

LESSON 1 "The Keystone of Our Religion"

OVERVIEW: The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion. Many witnesses have testified of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon was written for our day. The Book of Mormon will bring us closer to God.

Biblical Prophecy

The prophet Ezekiel recorded the following: *"The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand."* (Ezekiel 37:15-17)

What are these sticks Ezekiel speaks of? The Bible Cyclopaedia says that "ancient writings were rolled round a cylinder or stick." Ezekiel writes of two sticks or writings. The first writing is for Judah. The Bible is primarily a record of the tribe of Judah or the Jews. Ezekiel speaks of a second record for Joseph. Nephi says that he and his family are descendants of Joseph (1 Nephi 6:2). Thus, the Book of Mormon is a writing of the tribe of Joseph. As Ezekiel prophesied, these two records have become one in the hands of modern missionaries as they go out to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Prior to his death, Jacob called his sons together and gave each of them a blessing. In his blessing to Joseph, he said that Joseph would be *"a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall"* (Genesis 49:22). He also said that these blessings to Joseph would extend *"unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills"* (Genesis 49:26). This is a great blessing given to Jacob's favored son. We see its fulfillment in the Book of Mormon. Joseph became exceedingly fruitful through the descendants of Lehi. And where did they dwell? The land of the "everlasting hills." The Americas. Is there not a spine of "everlasting hills" that runs through North and South America?

Isaiah beheld the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Isaiah saw in vision a place like Ariel or Jerusalem. He saw that the inhabitants of this place would *"be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust"* (Isaiah 29:4). The Book of Mormon came forth from the "ground." Many converts testify that the Book of Mormon brought them into the Church because they found there "a familiar spirit" of truth.

Later in this same chapter, Isaiah made this prophecy, *"And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned"* (Isaiah 29:11-12). In February, 1828, Martin Harris took a copy of a few of the characters on the plates and the accompanying translation to a Professor Charles Anthon in New York City. When Martin reported the source of the characters, Anthon suggested that Martin bring the plates to him for translation. Martin replied that part of the plates were sealed and he was forbidden to bring them. Dr. Anthon replied, "I cannot read a sealed book." Joseph Smith was the one who was "not learned." He accomplished this remarkable translation in a relatively short period of time through the power of God.

The Savior, himself, taught of the Book of Mormon peoples during his ministry. He said, *"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd"* (John 10:14-16). After his resurrection, the Savior appeared to his followers on the American continent and taught them, *"And verily I say unto you, that ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. And they understood me not, for they supposed it had been the Gentiles; for they understood not that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching"* (3 Nephi 15:21-22)

The purposes of the Book of Mormon: An independent witness that Jesus is the Christ. A second witness to the verity of the Bible. God who has directed that we prove all things and hold fast that which is good granted us the Book of Mormon as tangible proof that Joseph Smith is a prophet. The Book of Mormon stands as proof that God is in reality the same yesterday, today and forever. Myriad conflicting doctrines claim parentage from the Bible, thus dramatizing the need for an independent source – one of pure lineage, a lineage that traces itself directly from God to prophet to man – a source which the pen of man has neither added to nor taken from, so that the gospel in its purity might be known. In the providence of God the Book of Mormon has been ordained as the scriptural testimony which gathers Israel to the faith of their ancient fathers. The spiritual power and purity of doctrine in the Book of Mormon can bring a man nearer to God than any other book.

Some of the doctrines taught by the Book of Mormon include: Jesus as the Son of God; Jesus as the Christ; Christ as the promised Messiah; The Fall of Adam; the Plan of Salvation; The Atonement; the Resurrection; the Spirit World; the necessity of ordinances; the doctrine of justification (including the relationship between grace and works); the gathering of Israel; continual revelation. (Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Joseph Fielding McConkie & Robert Millet)

(In the October 1982 General Conference, Elder Boyd K. Packer said: “You should know also that by recent decision of the Brethren the Book of Mormon will henceforth bear the title: ‘The Book of Mormon,’ with the subtitle, ‘Another Testament of Jesus Christ.’ CR, Oct, 1982, p. 75)

