



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

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Title

Author(s) John M. Beck

Reference *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5/1 (1993): 109-12.

ISSN 1050-7930 (print), 2168-3719 (online)

Abstract Review of *The Grand Design: America from Columbus to Zion* (1992), by E. Douglas Clark.

E. Douglas Clark, *The Grand Design: America from Columbus to Zion*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992. vii + 220 pp., with subject index. \$11.95.

Reviewed by John M. Beck

This volume addresses the spiritual roots of America's discovery, colonization, and destiny. According to Clark, the Book of Mormon is the one source that provides clarity in describing the prophetic history and mission of America. Indeed, the Book of Mormon, according to Clark, will save America.

Prepared as a study to celebrate the quincentennial discovery of America by Columbus, Clark expounds on Columbus's discovery, American colonization, the Revolutionary War, independence, the Constitution, and conditions for residency in America. President Ezra Taft Benson's teachings about the grand design of America have greatly influenced the writing of this book:

As one looks back upon what we call our history, there is a telling theme that occurs again and again in this drama. It is that God governs in the affairs of this nation. As the late President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., said, "This is the great motif which runs through our whole history."¹

This book is well worth reading. Clark has produced an attractive, well-organized, and extensively researched book. His bibliography includes some 200 entries. Among his list are many of the finest authors of American history, such as Boorstin, Bowen, Burns, Catton, Commager, Cousins, Flexner, Handlin, Morrison, Morris, Nibley, de Tocqueville, Tuchman, and Wood. These various sources are quoted extensively throughout the book to support the thesis that the Book of Mormon text explains the real destiny of America.

Clark's extensive documentation provides the reader with the following conclusions:

1. North America has existed as a land hidden away and protected by God (pp. 8-15).
2. Columbus was foreordained to discover America. His motivation for this mission, including his voyage, was di-

¹ Ezra Taft Benson, *Our Nation Shall Endure* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 12.

vinely inspired. He literally fulfills Book of Mormon prophecy (pp. 16–38).

3. Seeking religious freedom, the American colonists had the power of God with them. They were successful in delivering themselves out of the hands of despotic rulers (pp. 39–40).

4. Columbus and the early colonists encountered Indians who believed in the return of white men. The devastating plight of the Lamanites was a result of the “wrath of God” (1 Nephi 13:14) (pp. 51–62).

5. Any student of American history knows the many and varied interpretations of the reasons for the American Revolution.² Was this marvelous revolution a result of socioeconomic forces, a struggle between liberty and tyranny, or merely a social or an intellectual movement? Clark addresses the issues of a prophesied revolution based on scripture, a revolution with the blessings of God for protection and deliverance. This protection eventually centers upon Washington and his experience as commander-in-chief. Not only is God’s hand upon him, but that of his angels as well, as stated by Elder Orson Hyde.³ Washington indeed became a modern-day Captain Moroni (pp. 63–87).

6. The Founding Fathers were deeply religious men, raised up by God to write and establish the Constitution. These were men of morals and virtue. They were the best men available for this assignment upon the face of the earth (pp. 88–108).

7. The latter-day establishment of America was a consequence of the fulfillment of Abraham’s covenant with God. This grand and glorious design was for the benefit of all mankind. Joseph Smith was raised up to lay the foundation of the gospel (pp. 109–29).

8. God’s latter-day plan included gathering the Lamanites, teaching them, and ultimately bringing them to the gospel. They will yet see great days of glory and promise (pp. 130–44).

9. The Book of Mormon decreed the condition for residency in America. Many early American colonists also realized their actions were accountable to God. The American republic will only function and prosper based on the principles of virtue,

² See George A. Billias, ed., *The American Revolution—How Revolutionary Was It?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1970).

³ *JD* 6:368.

morality, and religion. The citizenry must serve God to be free from bondage (pp. 145–59).

10. The Book of Mormon clearly prophesied the problems of our day: secret combinations, pride, the collapse of moral values, and greed. The Founding Fathers also spoke out on many of these problems. The Book of Mormon is the instrument prepared by God to save latter-day America (pp. 160–78).

11. America will become the site of the New Jerusalem. This is the land of Zion. The Garden of Eden and Enoch's Zion city were once here on this land. Enoch's city will return and join latter-day Zion. Zion is not only a place but a sociospiritual condition requisite for Saints who desire a place in Zion. As a people we must strengthen the family, protect the Constitution, and read the Book of Mormon (pp. 179–203).

Weaknesses of the Book

Clark's prologue and epilogue are especially well written. However, a flaw in the book is his lack of synthesis and interpretation within the text. This style nearly represents a textbook, with statements by the author interspersed with lengthy quotations substantiating the author's thesis. It appears that critical evaluation and judgment is left to the reader. Clark could have greatly enhanced each chapter with a short conclusion or synthesis of major points discussed.

In several areas this book does not go far enough. A case in point is chapter 9, "Condition of Residency on the Choice Land." Clark here misses the bull's-eye when he fails to quote the prophetic teaching of Mosiah 29 in the Book of Mormon. In fact, this timely discourse is not mentioned in Clark's book. What greater discourse is there in the book of Mormon about public and private virtue—a warning of the "tyranny of the majority?"

Also the *Federalist Papers* represent some of the finest writings on the morality and virtue taught by the Founding Fathers. *Federalist Papers* numbers 10 and 39 are particularly impressive and could have been more widely quoted in the book.

A major weakness is that Clark ignores the issue of a limited geographical setting for the Book of Mormon people.⁴ He should have addressed the scholarship available on this point

4 John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1985).

and then presented his arguments as to why he believes North America has received great blessings while Central and South America have experienced generally less. It would also have been instructional for him to say how North America becomes a part of the "promised land" of the Nephites.

Conclusion

This type of historical writing has its place in the Church. The danger is in using folklore and unsubstantiated stories to promote an agenda, which Clark has done a good job in avoiding. The plus side of this type of book, if it is well researched and documented, is that it can show God's hand in the affairs of men and nations. Clark offers food for thought. He should especially be given credit for tackling the difficult quotation of Orson Hyde on Columbus and Moroni (p. 219).⁵ Reading this book brings added meaning to the statement by President Ezra Taft Benson:

The restoration of the gospel and the establishment of the Lord's church could not come to pass until the founding fathers were raised up and completed their foreordained missions. Those great souls who were responsible for the freedoms we enjoy acknowledged the guiding hand of providence. For their efforts we are indebted, but we are even more indebted to our Father in Heaven and to His son, Jesus Christ. How fortunate we are to live when the blessings of liberty and the gospel of Jesus Christ are both available to us.⁶

⁵ *JD* 6:378; 7:107.

⁶ Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 604.