

## WHY I WROTE

# PEOPLES, PLACES AND PROPHECIES

BY VERNEIL W. SIMMONS

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I had the good fortune to be born into a family who had been identified with the Restored Church of Jesus Christ since the day of Joseph Smith, Jr. I was brought up on

family stories of how my great, great grandmother carried food to Brother Joseph and the brethren confined with him in the Liberty Jail, and how her husband, Charles Allen,

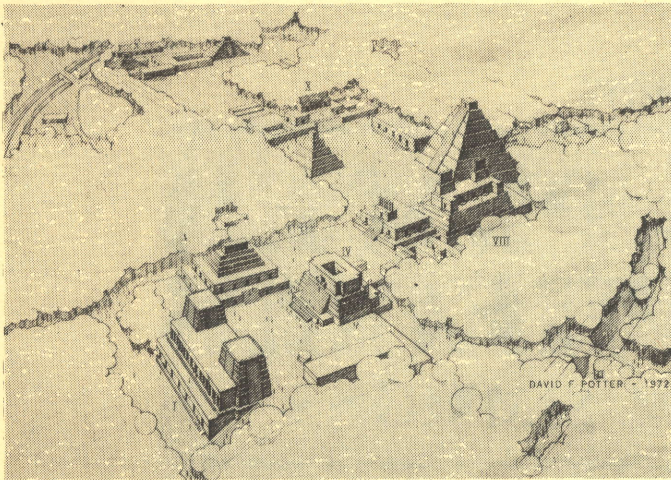


Fig. 2—Restoration drawing of Becan (after Webster 1974).

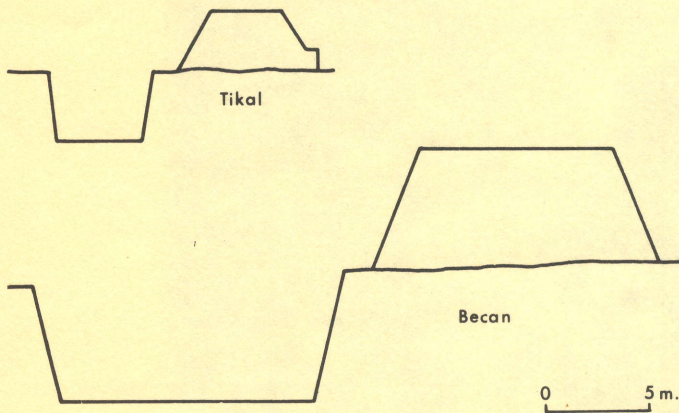


Fig. 3—Cross sections of fortifications at Becan and Tikal (after Webster 1974).

but this is precisely where the most severe erosion has taken place (1976:89)."

Seven narrow causeways provided entrance into the site. The following verses give us a graphic description of what happened on causeways such as these in Book of Mormon times:

Now behold, the Lamanites could not get into their forts of security, by any other way save by the

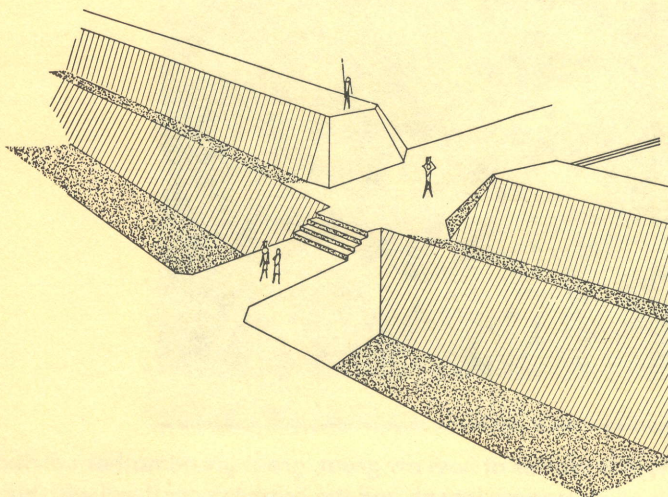


Fig. 4—Reconstruction of part of the Becan fortifications showing a causeway (after Webster 1976).