(Neal A. Maxwell said: “One reason to ‘search the scriptures’ is to discover these sudden luxuriant meadows of meaning, these green pastures to nourish us in our individual times of need. The Book of Mormon surely has its share and more of these...For my part, I am glad the book will be with us ‘as long as the earth shall stand.’ I need and want additional time. For me, towers, courtyards, and wings await inspection. My tour of it has never been completed. Some rooms I have yet to enter, and there are more flaming fireplaces waiting to warm me. Even the rooms I have glimpsed contain further furnishings and rich detail yet to be savored. There are panels inlaid with incredible insights and design and décor dating from Eden. There are also sumptuous banquet tables painstakingly prepared by predecessors which await all of us. Yet, we as Church members sometimes behave like hurried tourists, scarcely venturing beyond the entry hall to the mansion. May we come to feel as a whole people beckoned beyond the entry hall. May we go inside far enough to hear clearly the whispered truths from those who have ‘slumbered,’ which whisperings will awaken in us individually the life a discipleship as never before.” (“The Book of Mormon: A Great Answer to ‘The Great Question’, pp. 13-16))

A BRIEF EXPLANATION ABOUT THE BOOK OF MORMON

1) What portions of the Book of Mormon did Mormon write?

A careful reading of the “explanation” reveals that Mormon abridged the large plates of Nephi from the Book of Mosiah until he recorded his own history in the Book of Mormon. Therefore, he is responsible for pages 143 – 481 in the English edition. This represents a total of 338 pages out of 531, or just over 3/5 of the Book of Mormon.

2) What portions were abridged and which were not?

1 Nephi 2 Nephi Jacob Enos Jarom Omni	These six books represent unabridged records made on the small plates of Nephi by the prophets whose names are listed.
Words of Mormon	This book represents Mormon’s insert signifying the transition between the unabridged small plates and his abridgment of the large plates of Nephi. (See Words of Mormon 1:3-5)
Mosiah Alma Helaman 3 Nephi 4 Nephi Mormon (chap. 1-7)	These six books represent Mormon’s abridgement of the large plates of Nephi and his own unabridged record.
Mormon (chap. 8-9) Ether Moroni	This portion represents Moroni’s work to finish the record. The Book of Ether is abridged by him (See Mormon 8:1).

(Hugh Nibley said: In the reading of the Book of Mormon no one is ever doing something he shouldn’t be doing. Most of the time he would be doing probably the best thing he could possibly be doing. If it is not itself the best thing to be doing, it will quickly put you onto the best thing to be doing because it will have a direct effect on you. It will change you; it will work on you. It is a personal, intimate document. It will hit you. You can’t just read the Book of Mormon and nothing else. It immediately puts you on the high road to what you should be doing, like no other book. And it will lead you directly into a course of thought or a course of action of the greatest significance to yourself and to the world you live in. When you read the Book of Mormon, every sentence is a whole proposition, and it presents a number of possibilities. It may or may not contain a vast amount of information (that’s for you to find out.). We have in writing here for us a most choice document. It’s not like any other book in existence. It’s not like anything else. It is a standing revelation, a standing miracle, as we have it here. No one could have produced this book of a thousand years, covering every phase of the cultural, historical, intellectual, literary aspects. What a miracle of condensation, as we will see! But the point is that it’s not just written as a tour de force to show it can be done. Every word of it is significant. It’s meant for us, it’s directed to us, and it’s very urgent that we know this. Since we are told how carefully it has been edited, with a particular audience in mind, we must assume that every sentence in it has significance for us. They couldn’t afford to waste anything. The Book of Mormon tells us there are four things that everyone is after. The four things everybody seeks for in the Book of Mormon are wealth, power, popularity, and the lusts of the flesh (plenty of sex and all the rest of it.) Teachings of the Book of Mormon, 1:2, 7, 13, 45,

68. But King Benjamin puts things in proper perspective: Mosiah 4:11 - And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have ^atasted of his love, and have received a ^bremission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own ^cnothingness, and his ^dgoodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of ^ehumility, ^fcalling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing ^gsteadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel. If we can just remember that we need to rely totally on God and that we are nothing without him, we'll probably be just fine.)

SCRIPTURES:

1 Nephi 13: 38 And it came to pass that I beheld the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the ^abook of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew, that it came forth from the Gentiles ^bunto the remnant of the seed of my brethren.

39 And after it had come forth unto them I beheld ^aother ^bbooks, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the ^cconvincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are ^dtrue.

