

Book of Mormon Archaeology and Faith: New Perspective-Part 2

by Shirley Heater

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In Part 1 of this article I defined Book of Mormon archaeology as using The Book of Mormon to interpret Mesoamerican archaeology. We saw that Mesoamerican archaeology is the temporal or physical revelation of The Book of Mormon. Viewing secular archaeologists as those who provide the data, I concluded that it is then up to archaeologists who believe The Book of Mormon as a true and historical account to provide proper interpretation of that data. Without this perspective, interpretations fall far afield, demonstrated by early views 180° from what The Book of Mormon account should be found. It has only been during the last fifty years as more data accumulated that interpretations have gradually changed, coming ever closer to Book of Mormon requirements.

My final point in Part 1 was that most

Book of Mormon evidences are still hidden! So the critical question is how do hidden evidences become seen? This brings us to the second element in the title: Faith

Hidden Evidences

There are three kinds of evidence: circumstantial (in court); direct (observation); and faith (not seen). Our focus is on the third kind of evidence. How does the unseen become seen? In other words, how does it become direct (observational) evidence?

According to Hebrews 11:1 and Ether 5:6, **faith** is the assurance or substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Definitions of the words “faith” and “hope” clarify our understanding:

faith = confident, secure belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing. Belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence. Unshakeable, steadfast, firm.

hope = to expect, to wait, fixed, to look forward to with confidence or expectation, confident expectation of its fulfillment, to have confidence; trust.

(Note: we erroneously use the word “hope” to mean “wishful.”)

Faith is the blueprint for our hope or expectations. In this case The Book of Mormon becomes our ‘faith blueprint.’ Faith is the mechanism—held up by hope—that produces evidences from the unseen to the seen. I suggest to you that it is our faith that is rewarded when hidden evidences are revealed. We’ll come back to this in a practical way later. But first, logic leads to the next question that many of you may wonder about—how do science and faith mix? My answer comes from my own life experience—go back with me a few years.

Discovering science — my testimony

When I was twelve years old, I remember

that the news media of the day was filled with announcements of a new astronomical discovery. It caught my attention because I had been reading the story of creation in Genesis. I thought about the significance of what I had heard in the news and wondered; how did science and God mix? As I thought about this, I realized that this discovery in the heavens was revealing something new to mankind. However, God was the Creator and it certainly wasn’t new to Him! In my simple understanding, scientists were merely discovering the way things are.

In retrospect over the last couple of years, I recalled this event when I was twelve but not the exact astronomical discovery. Thanks to the Internet, my search was confirmed and I remembered! Here are the details: In the fall of 1955 Astronomer George Herbig announced the first evidence of the birth of a star—a stellar nursery—in the dust of Orion. I realize now that this specific discovery isn’t what’s so important—many even more profound discoveries have been made since then. What is important is the impact it had on my understanding of God and the Universe. The insight that science discovers what God has created shaped my views of all science throughout the next decades and continues to undergird my interest in all fields of science.

When I returned to college working toward my degree in anthropology (archaeology is a sub-discipline), I took a class in the history and philosophy of science. I learned that science operates by paradigms—a group of theories are focused on, filling in the gaps. Those things that do not fit are set aside until one day someone looks at all the anomalies and comes up with a better paradigm. The transition from one paradigm to another is actually a revolution, a “conversion” experience (Kuhn 1970; 1977:8; Treat 1984:3).

Thus science is ever-changing, hopefully moving forward as knowledge is gained, and errors recognized and rejected. We

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have seen this very thing in the field of Mesoamerican studies. Our interest has been riveted to amazing discoveries over recent decades, discoveries which are the opposite of views long-held by archaeologists that proved to be erroneous. Our interest is how these discoveries relate to The Book of Mormon.

Archaeology As A Witness

The Scriptures tell us in several places that in the mouth of two or three witness all these things shall be established. This principle of two or three witnesses can be applied in many circumstances. Note that the verse from Second Nephi 11 below¹ is speaking specifically about The Book of Mormon:

Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book; And in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth Him good, will He establish His word; And wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!

2 Nephi 11:135

And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established;

Ether 2:3

But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

Matthew 18:16

These verses (among others) remind us of the evidences and witnesses accepted in a

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court of law. And in this case it is our faith that is on trial. But we are also told that we will not receive a witness until after the trial of our faith:

Wherefore, dispute not because ye see not,
For ye receive no witness—not until after the trial of your faith.

Ether 5:7

However, an important question needs to be asked—why are archaeological evidences important? Some might even ask, *are* archaeological evidences important? Yes, we all love to hear about new discoveries, and it is exciting to see the correlation with The Book of Mormon account.

However, we may think we have to prove to secular archaeologists and to the world—the critics and scoffers—that this book is true. If only there were some piece of incontrovertible evidence that would just convince them!

But all the evidences in the world can still be rejected! An account in Helaman seems to fit this situation. Nephi chastened his people for their wickedness after all the evidences and witnesses they had received (5:44-60). He observed that they still rejected them in spite of all these evidences which could not be denied:

“And now, seeing ye know these things and cannot deny them except ye shall lie,
Therefore, in this ye have sinned, for ye have rejected all these things notwithstanding so many evidences which ye have received;
Yea, even ye have received all things—both things in heaven and all things which are in the earth—as a witness that they are true.”