entrance, because of the highness of the bank which had been thrown up, and the depth of the ditch which had been dug round about, save it were by the entrance. And thus were the Nephites prepared to destroy all such as should attempt to climb up to enter the fort by any other way, by casting over stones and arrows at them. Thus they were prepared; yea, a body of their most strong men, with their swords and their slings, to smite down all who should attempt to come into their place of security, by the place of entrance; and thus were prepared to defend themselves against the Lamanites. And it came to pass that the captains of the Lamanites brought up their armies before the place of entrance, and began to contend with the Nephites, to get into their place of security; But behold, they were driven back from time to time, insomuch that they were slain, with an immense slaughter. Alma 21:170-174

The Becan fortifications provide a dramatic archaeological validation of the military preparations of General Moroni. The way in which a particular culture wages war is as much a part of that culture as any other trait and helps to identify that culture in time and space. The Becan defenses are unmistakably a part of the pattern initiated General Moroni. In addition, Becan is in or near the area where the Nephites fortified their cities. Chronologically, the Becan fortifications could have been constructed in the Pakluum phase which is dated about 150 B.C. to A.D. 250. Therefore, not only does Becan provide evidence of a similar pattern but could very well be one of the very cities fortified during the time of General Moroni.▲

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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The Zarahemla Research Foundation is a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation chartered under the laws of the state of Missouri. This is a non-church sponsored association. A major aim of the Foundation is to provide information and materials to assist in Book of Mormon ministries. ZRF is open to all who desire to improve their understanding and use of the Book of Mormon.

A major goal of this newsletter is to provide a bridge of understanding between the scientific-oriented field of archaeology and Book of Mormon studies. Keeping abreast of archaeological information is a full-time job, hence few people are in a position to devote the time needed to this subject. Yet, there is a wealth of information and enlightenment there that remains to be tapped. This newsletter hopes to draw on the finds of those who are in a position to give time to these areas of research and make this information available to interested church members.

... the Lamanites could not get into their forts of security, by any other way save by the entrance, because of the highness of the bank which had been thrown up, and the depth of the ditch which had been dug round about ... Alma 21:170

... upon the top of these ridges of earth he caused that there should be timbers; yea, works of timbers built up to the height of a man ... upon those works of timbers, there should be a frame of pickets built upon the timbers ... and they were strong and high; and he caused towers to be erected that overlooked those works of pickets ... Alma 22:2,3

So we see that the Nephite fortifications consisted of a deep ditch and a high bank with timbers and towers. We know that these fortifications which Moroni made in every city in their borders were unique. It was a tactic never used before by the Nephites (Alma 21:157) and took the Lamanites completely by surprise. Certainly Moroni was inspired to prepare his people in this manner.

Five years later the Lamanites were able to take possession of a line of fortified Nephite cities from the city of Moroni, to the city of Nephihah, to the city of Lehi and on to several other cities.

And thus had the Lamanites obtained, by the cunning of Amalickiah, so many cities, by their numberless hosts, all of which were strongly fortified, after the manner of the fortifications of Moroni. Alma 23:33

In accordance with the best information presently available on Book of Mormon geography, this line of fortified Nephite cities extended across the Yucatan



Fig. 1—Map of southern Mesoamerica showing location of Becan and Tikal.

Peninsula from the Laguna de Terminos on the Gulf Coast of Campeche to the southern part of Belize (fig. 1). Even though we know the land southward experienced great destruction and upheaval around A.D. 34, we can reasonably expect some evidence today of General Moroni's inspired fortifications because the land southward was not as disturbed as the land northward (3 Nephi 4:10).

Although most of the life of ancient peoples is not recoverable through archaeology without written records, the sheer size of the ditches and the banks should insure enough preservation to be recognizable today. The ancient Maya site of Becan (bay-KAHN) does have such evidence (Webster, 1974, 1976).

