

**JOSEPH THE SEER; HIS PROPHETIC  
MISSION VINDICATED, AND THE  
DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF  
MORMON DEFENDED AND  
MAINTAINED**

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Joseph the seer; his prophetic mission vindicated, and the divine origin of the Book of Mormon defended and maintained by William W. Blair

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**WILLIAM W. BLAIR**

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JOSEPH THE SEER;  
HIS  
PROPHETIC MISSION VINDICATED,  
AND THE  
DIVINE ORIGIN  
OF  
THE BOOK OF MORMON DEFENDED AND MAINTAINED;  
BEING A REPLY  
BY ELDER WILLIAM W. BLAIR,  
*Of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,*  
TO ELDER WILLIAM SHELDON,  
*Of the Second Adventist Society.*

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1877.

P R E F A C E .

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THE severe trials to which the Truth of God has been subjected in all the past, have always resulted well in bringing its high importance, its essential impregnability, and its perpetual beauties into clearer, grander light, disclosing more plainly its deep, and broad, and immovable foundations. They have also resulted well in revealing the dark and delusive ways of error, ways so common to the conceited, the self-sufficient, and the bigot, who, with blind heart, and clamorous tongue, or pen, would compel all others into their mazy lines of thought, and into their devious and inconsistent modes of religious, moral, social, and scientific conduct. Truth gains and error loses in every fairly conducted conflict.

Such, we trust, will be the ultimate fruits of the recent malevolent attack of Rev. William Sheldon upon the faith and doctrines of the Latter Day Saints, to which we reply in the following pages. Truth will arise and prevail.

Mr. Sheldon, in his arguments, draws heavily on various anti-Mormon writers, from Howe to Ann Eliza. From these he takes his cue; and from their productions he obtains his chief enlightenment, and his loftiest inspirations; yet, notably, he fails to give them their proper credits. This literary piracy will be found to be quite in keeping with the general tenor of his work, as we proceed.

It will also be seen that he is a prince among cavilers, and that he is as feeble in his sophisms as he is fertile in invention. He builds, with affected seriousness, his men-of-straw; and then, with self-complacent, pompous puffs, topples them over, and then applauds himself for decisive victories.

He attempts, with persistent zeal, to make the Book of Mormon and the Inspired Translation claim for themselves what they do not claim, viz., that *all* their historical and epistolary parts were written with un-

erring precision, and infallible accuracy, and under the fullest and highest measure of inspiration; but in this attempt he fails, miserably.

He seeks to force upon the standard writings of the Church such sense and meaning as are utterly foreign and contrary to them; and this he does, evidently, with the base purpose of making them appear false and contradictory.

We regret that Mr. Sheldon has quoted our works so inaccurately, and that he has cited passages so incorrectly; for it tends to perplex the reader, both as respects his statements, and, possibly, in respect to our answers; beside which it places him in the attitude of either a heedless, or a lawless controversialist.

It is quite impossible in these pages to notice more than the major and more important part of the objections urged by Mr. Sheldon; and this we cannot do in a manner nearly so extended as we could wish, and as we know their importance demands; but we have undertaken to reply to all those of any real force or value.

If in anything in this work we have descended to too low a plane in our argument, our main apology is, that we thought it best, in the interests of truth, to follow our opponent wherever he went, in order to flash the true light upon his dark and crooked ways, and thus disclose his errors.

We have frequently emphasized passages quoted, and we have done so in order to call special attention to the matter under consideration; but we disclaim any intention of thereby changing the sense of such passages.

We submit our work to the careful and considerate attention of the reader, asking that it be judged upon the merits of its *facts*, and not upon the excellency of its diction, or the beauty and finish of its periods.

We regret its brevity, and its imperfections; especially when we consider the weighty matters of which it treats.

We have written it in the interests of truth—diamond truth—and for the promotion of the righteousness of God among men, and to further the cause of "full salvation." And with this consciousness we send it out, humbly asking for it the best blessings of heaven, a respectful reception among men, and a fair hearing by all into whose hands it may come.

THE AUTHOR.

PROPHETIC MISSION OF JOSEPH SMITH VINDICATED,  
AND THE  
DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF MORMON MAINTAINED  
AND DEFENDED.

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CHAPTER I.

We have recently read in the *World's Crisis* for July, 1875, a lengthy article, entitled "Mormonism Examined; or, Was Joseph Smith a Divinely Inspired Prophet?" from the pen of Elder Wm. Sheldon, a minister of the Advent Church, and sometime editor of the *Christian Advent Times*, and more recently his book entitled "Mormonism Reviewed," and feeling that they should be answered, we now undertake this review.

Mr. Sheldon doubtless availed himself of all the arguments hitherto used by opponents of the Latter Day Work, selecting such as he thought he could use with effect, and has then added to them an occasional one that has at least the merit of being new. His affected fairness is painfully apparent, while his false inferences, his bald mis-statements, and his frequent false and garbled quotations, place him in an unpleasantly low rank among controversialists. This we very much regret, as from a brief acquaintance with the gentleman we had expected of him better things. His course adds but another to the long list of evidences, stretching down through the ages, that men, when they have an end in view, usually, spare no effort, and use without scruple any means to attain it—"the end [with them] justifies the means."

We are not averse to criticism, but, on the contrary, admire it when it is conducted with fairness and skill; but when it degenerates into quibbling, low trickery, and contemptible pettifoggery, then the less of it the better.



We have no quarrel with any for not believing as we do; all may believe as they think best, and we are morally bound to respect them in that right; for the right of private judgment, and the fact of personal responsibility, are inherent in man, and ordained of God. What we ask, and all that we ask, is, for others to bear in mind that the Latter Day Saints, as well as themselves, should be respected in their rights, and be treated in respect to their *faith* and *works*, honestly, fairly and courteously.

