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Paul R. Cheesman, *The Keystone of Mormonism: Early Visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith*

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Abstract Review of *The Keystone of Mormonism: Early Visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (1988), by Paul R. Cheesman.

Paul R. Cheesman, *The Keystone of Mormonism: Early Visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Provo: Eagle Systems International, 1988. 205 pp. \$14.95.

Reviewed by Larry C. Porter

Paul Cheesman's publication, *The Keystone of Mormonism: Early Visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, is a title sound-alike to an earlier volume which he published in 1972, entitled *The Keystone of Mormonism: Little Known Truths about the Book of Mormon*. A careful comparison of the content of the two volumes, however, readily reveals that, although there are some chapter materials which are the same, extensive additions of new subject matter, deletions of former information, and a change of emphasis have created two distinctly separate volumes. The student of the Book of Mormon and the early visions of the Prophet will want both books in his collection to cover the labyrinth of excellent instruction peculiar to each text.

Dr. Cheesman's first volume (1972) focused primarily on the physical setting in which the Book of Mormon originated and the means by which it came forth under miraculous circumstances. The new volume (1988) expands its text to include an excellent introductory chapter on the importance of revelatory communication between God and man and a follow-up chapter examining the visitation of the Father and the Son. Though he isolates the primary accounts of the visitation of the Father and the Son and those of Moroni for special scrutiny, Cheesman also cites evidences for a numerous host of other angelic visitors who came to enlighten the Prophet in conjunction with the translation of the Book of Mormon.

For the reader who is interested in the mechanics of the translation of the Book of Mormon, Dr. Cheesman has produced *the* handbook. The use of the Urim and Thummim, descriptions of that instrument, an examination of the possible methods employed in translating, the time involved in that process, and the respective scribes who aided the Prophet have been spelled out in detail. The various manuscripts of the Book of Mormon have likewise been traced with expertise. Extensive coverage is given to Joseph Smith's personal descriptions of his experiences in producing the Book of Mormon text through the help of the Lord.

In a well-formulated concluding chapter, Dr. Cheesman analyzes the importance of the Prophet's earliest visions at the outset of the restoration. He then cements Joseph's witness with a succession of personal testimonies by his close associates. One of the most significant features of the volume is the inclusion of an extensive appendix containing verbatim accounts of both the First Vision and also early descriptions of the appearances of Moroni. Some of these were recorded at the direction of the Prophet himself and others by contemporaries who obtained their information firsthand from the mouth of Joseph. One of these appendixes, Appendix E, "Wentworth Letter," has an introductory paragraph explaining the origin of the letter with the comment, "Mr. Wentworth was to furnish a Mr. Bastow, his friend, with a copy of this summary [a brief account of the rise of Mormonism by the Prophet] to be used in a history of New Hampshire, which Mr. Bastow was to publish" (p. 165). It might be insightful to note that rather than "Bastow" the man's name was "Barstow," George Barstow. George Barstow did write his *The History of New Hampshire* in 1842, but elected not to include any mention of the Prophet's early residence in New Hampshire nor his participation in the later birth of Mormonism.

Although the table of contents in this publication is quite replete, the reader will miss having an index in the back to assist him in locating the fine points—of which there are a substantial number.

Students of the scriptures, historians, and the casual reader will appreciate having this exceptional resource at their fingertips. It serves as a ready reference to the earliest visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith and constitutes a substantive commentary on the emergence of the Book of Mormon.