

MISGUIDED ZEAL AND DEFENSE OF THE CHURCH

(EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

Editor's Note: This paper is a summary of information presented in the full paper, Misguided Zeal and Defense of the Church. If you are interested in a longer exposition on the matters covered here, please see the full paper. It is available in PDF format at http://www.fairlds.org/Book_of_Mormon/MisguidedF.pdf.

The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) is a volunteer organization that provides well-researched, well-documented answers to questions and criticisms directed at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

FAIR provides an “Ask the Apologist” service to which people frequently send questions. In recent months many well-meaning individuals have asked why FAIR has not endorsed *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography*, a DVD created and promoted by Rodney Meldrum.¹ To those unfamiliar with DNA science, population genetics, and the historical facts, the information presented in the DVD may appear plausible and welcome.

After reviewing the material, examining the existing Latter-day Saint and scientific literature, and consulting experts in the relevant fields, FAIR cannot support or endorse Mr. Meldrum's theories or presentation. FAIR has unreservedly concluded the following:

- Mr. Meldrum has attempted to assert revelation for those outside of his stewardship, and has used that revelation as a substitute for solid scholarship.
- The DVD contains much material that is misrepresented because the author is unfamiliar with the large body of work that addresses the very topics he seeks to address.
- The DVD plants erroneous concepts and expectations in the minds of viewers, making them easier targets for hostile critics when these errors are inevitably trumpeted by enemies of the Church.

Mr. Meldrum appears sincere in his beliefs about the Book of Mormon. We are worried, however, by the means Mr. Meldrum uses to promote his beliefs. We have therefore concluded that Mr. Meldrum's theories should be publicly addressed. The following sections

¹ Rod Meldrum, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography: New scientific support for the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon; Correlation and Verification through DNA, Prophetic, Scriptural, Historical, Climatological, Archaeological, Social, and Cultural Evidence* (Rod Meldrum, 2008), DVD. The DVD is in sections; citations in this paper reference the DVD's section number and title, followed by an approximate time stamp from the DVD.

provide a broad overview of some of the theological problems we see. For a more detailed examination, we commend the full paper, *Misguided Zeal and Defense of the Church*.

IS THERE A REVEALED GEOGRAPHY?

Leaders of the Church have long been clear that there is no “revealed geography” for the Book of Mormon.² Neither Joseph Smith nor any of his successors gave any revelation about where the Book of Mormon took place, save to place it in the western hemisphere.

In his presentation, Mr. Medrum spends four hours giving the impression that a verifiable geography has now been located. He infers endorsement by “geneticists, General Authorities, scientists, stake presidents, mission presidents [and] patriarchs”³ and includes positive comments from an emeritus General Authority Seventy. His references to people holding responsible Church offices are clearly intended to suggest that servants of the Lord endorse his presentation, even though no express endorsement is made.

Even if all of these people gave Mr. Meldrum’s work their explicit encouragement and approval, which they do not, it would make no difference. In the 1950s Elder Mark E. Peterson noted that

We have had speculation, for instance, on the part of some with respect to Book of Mormon geography, and it is plain, unadulterated speculation and not doctrine. And if a General Authority has speculated on Book of Mormon geography he did not represent the view of the Church while doing so.⁴

ASSERTING A DIVINELY REVEALED GEOGRAPHY

Mr. Meldrum claims that God has chosen to “re-establish...Joseph Smith as the preeminent scholar on the subject of Book of Mormon geography.”⁵ It is easy to conclude from such a statement that Mr. Meldrum believes Joseph Smith gave revealed answers to the issue of Book of Mormon geography and that the Church has ignored those revelatory insights—otherwise he would see no need to “re-establish Joseph Smith.” Mr. Meldrum therefore takes it upon himself to correct the Church and our leaders, who for more than a century have taught that Joseph Smith never revealed a geography.

² “The Church has not taken an official position with regard to location of geographical places” of the Book of Mormon. See John E. Clark, “Book of Mormon Geography,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, Vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 178.

³ See the marketing information on the back of the DVD’s packaging.

⁴ Mark E. Petersen, “Revelation,” address to religious educators, 24 August 1954; cited in *Charge to Religious Educators* (Salt Lake City: Church Educational System and The Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-day Saints, 1982), 136–137; cited in *Determining Doctrine: A Reference Guide for Evaluating Doctrinal Truth*, edited by Dennis B. Horne (Roy, Utah: Eborn Books, 2005), 315.

⁵ Rodney Meldrum, “Update and Request to Serve on the FIRM FOUNDATION Counsel,” e-mail dated 9 May 2008.

By implication Mr. Meldrum leads people to conclude that he is restoring revelatory insights lost to the Church and its leaders for more than a century. In an e-mail letter to his supporters, Mr. Meldrum wrote:

Within 48 hours the Lord provided the answer to how this was to be accomplished... What a tremendous blessing!... Within 48 hours again the Lord provided another ‘miracle’... *So the Lord is watching out for this project!*⁶

While Mr. Meldrum may be the private beneficiary of God’s miracles, it is not appropriate to publicly reference such miracles as evidence for God’s support and endorsement of his efforts.