Becan is located in the center of the Yucatan peninsula about 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of the well-known Maya site of Tikal (fig. 1). (Tikal also has evidence of fortifications. A 9.5 kilometer or 5.7 mile ditch protects its northern side.) Becan is easily accessible, being only 500 meters from the road which runs east-west across the Yucatan Peninsula. Before this road was constructed, Becan was as inaccessible as most of the sites in the rainforests of the southern Maya lowlands.

Becan was first brought to the attention of the modern world by the Third Campeche Expedition of the Carnegie Institution of Washington in 1934 (Ruppert and Denison 1943). Webster's report on the fortifications are the result of his work with the three-year Becan Project which began in 1969 and was co-sponsored by the Middle American Research Institute of Tulane University and the National Geographic Society.

Becan (fig. 2) is a compact site. The ditch around the site is 1890 meters (about 1.2 miles) long. While the site is considered small (46 acres), the fortifications represent one of the largest earth moving projects presently known in Maya archaeology.

About 117,607 cubic meters of fill were taken from the ditch during its original construction. The bank on the inner side of the ditch contained about 80,000 cubic meters of fill. It is estimated that this construction would have required 352,821 man-days of work. This amounts to 70 days work for 5000 men (figs. 3, 4).

The width of the ditch varies from 12 to 27 meters with an average of 16 meters (52.5 feet). The average depth is 5.3 meters or about 17.4 feet. Webster (1976:88) states: "To judge from the bedrock outcrops which are still visible, the sides of the trough must have been vertical or near vertical, steep enough to keep attackers from clambering up them." It would not have been possible to get out of the ditch without a ladder.

The minimum width of the bank above the ditch is 10 meters (32.8 feet). In many places, it is wider. The average height is estimated to have been about 5 feet. Webster indicates that an attacker in the bottom of the ditch would have had to scale a height of about 37 feet to reach the top of the bank. Webster believes there were wooden palisades on top of the bank. He states: "I suspect that a palisade may well have existed but that all traces of it have been obliterated. About the only remaining evidence would be a line of post holes or soil discolorations along the outer edge of the embankment,

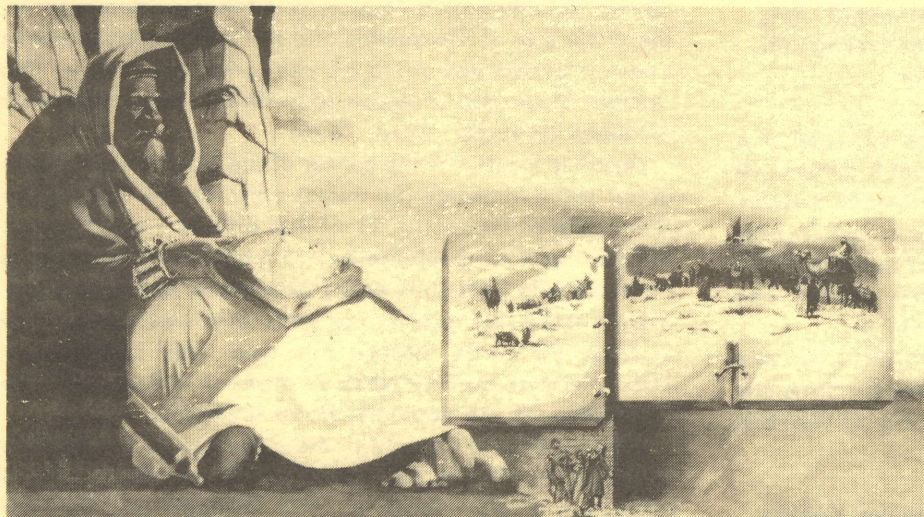


# THE ZARAHEMLA RECORD

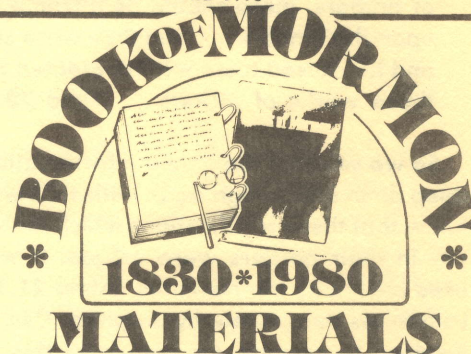
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"And he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word..." Alma 9:18



Mormon reviews his record for the last time.



