



LATEST NEWS THE WEST UTAH ▼ SPORTS ▼ OPINION MAGAZINE IN DEPTH FAITH MORE ▼

UTAH

Debate renewed with change in Book of Mormon introduction

By Deseret News | Nov 8, 2007, 6:14pm MST

Carrie A. Moore



A one-word change in the introduction to a 2006 edition of the Book of Mormon has re-ignited discussion among some Latter-day Saints about the book's historicity, geography and the descendants of those chronicled within its pages.

The book is considered scripture by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and many lifelong members grew up believing that American Indians are direct descendants of ancient people in the book called Lamanites, who the book says built a civilization in the Americas between about 600 B.C. and 400 A.D.

Past LDS Church leaders, particularly former church President Spencer W. Kimball, have made such statements, which have been supported by the introduction page in the Book of Mormon. Past editions of that page say all of the people chronicled in the book "were destroyed, except the Lamanites, and they are the principal ancestors of the American Indians." The new introduction reads much the same, but says the Lamanites "are among the ancestors of the American Indians."



The change was made in the second edition published by Doubleday, a hard-cover book that eliminates the footnotes Latter-day Saints see in their church-published books. The Doubleday edition is designed to be "reader-friendly" for non-Latter-day Saints who are encountering the book for the first time.

Last year's change "takes into account details of Book of Mormon demography which are not known," according to church spokesman Mark Tuttle. "The change will be included in the next edition of the Book of Mormon printed by the church."

He said the introduction page in current LDS-produced books "was not part of the original text translated by Joseph Smith Jr.," adding it was written and published in 1981. The church declined comment on who wrote that version of the page.

Andrew Corbin, a senior editor at Doubleday, said the one-word change was specifically requested by the church for the second edition published in October 2006. "It's been out for quite a while, so if there are other questions about the text, the church can better answer that."

The change is significant for those who have questioned the book's claim to be a historical record of people who migrated to the Americas from Jerusalem, rather than a creation of LDS Church founder Joseph Smith, who said he translated it from plates given to him by an angel from God.

Claims in recent years by LDS anthropologist Thomas Murphy and former LDS molecular biologist Simon Southerton regarding the lack of a genetic connection to Hebrew blood in American Indians have caused spirited debate in some quarters about the book's origins.

Southerton, a former bishop living in Australia, was excommunicated from the church after his writings appeared. Murphy was threatened with church discipline over his writings.

Other Latter-day Saint scientists have challenged the assertions of both men, saying they draw conclusions well beyond those validated by existing data. Some observers

anthropologist said the change is welcome, although of minor consequence in the overall discussion regarding the Book of Mormon.

It "eliminates a certain minor embarrassment in the use of language, that's all," said John L. Sorensen, professor emeritus of anthropology at Brigham Young University, adding it has no impact on the substance of the book itself.

Sorensen's book, "An Ancient American setting for the Book of Mormon," outlines the "limited geography" theory and has become the definitive work to date on the topic among scholars. Its premise is that the book's characters lived within a fairly small region of Central America, rather than populating the entirety of North and South America, as some have speculated.

He said several LDS scholars have noted for decades that the assumption about "principal ancestors" was inaccurate.

The late Elder Richard L. Evans, a member of the church's Quorum of the Twelve from 1953 to 1971, described the Book of Mormon as "part of a record both sacred and secular of prophets and people, who (with supplementary groups), were among the ancestors of the American Indians." The description — approved by the church's First Presidency — was printed in a book titled "Religions of America," by Leo Rosten, which was first published in London in 1957 and subsequently reprinted in 1963 and 1975, Sorensen said.

With questions among LDS scholars about its accuracy, why didn't the change come sooner?

Sorensen said he believes it's simply "the principle of inertia." Such things are "not likely to be changed unless someone thinks there is something to be gained by making the change, or to be lost by not making the change."

"I don't think it means very much for anyone," he said. "The assumptions may have been and may be in the minds of some that the previous phrasing had substance to it. As a matter of fact, it was a sheer accident of someone — probably (Elder) Bruce

Another change in the book's introduction may be of interest to those who question whether Latter-day Saints are Christians, but church officials declined comment about when that change was made.

The second sentence of the introduction in many editions says the book is "a record of God's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains, as does the Bible, the fullness of the everlasting gospel."

The 2004 edition produced by Doubleday for non-Latter-day Saints omits the phrase, "as does the Bible." A church spokesman declined comment on when the change was first made or an explanation of why.

LDS leaders have long emphasized that the book is a second witness for Christ's gospel beyond what is contained in the Bible alone.

E-mail: carrie@desnews.com

Utah Today

Get all the news that's happening in the Beehive State in one place, as well as major national and world news that you value.



By signing up, you agree to our [Privacy Notice](#) and European users agree to the [data transfer policy](#).

Next Up In Utah

Report: Trump is considering a female running mate — possibly Kari Lake

Could Utah's 'diverse, crazy, cool' mineral landscape ease U.S. dependence on foreign imports?

What is a 'burn after reading' letter and why did Brian Laundrie have one?

Groups seek protections for this creature you can hold in your hand

Park City Mountain extends operations, plans to have longest season in 30 years

Most Popular



What's the sleep 'sweet spot' to boost longevity?

COMPANY

- [About Us](#)
- [Editorial Staff](#)
- [Careers](#)

REACH OUT

- [Contact Us](#)
- [Technical Support](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Send Us a Tip](#)
- [Do Not Sell My Info](#)

GET MORE

- [Newsletters](#)
- [Print Subscription](#)
- [iOS App](#)
- [Android App](#)
- [Deseret News Marathon](#)

CONNECT

- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)