40 And the angel spake unto me, saying: These ^alast records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles (Book of Mormon), shall ^bestablish the truth of the ^cfirst, (The Bible) which are of the ^dtwelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the ^eSavior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.

41 And they must come according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; and the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed (Book of Mormon), as well as in the ^arecords of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Bible); wherefore they both shall be established in ^bone; for there is ^cone God and one ^dShepherd over all the earth.

1 Nephi 19: 23 And I did read many things unto them which were written in the ^abooks of Moses (Old Testament); but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet ^bIsaiah; for I did ^cliken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our ^dprofit and learning.

2 Nephi 25: 21 Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I ^awrite (Book of Mormon) shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation, that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never ^bperish as long as the earth should stand.

22 Wherefore, these things shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand (The Book of Mormon will last through the Millennium); and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God; and the nations who shall possess them shall be ^ajudged of them according to the words which are written.

2 Nephi 27: 22 Wherefore, when thou hast read the words which I have commanded thee, and obtained the ^awitnesses (Others to witness the plates) which I have promised unto thee, then shalt thou seal up the book again, and hide it up unto me, that I may preserve the words which thou hast not read, until I shall see fit in mine own ^bwisdom to ^creveal all things unto the children of men.

2 Nephi 29: 6 Thou fool, that shall say: A ^aBible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews?

7 Know ye not that there are more ^anations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the ^bisles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the ^cearth beneath; and I bring forth my ^dword unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?

8 Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the ^atestimony of ^btwo nations is a ^cwitness unto you that I am God, that I remember one ^dnation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two ^enations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.

9 And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the ^asame yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my ^bwords according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one ^cword ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my ^dwork is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever.

Mormon 8: 26 And no one need say they shall not come, for they surely shall, for the Lord hath spoken it; for ^aout of the earth shall they come, by the hand of the Lord, and none can stay it; and it shall come in a day when it shall be said that ^bmiracles are done away; and it shall come even as if one should speak ^cfrom the dead.

27 And it shall come in a day when the ^ablood of saints shall cry unto the Lord, because of secret ^bcombinations and the works of darkness.

28 Yea, it shall come in a day when the power of God shall be ^adenied, and ^bchurches become defiled and be ^clifted up in the pride of their hearts; yea, even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers shall rise in the pride of their hearts, even to the envying of them who belong to their churches.

29 Yea, it shall come in a day when ^athere shall be heard of fires, and tempests, and ^bvapors of smoke in foreign lands;

30 And there shall also be heard of ^awars, rumors of wars, and earthquakes in divers places.

31 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be great ^apollutions upon the face of the earth; there shall be ^bmurders, and robbing, and lying, and deceivings, and whoredoms, and all manner of abominations; when there shall be many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it ^cmattereth not, for the Lord will ^duphold such at the last day. But wo unto such, for they are in the ^egall of bitterness and in the ^fbonds of iniquity.

32 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be ^achurches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins.

33 O ye wicked and perverse and ^astiffnecked people, why have ye built up churches unto yourselves to get ^bgain? Why have ye ^ctransfigured the holy word of God, that ye might bring ^ddamnation upon your souls? Behold, look ye unto the ^erevelations of God; for behold, the time cometh at that day when all these things must be fulfilled.

34 Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.

35 Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.

36 And I know that ye do ^awalk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not ^blift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of ^cvery fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.

37 For behold, ye do love ^amoney, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

38 O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have

ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ^aashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that ^bmisery which never dies—because of the ^cpraise of the world?

39 Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?

40 Yea, why do ye build up your ^asecret abominations to get gain, and cause that widows should mourn before the Lord, and also orphans to mourn before the Lord, and also the blood of their fathers and their husbands to cry unto the Lord from the ground, for vengeance upon your heads?

41 Behold, the sword of vengeance hangeth over you; and the time soon cometh that he avengeth the ^ablood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer.

Ether 5: 2 And behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto ^athose who shall assist to bring forth this work;

3 And unto ^athree (three witnesses) shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall ^bknow of a surety that these things are ^ctrue. (Moroni is writing and is telling Joseph what he will do. Moroni will be coming to show the plates to three witnesses.)