FROM ZARAHEMLA RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Shown to the left, is a sample from our new full-color booklet, **Overview of the Book of Mormon**. The picture of Mormon's library on page 8 is also from the booklet.

## BECAN:

### A Dramatic Validation of a Book of Mormon Warfare Pattern

By Raymond C. Treat

About 73 B.C., Alma II turns over the leadership of the church and the sacred records to his son, Helaman. The Nephites become proud and rich and will not listen to Helaman. The leader of the rebellion is Amalickiah. He wants to overthrow the government and become king. Moroni, the chief commander of the Nephite armies, seeing this great threat to freedom, tears a piece from his coat and writes on it, "In memory of our God, our religion and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children." He fastens it to a pole and goes throughout the land enlisting all those that will fight to defend their freedom.

Amalickiah and his followers, seeing they are defeated, defect to the Lamanites. Through treachery and deceit, Amalickiah becomes the king of the Lamanites and leads their armies against the Nephites.

Moroni, knowing that the intent of Amalickiah is to become king of both the Nephites and the Lamanites, begins strengthening the cities on the borders between the lands. A description of these fortifications proves to be very interesting:

... the Nephites had dug up a ridge of earth round about them, which was so high that the Lamanites could not cast their stones and arrows at them . . . neither could they come upon them, save it was by their place of entrance. Alma 21:152

(Continued on page 2)

#### Coming to WORLD CONFERENCE 1980??

Zarahemla Research Foundation will have a table at the meetings sponsored by the Foundation for Research on Ancient America in Luff Auditorium of the Stone Church. Meetings are scheduled Monday through Friday immediately after the afternoon business sessions (about 4:30 p.m.). We will have our three new projects available at that time (they will also be available at the School of Saints).

Come by and visit with us. The following lectures are scheduled for the week:

Monday—**Raymond C. Treat**  
"Mesoamerican Archaeology and the Book of Mormon—Outlines Compared."

Tuesday—**Roy Weldon**  
"Ebla"

Wednesday—**Charles R. Hield**  
"Jesus Christ in Ancient America"

Thursday—**James A. Christenson**  
"La Buena Fe—Recent Developments in the Honduras Mission"

Friday—**Clair F. Weldon and Kenneth Raveill**  
Two-screen, Book of Mormon-centered presentation

was tarred and feathered by the mob in Independence.

In the exodus from Nauvoo the Allen and Galland families followed Brigham Young to the winter quarters in Nebraska. However, they did not agree with the action taken there which placed Brigham Young in the position of presiding over the church. At that point, a number of church families sought homesites in western Iowa.

Maria Allen and Benjamin Galland were married at Galland's Grove. There my grandfather, Abram Galland, was born. Later the family moved a few miles north to Deloit, Iowa, which had originally been settled by other church families under the name of Mason's Grove. This was my mother's home.

My father's family (the Newcoms) moved to the area following the Civil War and eventually many members were converted to the church by J. J. Cornish during one of his missionary tours of Northwestern Iowa. I was born near Deloit and was both blessed and baptized as a member of the Deloit congregation. There I began to learn about the church and there I taught my first Sunday school class—a tiny group of 3-5 year olds.

My father was an avid reader and I inherited his love of books. My brothers and I were encouraged to read the scriptures for ourselves and church publications were held in high regard in our home. The history of the church had always fascinated me perhaps because I felt my family had been intimately involved with it. At the time of my baptism at age 13, I became extremely interested in the Book of Mormon. This led to a growing interest in the archaeology and history of the Western world.

As a teen-ager, my deepest desire was to be an archaeologist—a desire which the great depression of the thirties made only a dream. College for me, was out of the question. My family moved to Cameron, Missouri in 1936. There I met and married a young church member who held the office of priest. Wayne's family also had a church heritage going back five generations, to the building of Kirtland Temple. He was born at old Far West and his father had built and pastored the small church which still stands today. We shared a mutual interest in the Book of Mormon as he was teaching that subject to the adult class in the Cameron branch.

