

Solomon Spaulding's Manuscript

For many years I had heard that some people claimed that the Book of Mormon was not an original work, but was based on a story written by Solomon Spaulding about 20 years before the publication of the Book of Mormon. I have even read of people who have lost their testimony of the Book of Mormon after studying the Spaulding manuscript. However, for whatever reason, it had never occurred to me that the Spaulding manuscript was easily available for perusal. Then a couple of weeks ago I searched for it on the internet, and discovered that the whole thing is there¹, so I decided to look at it.

I have to admit, I have not read the Spaulding manuscript carefully. It is rather slow going, and although only about 140 pages long I am not interested in giving it a detailed study. I just wanted to see why it is claimed to be the origin of the Book of Mormon. And perhaps that goal is part of what made it hard to read. At first glance the only similarity is that it purports to be the history of people who lived in the Americas before Europeans came here. The differences are so many that I quickly lost all hope of finding any significant parallels between the Spaulding manuscript and the Book of Mormon².

So then I turned to a site which advocated the theory that the Spaulding manuscript is the original source of the Book of Mormon. As they laid out the similarities they had noticed I was rather impressed with the number of things they could cite. Without doing a careful study I would guess they are able to link about 10% of the Spaulding manuscript with about 5% of the Book of Mormon. I reread the Spaulding manuscript (again quickly) just to see where their facts fit in. Although some of the similarities are striking in isolation, in context they appear to be coincidences of situations between the two stories. The Spaulding manuscript is a sometimes humorous, sometimes historical fantasy. The Book of Mormon is an account of the dealings of God with men. The Spaulding manuscript revolves around tales of love, marriage, and battles. The Book of Mormon certainly has battles, but it revolves around the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, if one were to attempt to take the parallel points and reconstruct the Book of Mormon it would be nearly impossible, because the "parallels" are out of order and represent almost none of

1 A good source is <http://solomonspaulding.com/docs/rlds1885.htm>

2 Briefly, the first 40 pages or so of the Spaulding manuscript tell about the experiences of a group of Roman citizens shipwrecked in North America and their observations of the Indians; the remainder is largely devoted to the legends and traditions of some of those Indians.

the substance of the Book of Mormon.

Having said all of that, I reflected on my experience. I recognized that I had a bad spiritual feeling about the time I had spent on the Spaulding manuscript, and I realized I needed to understand why. The answer that came to me was very clear, and I would liken it to Nephi's warning in 2 Nephi 28:22.

And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell, and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none - and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.

Curiosity may lead one to look at the Spaulding manuscript and its apologists, as I was lead. However, any time spent studying the theories is time spent on the devil's ground, although cloaked in the appearance of research. Such things as the Spaulding manuscript are decoys designed to sidetrack us from the study of the word of God. I do not believe that archeology will ever give a satisfactory "proof" - or even basis - for the Book of Mormon. The only proof is to pray about it and receive the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

From an intellectual standpoint I am glad that I have now seen the Spaulding manuscript. When I first considered writing about it I considered quite lengthy arguments I could make against it being any sort of origin of the Book of Mormon. However, prayer and meditation made me realize that that is not the Lord's way. Just as there is no need of, nor benefit from, an external proof of the Book of Mormon, we should be very careful about our efforts to disprove the opposing theories. If the Book of Mormon is true, and I know that it is, then it is entirely sufficient to speak in its own defense, along with the testimony of the Holy Ghost.

So I return to an invitation I have made elsewhere. If anyone wonders about the origin or worth of the Book of Mormon I would encourage such a person to read the book with care, reflection, and attention to the spiritual promptings thus received. As one does this he or she will receive the same sure testimony that I and millions of others have received, and will be blessed for their efforts.