Helaman 5:61-62

Yes, archaeological evidences serve as witnesses to the world that the book is true, just as evidence in a court situation serves as a witness and is testimony of fact. I believe that is the case with The Book of Mormon. While such evidences do offer people an opportunity to accept or reject

The Book of Mormon, let me suggest that proof is not the goal, but that there is an even greater purpose.

God Has A Plan for Book of Mormon Archaeology

In the mid-1980s, FRAA² sponsored a series of presentations at the Auditorium. The subject of my presentation was “God Has A Plan for Archaeology.” At that time I shared about the accumulating evidences, both external (archaeology) and internal (Hebrew language patterns) and the significance of timing. I had dropped my tray of slides crossing the street to the Auditorium, spilling the slides out. When I put them back in, one of them, the chart of the timeline showing the mirror image of The Book of Mormon and archaeology was upside down. My instant response to that was to say, “God

is turning archaeology upside down”! I didn’t realize it at the time, but I believe that was a small glimpse of greater

things yet to come. Now more than 20 years later, I am more firmly convinced than ever. I am truly humbled to be here at this point in time, and realize that we are on the threshold of many discoveries and the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning The Book of Mormon and its message.

The potential for future Book of Mormon archaeology, considering recent discoveries at San Bartolo, the translation of hieroglyphs, and the use of satellite imaging as examples, is phenomenal. And I can see where the 2% Factor is going to have to be revised! There are at least five areas relating to Book of Mormon archaeology where we can expect new discoveries, new interpretations:

- Satellite Imaging
- Pre-Classic Hieroglyphs
- Pre-Classic Sites & Settlement Patterns
- More Old World Connections
- Book of Mormon Contributions

The last point, Book of Mormon contributions, means there must be a clearer

¹ The RCE is used for all quotations.

² Foundation for Research on Ancient America, now known as The Book of Mormon Foundation.

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Book of Mormon presence. Let me give you an example of how The Book of Mormon may play such a role—Dr. Richard DeLong (1986), after learning of chiasmus and poetry in The Book of Mormon, presented a paper to professionals about finding chiastic structure in Maya

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hieroglyphic writing. Two Maya specialists went on to find poetry in the inscriptions, illustrating the presence of couplets and chiasmus in the hieroglyphic inscriptions, as well as in present-day Maya storytelling and prayers (Hopkins and Josserand 1995). While there may be others, this is the only case I know of where something from The Book of Mormon contributed to a discovery in Mesoamerican archaeology by others than Book of Mormon believers. This illustrates that breakthroughs in truly understanding the archaeology can come from knowledge of The Book of Mormon.

In a previous article, I related that at the first symposium on the San Bartolo murals, I was present when the Vice President of Guatemala and other members of the audience—part of a large contingent from Guatemala—spoke of the rebirth of interest in their original cultures by the Maya people and expressed gratitude for restoring a knowledge of their ancestors. A yearning was expressed to know of their heritage and their ancestors, because they do not have a continuous written history like some parts of the world. This filled our hearts with joy! Unbeknownst to them, they were expressing the very desires that the intent of The Book of Mormon states over and over again.

If they are excited at this juncture about learning their history through archaeology, we can only imagine their great joy when they embrace the knowledge that their fathers and their first parents knew of Christ and were visited by Him, and that they are part of the latter-day remnant of the House of Israel whom The Book of Mormon call the people of the first covenant! This is the most exciting thing of all! What a glorious day that will be!

Your Response

Let's take a moment to review. So far we have seen that when The Book of Mormon

came forth the temporal evidences were TOTALLY UNKNOWN. In fact, had they been known at that time, and known to Joseph Smith, critics would have accused him of using them as a source for writing The Book of Mormon. Traditional views of the ancient civilizations which developed

over nearly a century were in complete opposition to Book of Mormon details. As physical evidences began to come forth in favor of new views which more closely parallel The Book of Mormon account, we have seen that many of those traditional views have been overturned.

I suggest to you that it is our faith that is rewarded when hidden evidences are revealed. The evidences—which faith and hope expect to come forth—are an actual product of that faith and hope! The potential is profound for future discoveries, since most Book of Mormon evidences are still hidden.

Now comes the practical application of our earlier discussion of faith as a blueprint. I leave this final challenge with you, dear reader. Remember that it matters not whether you have archaeological training, academic “letters” or great success in the business world—you are challenged to be an integral part of what God has in store for these last days. In this day of eroding faith, two great “faith chapters”—Ether 5 in The Book of Mormon and Hebrews 11 in the New Testament—remind us that it is “by faith” that all things are fulfilled.

As caretakers of this wonderful book, this miracle book, our prayers of faith are not only for more evidences, but for the people to whom the book was written. One reference from The Book of Mormon (and there are many) tells us God's plan for his people. Mormon is speaking of the record and the welfare of his people:

And no one can have power to bring it to light, save it be given him of God; For God will that it shall be done with an eye single to His glory, or the welfare of the ancient and long dispersed covenant people of the Lord.

Mormon 4:19

I hope I've given you some food for thought, that you will consider your assignment, a challenge if you will, to exercise your faith, and make this mission a specific matter of prayer, that we will see more of those hidden evidences come forth as a witness to the “long dispersed covenant people of the Lord.” EXPECT IT!

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