The years following our marriage saw the birth of two sons, five war years spent in the Caribbean on the island of Aruba, a year in Costa Rica, and nearly two years in Caracas, Venezuela. Wayne worked for Standard Oil, the Interamerican School Service, and was director of a Cultural Center for the U.S. State Department. These varied assignments gave us an opportunity to study Spanish and to delve into the culture and pre-history of much of Latin America. During these years I continued to spend hours studying various aspects of the Book of Mormon. This led me into studies of the cultural backgrounds of the three colonies which left the Old World. I not only explored the biblical accounts but collected all the evidence I could on the exciting archaeological discoveries dealing with that period.

In 1950 Wayne was asked by the church to become a full-time appointee, the first assigned to Latin America. We assumed this meant that we would soon be sent to live somewhere south of the border; actually it was many

years before we were moved to Mexico City. In the interim we spent several years in South Texas, on the Mexican border. This did permit us to take short vacation trips into Mexico and we used these opportunities to visit many ancient ruins. And it was here on the border that I was, very reluctantly, pushed into teaching my first Book of Mormon class. I enjoyed the study and research, but the idea of teaching it to someone was frightening.

My years of research had convinced me that the lands of the Book of Mormon could not include parts of South America and the United States, as commonly accepted in the church, but must be confined to Mesoamerica—the area from central Mexico south to Costa Rica in Central America. It therefore followed that Mormon's Hill Cumorah was somewhere in southern Mexico and not the hill we call Cumorah in the state of New York.

Such unorthodox ideas did result in a high level of interest in my Book of Mormon classes and I found myself more and more in demand as a teacher on the subject.

During these years my husband and our three sons (the youngest born in 1950) had joined me in a family quest. We set out to find Mormon's hill, which we call Cumorah South. We believe that Moroni, who took to New York only the small plates of the abridgment, called the hill there Cumorah, in memory of the place where his father had hidden the original records. My in-depth study of the lands as mentioned in the Book of Mormon had indicated that we would have to search southern Mexico to find the real Cumorah.

We read archaeological site reports, we studied topography maps, we read many books, and we walked miles in personal exploration. In 1964 we had been assigned to Mexico City where I then had the opportunity to attend archaeological lectures at the Museum, as well as visit sites with the professionals. (It was there our youngest son entered college, graduating with an anthropological degree in the field of Mesoamerican archaeology. A vicarious fulfillment of my youthful dreams!)

Eventually I came across studies of the ancient trade routes which proved very helpful, resulting in our exploration of an area which fitted all the necessary criteria, and which we felt had to be right. Finding the hill was a tremendous experience for the family; and though we rejoiced over the success of our quest, we shared our information and our feelings with only close friends.

While I was completely satisfied in my own mind concerning our location of Cumorah South, I was most reluctant to include it in classwork or in discussion with the many church members who came as visitors to Mexico City. Wayne was not so inhibited. Frequently I found him pointing out the location of Hill Cumorah on a map and explaining why we placed it there as he guided such visitors through the museum. I knew I had been directed by the Spirit of the Lord in my study and research. I had had many confirmations of the Spirit as I had struggled to make sense out of data which had been very confusing. I knew I had been led from my youth to work on this particular problem concerning the Book of Mormon, but now that I felt I had some answers, I still hesitated to use

them publicly. I felt so deeply about this that I went to the Lord in most earnest prayer. I would have to have some confirmation of the truth of our position before I could talk freely about it.

Very shortly after this an appointee family came to Mexico. Again we served as guides while touring the museum. Again Wayne talked about Mormon's hill and why it had to be in that particular place. And again I worried. The next day Wayne served as their guide to a site outside Mexico City and upon their return the family said their good-bye's.

They were leaving the city the next morning. Early in the morning the phone rang and our brother appointee asked if they could return for a short visit before leaving for home. When they arrived, he explained that his daughter-in-law (part of their family group) had had an experience while in the museum which he felt was to be shared with us. She then told us that while we were discussing these things at the museum, a voice had spoken to her and said: "Listen, you are hearing truth". She had been quite moved by the experience but had not told the rest of her family until the evening after they had left our home. Her father-in-law felt the experience was for us too, not knowing that I had asked for this confirmation from the Lord. How thankful I was that they had come back to the house to share it with us.