As for Mr. Sheldon,—the propriety of his efforts, the strength of his arguments, the piety of his motives, and the extent of his success in proving that "Mormonism" is false in its foundations and in its leading facts,—the reader must form his own judgment as we progress.

Mr. Sheldon postulates the following: "The claims of Mormonism to divine origin, stand or fall with a correct answer to the simple question, Was Joseph Smith a true prophet;" and he then attempts to prove that there are historical errors in the Book of Mormon, assuming that if there are, then Joseph Smith, who translated the book, must be a false prophet. This claim is certainly a novel one.

To make a translator responsible for the truth or falsity of the facts he translates, is probably an original idea with Mr. S., and one that he feels is quite indispensable to his success. Sensible, fair-dealing people, hardly think of holding Pope responsible for the truth or falsity of Homer's *Illiad*, or *Odyssey*, because he translated them; nor would they hold the translators of the Bible responsible for the character of its contents, but only for the faithfulness with which they performed their work of translation.

Now, the Book of Mormon in more places than one admits that there *may be* errors and imperfections in it. It does not claim absolute perfection as to its contents in all, and in every respect. Its *historical* parts do not claim to be written by revelation, or by such measure of inspiration as to exclude errors and defects in language, and style; nor does it claim to be absolutely correct in *all* its historical dates. Nephi, the very first writer in the book is conscious that through his inherent "weakness" his record might be, possibly, faulty. He says,

"If I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh."—1 Nephi 5: 47.

That some of the sacred historians "of old" did "err" in some of

their writings is too well known to need any argument to prove it, as may be seen by comparing the historical books of the Old Testament. Nor is the New Testament free from this defect. One instance may suffice for this place. In Acts, 1 : 18, 19, we are told that Judas obtained for betraying Christ, money with which he bought a field; but in Matthew 27 : 5, 6, 7, we are told that the chief priests with that money bought the field. So of Paul, 1 Cor. 10 : 8, compare Num. 25 : 9. Here are conflicts, which with others that occur, prove that the writers of the New Testament history made some mistakes—they did “err” in, at least, a few things.

Mr. S. quotes the Book of Nephi:

“And it came to pass in the thirty-fourth year, in the first month, in the fourth day of the month, \* \* \* then behold there was darkness upon the face of the land. \* \* \* And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days.”  
—Nephi 4 : 2.

This, Mr. S. claims, was the time of Christ’s crucifixion, as predicted by the Lamanite prophet Samuel; and, that its occurring on the “fourth day” of the “first month,” instead of the fourteenth day of the first month, Jewish time, proves the account false, the Book of Mormon untrue, and Joseph Smith, its translator, a false prophet. Now, if Mr. S. had read and honestly considered the preceding paragraph, he might have spared us the necessity of exposing what savors strongly of craftiness, and even downright trickery. It reads:

“It was a just man who did keep the record; \* \* \* and now it came to pass, if there was no mistake made in the reckoning of our time.”

Here is a frank admission of a *possible* error in the record, as to time. Why did not Mr. S. cite this qualifying statement? Evidently because he knew that his argument would thereby be stripped of its force.

The Nephites reckoned time under three different eras; the first dating from Lehi’s exodus from Jerusalem,—1 Nephi, 1 : 2. Jacob 1 : 1, etc.; the next dating with the beginning of the reign of the Judges,—Alma, 1 : 1; 2 : 1; also, book of Nephi, 1 : 1; and the next with the birth of Christ,—Book of Nephi 1 : 6–8. Whether their *months* were after the Jewish style, or not, is uncertain. Their months may have begun with the going out of Lehi and his family from Jerusalem. As to whether “the first month,” of Nephi 4 : 2, was really intended for Jewish time, or for time peculiar to the Nephites, it is not our province now to determine. Whatever the time was, Jewish or Nephite, the writer of the book does not

claim that it was absolutely correct. Joseph Smith translated it as he found it; and the correctness or incorrectness of those dates cannot affect the truthfulness of Joseph Smith's calling.

#### TIME OF CHRIST'S BIRTH.

Mr. S. next affirms that "the Book of Mormon locates the birth of Christ too late in the world's history to harmonize with the Bible," because it is stated in 2 Nephi 11 : 4, that the Messiah should come in six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem, which was in the first year of King Zedekiah's reign. Mr. S. enters into a lengthy argument to prove that the birth of Christ occurred "just five hundred and fifty-three years from the first of Zedekiah."

As to the precise number of years between those events, chronologists differ. All that seems necessary now is to find what was intended by the statement in question; for it is a wise maxim that "the thing *intended*, is the thing said." The text reads:—

"For according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem."

Here is a text similar in structure, in which the Lord said to Abraham:—

"Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years."—Gen. 15 : 13.

Now, In Ex. 12 : 40, it is said, "The sojourning of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years." Here is a difference of *thirty years*, when we descend to verbal niceties, between the time as promised, and the recorded time of history. Will Mr. S. impeach the Almighty, or invalidate Bible history, because of this discrepancy! The grounds here presented are much better for his doing so, than are his supposed grounds for invalidating the testimony of Nephi. For in one case there is an admitted verbal difference, of thirty years, while in the other there is not. What was evidently intended in the promise to Abraham, was, that about four hundred years, in round numbers, would measure Israel's captivity in Egypt. So in regard to the "six hundred years" predicted by Nephi, a fair interpretation would be that "in about six hundred years."

But we need not dwell upon this, for it is a well known fact that there is quite a difference of opinion about the date of our Savior's birth, and Mr. S.'s statement is only his personal