He then goes on to claim that he received a blessing from an emeritus Church authority that divinely sanctions his work. Mr. Meldrum insists that the blessings received by him and his wife affirms “the validity [of] the...work in which we are engaged.”⁷ Most Latter-day Saints know that the recitation of a blessing to others with the intention of convincing them that one’s course is in harmony with the powers of heaven is absolutely forbidden by scripture.

Mr. Meldrum also states that the blessing promised his information will go out to millions and the Saints will “declare anew the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁸ Of course, it would only need to be declared *anew* if it weren’t being declared *now*, something that should astonish any missionary-minded Latter-day Saint.

The bottom line is that if a Book of Mormon geography were to be divinely revealed, such a revelation will not come through Mr. Meldrum or anyone else other than he who has the keys and authority to receive revelation for the Church: Thomas S. Monson.

DISMISSING THE SCHOLARS

It is no secret that for the past fifty years the general consensus of most LDS scholars has been that the setting for the Book of Mormon was in Central America—a view with which Mr. Meldrum disagrees and which his revelations cause him to dismiss.

One organization that has been key in providing secular evidences for the veracity of the Book of Mormon has been the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), recently renamed the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. FARMS started as an independent organization in 1979 and was asked to become a part of BYU in 1997 by President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Mr. Meldrum has been asked by people what FARMS thinks of his theories. In his e-mail to supporters he discussed this issue and stated that “after much prayer, I know that we are

⁶ Rodney Meldrum, e-mail (9 May 2008), emphasis added.

⁷ Rodney Meldrum, e-mail (9 May 2008).

⁸ Rodney Meldrum, e-mail (9 May 2008).

not to attempt to ‘convert’ FARMS.”⁹ The implication from such a statement is that God told Mr. Meldrum, by revelation, what to do about FARMS. Mr. Meldrum’s previous revelations removed the need for him to engage the existing body of scholarly research; this revelation removes the need to even deal with the scholars themselves.

POISONING THE WELL

Mr. Meldrum doesn’t stop there, however. He not only cuts himself off from the scholars, but seeks to turn his audiences away from the scholars, as well. He accuses “the scholarly community of the Church” of “dismissing Joseph Smith” and by so doing helping anti-Mormons.¹⁰ He also implicitly charges Church leaders with wasting Church funds through research targeted at Central America.¹¹

In his presentation Mr. Meldrum quotes several examples of how he feels the scholarly community has fallen in “discounting or disdaining Joseph’s knowledge.”¹² Yet, these examples are consistent with the Church’s long-standing position that there was no Book of Mormon geography revealed to Joseph Smith or his successors.

To Mr. Meldrum, current LDS scholar’s views are heretical and, notwithstanding the consistent position of the leaders of the Church, he misuses a quote by President Hinckley to portray the scholars as those who “would pluck the fruit from the tree while cutting off the root from which it grows.”¹³ In other words, he misuses the words of a prophet to poison the well against existing LDS scholarship.

MORE INFORMATION

FAIR is troubled by Mr. Meldrum’s public claims to divine guidance and revelation to fortify his theories. We are also disturbed by the fact that such claims are outside the normal revelatory channels for the Church, and yet Mr. Meldrum seeks to apply them to the Church as a whole.

What Mr. Meldrum is doing is unique in our experience. Because of the likelihood that his presentation will mislead Latter-day Saints who are not familiar with the scholarship, it is within FAIR’s mission to address Mr. Meldrum’s claims. Were FAIR to be silent in the face

⁹ Rodney Meldrum, e-mail (9 May 2008).

¹⁰ Rodney Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 3, “Joseph Smith,” 36:18.

¹¹ “There’s been millions and millions of dollars spent in a vain attempt to show the Book of Mormon happened in Central America.” Rod Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 17, “Conclusion,” 4:20–4:45.

¹² Rodney Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 3, “Joseph Smith,” 36:45. Mr. Meldrum is citing, without attribution, Kenneth W. Godfrey, “The Zelph Story,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 29/ 2 (Spring 1989): 48. Mr. Meldrum also cites, without attribution, Matthew Roper, “Nephi’s Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations,” *FARMS Review of Books* 15/ 2 (2003): 91–128 and on-line author Jeff Lindsay, “Nugget #11: What Could Joseph Smith Have Known about Mesoamerica?” www.jefflindsay.com; on-line at <http://www.jefflindsay.com/bme11.shtml> (accessed 21 June 2008).

¹³ Gordon B. Hinckley, “Joseph Smith Jr.—Prophet of God, Mighty Servant,” *Ensign* (December 2005).

of Mr. Meldrum's claims, error could be perpetuated and silence could be incorrectly viewed as consent and concurrence.

To be clear, FAIR advocates no particular theory of Book of Mormon geography. Some of our members subscribe to one or the other, but refrain from imposing their opinions on Latter-day Saints as matters of testimony. In the near future FAIR will examine and respond to the arguments put forth by Mr. Meldrum to support his theories. These responses will be consistent with FAIR's mission to provide "documented responses that are written in an easily understandable style" and to "use current scholarship, scripture, Church doctrine, historical literature and sound logic in constructing faithful, well-reasoned answers."

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