphic writing were found in Egypt in the tomb of king Menkhure, builder of the third pyramid at Giza (ca. 2800 B.C.). A gold leaf with hieroglyphic writing from 2000-1788 B.C. was found at Lisht. A set of thirteen metal plates from after the fourth century B.C. contain a chronicle written in Egyptian demotic script, a type of reformed Egyptian.

Some metallic records have also been discovered in Israel. A small silver scroll written in Greek and Coptic and dating to about A.D. 400 was discovered in Bethany in 1968. In 1980, archaeologists opened a seventh-century B.C. tomb adjacent to the Scottish Presbyterian church of St. Andrew in Jerusalem and discovered two small rolled-up strips of silver with a Hebrew inscription from the Bible (Numbers 6:24-26).

USE OF STONE BOXES

The ancient Assyrians wrote on metallic plates, often used as dedicatory plaques for temples and palaces. The Assyrian king Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) repeats throughout his annals that he kept records on plates of gold, silver, bronze, and lead. During excavations of his palace at Khorsabad, six small inscribed plates (gold, silver, bronze, tin, and lead, with one alabaster) were found in a stone box buried beneath the palace foundation. Two of the plates and the box were lost during the sinking of a ship on the Tigris River in Iraq on May 23, 1855. The four surviving plates, of gold, silver, bronze, and tin, were taken to France and are housed in the Louvre in Paris.

The storing of metallic records in stone boxes is also known from ancient Persia, where a number of examples have been found. In 1923 at Hamadan, Persia (now Iran), two small tablets, one silver and the other gold, were discovered. They bore inscriptions from king Darius I (521-485 B.C.) telling about the erection of palaces in the city. In 1938, two pairs of plates (one silver and one gold in each pair) were found in stone boxes placed

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in the foundation corners of Darius's palace at Persepolis.¹

CONCLUSION

Although perceived as an anomaly and a fabrication by scholars of his day, recent discoveries have vindicated Joseph Smith's account of a record written on gold plates and buried in the earth in a stone box. Indeed, the practice now appears to have been common among the cultures from which the Book of Mormon peoples derived.

¹ For an in-depth discussion of this subject, see H. Curtis Wright, "Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes," in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, editors, *By Study and Also by Faith* (Salt Lake: FARMS and Deseret, 1990), 273-334.