From this point on we both felt free to talk and to teach the evidence which points to the story of the Nephites, Lamanites and the Jaredites as being confined to a narrow land area in Central America, which contains the action described in the record. The oft-mentioned "narrow neck" would be the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico, the great final battles of both the Jaredite and Nephite nation would have been fought a little to the northwest of that area, and the cave where Mormon secreted the many original records and other sacred objects would be found in the vicinity. The scriptural, geographical and archaeological evidence all became a part of the classes I taught on the Book of Mormon.

In 1970 we were returned from Mexico. In our succeeding assignment in the States, I taught many Book of Mormon classes in districts, at reunions, branch classes, workshops etc. I had come to enjoy the teaching, especially as people were so responsive to the new and exciting information presented. More and more often I was asked the question, "Why don't you put it all in a book?" If the idea of teaching a class had been frightening, the idea of writing a book was positively terrifying. I had finally learned some of the rules of being a good teacher, but I knew nothing about writing a book. The suggestion was ignored for a long time.

Probably what changed my mind was the growing conviction that the prophecies of the Book of Mormon, particularly those dealing with the testimony of the original records, were of vital importance at this time, not only to the church but to the world. It is prophecy yet to be fulfilled. The discovery of the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls and the more recent find of the tremendous library at Ebla will pale in the light of the records which Mormon so carefully hid away for that time when the world should have them. If the Lord had truly directed my studies and

inspired my research, then I had some responsibility to share my information beyond the limitations of my classwork.

When I finally decided I would try to put my material into a book, I informed the family they would all have to help—a decision I frequently regretted! They took me seriously and criticized every line I wrote. The oldest son claimed I wrote all my sentences backwards. My husband, the English major, wanted it all very literary and formal. The one with the Anthro' degree challenged all archaeological statements! However, every time I threatened to burn the manuscript, vowing I would never write another word, they all united against me, saying "it's great—keep writing!" Certainly, without their support, suggestions, criticism and help it could never have been written.

So—"Peoples, Places and Prophecies" came into being. In reality, it is my testimony and my belief in the truth of the Book of Mormon and the story it tells. I hope to live to see the day when the records hidden in Cumorah South are given to the world. I am very grateful to my Lord that he led me into an awareness of the importance of the Book of Mormon to my generation and that he let me have a part in presenting that witness to the church.▲



Wayne and Verneil Simmons

## A TESTIMONY:

# Scriptures of the future

By James H. Robbins

What a marvelous future we have before us as we stop to consider that the Lord shall bring forth additional scripture records at some future date which shall be of great worth as treasures of hidden wisdom and knowledge! Remember these promises?

"And when they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things, then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them." III Nephi 12:4

"And whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these." Mormon 4:14

"And he that will contend against the word of the Lord, let him be accursed; and he that shall deny these things, let him be accursed; for unto them will I shew no greater things, saith Jesus Christ, for I am he who speaketh; Come unto me, O ye Gentiles, and I will shew unto you the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief." Ether 1:102,109.

One important fact to be noted in these scriptures is that the promise is conditional; namely, that which has already been revealed (our present-day Book of Mormon) must be accepted by faith as of divine origin before any other scriptures come forth.

The Book of Mormon is replete with references to other records of Scripture which comprised the sacred library of the Nephites. In fact, there are references that indicate there were other record-keeping people besides the Nephites:

"And it came to pass that there were many of the people of Ammon who were Lamanites by birth, did also go forth into this land (land northward). And now there are many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large, concerning them;" Helaman 2:11,12

"And thus the language of Nephi began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites. . . . but they taught them that they should keep their record, and that they might write one to another." Mosiah 11:49,51

The following is a list of various sacred records mentioned which shall come forth some day:

1. **Brass Plates:** I Nephi 1:158-169; Alma 17:32
  - a. **Joseph of Egypt's writings:** II Nephi 3:1-5

