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Overview of the Book of Mormon

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Title

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Abstract Review of *Overview of the Book of Mormon* (1991), by Zarahemla Research Foundation.

***Overview of the Book of Mormon.* Independence, MO: Zarahemla Research Foundation, 1991. 16 pp. \$3.00.**

Reviewed by Larry K. Smith

The Zarahemla Research Foundation (ZRF), based in Independence, Missouri, has published an overview of impressive quality and content. The overview is an attractive sixteen-page, full-color booklet with ample illustrations.

In the opening section about what the Book of Mormon is, three groups of people are mentioned, two which kept records (the Jaredites and the Nephites) and one which did not (the Mulekites). Another page is devoted to the purposes of the Book of Mormon (as outlined on its title page) and explanations of how we got the Book of Mormon and why we should read it (e.g., "it contains firsthand accounts of the ministry of the resurrected Jesus and gives additional insights into the principles of the gospel" [p. 4]).

In a section entitled "The Importance of Covenants in the Restoration of the House of Israel," we are informed that the authors of the Book of Mormon were Hebrews who used reformed Egyptian characters in their writing, but that "most, if not all, of their Hebrew thought patterns, idioms, sentence structure, cultural content and poetry were preserved in our literal English translation" (p. 5). The concept of covenants is a central one in this overview. "It is very significant that the Book of Mormon begins and ends with the concept of the covenant. . . . Today we associate the name Mormon . . . with the restoring of covenants. . . . Therefore, the name, the Book of Mormon, symbolically means the Book of the Restoration of the Covenants" (p. 5). This section concludes with, "The Lord has prepared a great endowment of spiritual power to be poured out in the near future. Those who understand and keep their covenant with the Lord . . . will be ready to receive this spiritual power to accomplish the perfect will of God" (p. 5).

A book-by-book summary in outline form of the Book of Mormon takes six of the sixteen pages. It lists the author(s) of

each book and indicates the approximate dates corresponding to each book along with the major events and doctrinal points. The summary helps clear up some easily misunderstood chronology by detailing which sections of Mosiah are flashbacks and where different sections take place.

Although consensus is growing among Latter-day Saint scholars that the geographic location for the events of the Book of Mormon was Mesoamerica, the proposition is not undisputed nor is it official doctrine. However, the ZRF overview asserts without reservation that "the Book of Mormon took place in the area known as Mesoamerica" (p. 9). A map of the physical features of Mesoamerica is overlaid with labels for the lands of Desolation, Bountiful, Zarahemla, and Nephi as well as the West Sea (North), the West Sea (South), and the East Sea. A time line shows the duration of various civilizations and depicts the records they kept. The authors of the overview apparently feel the evidence for a Mesoamerican setting for the Book of Mormon is strong enough to preclude the need for lengthy debate on the issue.

Another page summarizes the different sections of the Book of Mormon records. Included are the portion of the large plates of Nephi that were translated (the 116 pages which were lost), the unabridged small plates of Nephi, the Words of Mormon, the abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, the abridgment of the gold plates kept by the Jaredites, the book of Moroni, the sealed portion, and the brass plates Lehi brought from Jerusalem. For each section, the authors, dates, names of the corresponding books in the Book of Mormon, and major doctrinal points are listed.

A passage from Nephi's vision (1 Nephi 3:185–88, ZRF *Study Book of Mormon*; 1 Nephi 13:35–37, LDS edition) is quoted (without attribution) on the back cover to impress on the reader the important destiny of the Book of Mormon record (to be hid up and then come forth unto the Gentiles).

Although the illustrations are large, colorful, and uncluttered, the overview is aimed at adults rather than children. On the whole, it is quite well organized and informative and would be very helpful to a person new to the Book of Mormon.