- b. **Writings of the prophets Zenos, Zenock, and Neum:** I Nephi 5:240-242; III Nephi 4:69-73
2. **Book of Lehi:** I Nephi 1:15,16; I Nephi 2:1
3. **Record of Zeniff:** Mosiah 6-10; Mosiah 11:81
4. **Record of Alma in the wilderness:** Mosiah 9, Mosiah 11:82
5. **Record of Ether (24 Gold Plates):** Alma 17:52, Mosiah 5:64, Ether 6:15, 108
6. **Record brought by Jaredites (Book of Remembrance):** Ether 3:80,81,89; Genesis 5:14-16,36,37; Genesis 6:5-9 I.V.
7. **Sealed Portion of Book of Mormon:** II Nephi 11:126,127,130,131; Ether 1:86-101
9. **Large Plates of Nephi:** I Nephi 1:17, III Nephi 12:1; Mormon 1:5,45
10. **Many "unnamed plates":** Helaman 2:11-14

The promise of more scriptures for latter-day Lamanites and latter-day Gentiles (Restored Church) can be found in III Nephi 12:1-4; Mormon 2:35 and Ether 1:100,101, 109-113 (Sealed Portion).

There seems to be no specific indication as to when or how these records shall come forth but I would briefly like to mention a testimony which was shared with me. It would seem that at least some of these records will come forth in a rather ordinary manner. In fact, it will not appear that the hand of the Lord that has brought them forth, but will require those who know to bear testimony of this. I think I can safely say without fear of contradiction that the Record of the Brother of Jared and the Sealed Portion of the Book of Mormon will be translated by a prophet-seer with the Urim & Thummim (see Ether 1:86-101; Mosiah 5:77). Probably some of the records that come forth will be translated by experts in ancient languages. According to the testimony of two men that I know, both were permitted to see this sacred Nephite library in vision and were admonished to bear testimony of this experience to as many saints as would listen in order to overcome any skepticism which might prevail among the saints when some of these records do come forth.

Although I personally do not know to whom these future records will minister the most, I am confident that God and Christ will in their own perfect timing accomplish the maximum benefit for men in these last days.

I will close with a personal testimony. A few years ago, three other men and I went to Mexico to a mountain which is believed to be the hiding place for the sacred library. Nothing of a spectacular nature transpired while there. About a week after returning home I was pondering in my mind our trip to Mexico. I was thinking about the legend of the village near this mountain which claims that three men come through this village and climb the mountain during the first week of April each year and then are not

(Continued on page 8)

**SCRIPTURES OF THE FUTURE**

(Continued from page 7)

seen again until the following April. I think it is safe to say that these are the Three Nephites. I was wondering why the Three Nephites come to that mountain every year—God always has a purpose in what He or His servants do. Suddenly the Voice of Intelligence spoke to my intelligence (I did not hear an audible voice) and said, "They (the Three Nephites) are beholding the doings of God among the children of men until the end and are recording this on the plates in the sacred library." I was not told on which plates this was being done.

I quickly opened my Book of Mormon to see if this was mentioned and was thrilled to discover something I had overlooked up to that time:

"Therefore more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death, but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father, unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled, according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory, with the powers of heaven." III Nephi 13:18

Notice it clearly states that the Three will tarry and observe God's doings to the end although it does not mention anything about records being made by them. However, I am confident by the impress of God's Spirit that this is so.

With eager and prayerful anticipation let us look forward to the day when the Lord will bring forth additional treasures of wisdom, knowledge and Eternal truths.▲



Stories from the Book of Mormon filmstrips are now available through Creative Ministries Inc. Several years ago the LDS Church developed a set of 24 sound color filmstrips for use in their educational system. These have been re-released through this Blue Valley Stake corporation with cassette tape soundtracks (for manual and auto advance machines). The complete set can be ordered for \$95 (less than \$4 per filmstrip) plus postage from Creative Ministries Inc., 19404 East Holke Road, Independence, Missouri 64057.



Mormon's library in hill Cumorah.



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