4 And in the mouth of three ^awitnesses shall these things be established; and the ^btestimony of three, and this work, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record—and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day.

Moroni 1: 4 Wherefore, I write a few more things, contrary to that which I had supposed; for I had supposed not to have written any more; but I write a few more things, that perhaps they may be of ^aworth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day, according to the will of the Lord.

Moroni 10: 3 Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how ^amerciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ^bponder it in your ^chearts.

4 And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ^aask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not ^btrue; and if ye shall ask with a ^csincere heart, with ^dreal intent, having ^efaith in Christ, he will ^fmanifest the ^gtruth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

5 And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may ^aknow the ^btruth of all things.

D&C 10: 45 Behold, there are many things engraven upon the ^aplates of Nephi which do throw greater views upon my gospel; therefore, it is wisdom in me that you should ^btranslate this first part of the engravings of Nephi, and send forth in this work.

46 And, behold, all the remainder of this work does contain all those parts of my ^agospel which my holy prophets, yea, and also my disciples, ^bdesired in their prayers should come forth unto this people.

D&C 20: 8 And ^agave him power from on high, by the ^bmeans which were before prepared (The Urim and Thummim), to translate the Book of Mormon;

9 Which contains a ^arecord of a fallen people, and the ^bfulness of the ^cgospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also;

10 Which was given by inspiration, and is confirmed to ^aothers by the ministering of angels, and is ^bdeclared unto the world by them—

11 Proving to the world that the holy scriptures are ^atrue, and that God does ^binspire men and call them to his ^choly work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old;

12 Thereby showing that he is the ^asame God yesterday, today, and ^bforever. Amen.

D&C 84: 54 And your ^aminds in times past have been ^bdarkened because of ^cunbelief, and because you have treated ^dlightly the things you have received—

55 Which ^avanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation.

56 And this condemnation resteth upon the children of ^aZion, even all.

57 And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new ^acovenant, even the ^bBook of Mormon and the ^cformer commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to ^ddo according to that which I have written—

58 That they may bring forth ^afruit meet for their Father's kingdom; otherwise there remaineth a ^bscourge and judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion.

(The Title Page of the Book of Mormon: The Prophet Joseph Smith declared; “The title page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates. History of the Church, 1:71. Since it was the last leaf, or page, of the record, and the title page says the Book of Mormon was sealed by the hand of Moroni, it is believed that the title page was written by Moroni. Book of Mormon, Student Manual Religion 121 and 122, p. 1.)

THE
BOOK OF MORMON
AN ACCOUNT WRITTEN BY
THE HAND OF MORMON
UPON PLATES

TAKEN FROM THE PLATES OF NEPHI

Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites—Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile—Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—**Sealed by the hand of Moroni**, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile (Joseph Smith was of the Tribe of Ephraim. At the same time the Prophet was of the Gentiles, meaning that he was a citizen of a Gentile nation. MD, p.311)—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven—(Purpose of the book:) Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever— And also **to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD**, manifesting himself unto all nations—And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.

TRANSLATED BY JOSEPH SMITH, JUN.
First English edition published in 1830

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains, as does the Bible, the fulness of the everlasting gospel.

The book was written by many ancient prophets by the spirit of prophecy and revelation. Their words, written on gold plates, were quoted and abridged by a prophet-historian named Mormon. The record gives an account of two great civilizations. One came from Jerusalem in 600 B.C., and afterward separated into two nations, known as the Nephites and the Lamanites. The other came much earlier when the Lord confounded the tongues at the Tower of Babel. This group is known as the Jaredites. After thousands of years, all were destroyed except the Lamanites, and they are the principal ancestors of the American Indians.

The crowning event recorded in the Book of Mormon is the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ among the Nephites soon after his resurrection. It puts forth the doctrines of the gospel, outlines the plan of salvation, and tells men what they must do to gain peace in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come.

After Mormon completed his writings, he delivered the account to his son Moroni, who added a few words of his own and hid up the plates in the hill Cumorah. On September 21, 1823, the same Moroni, then a glorified, resurrected being, appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and instructed him relative to the ancient record and its destined translation into the English language.

In due course the plates were delivered to Joseph Smith, who translated them by the gift and power of God. The record is now published in many languages as a new and additional witness that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and that all who will come unto him and obey the laws and ordinances of his gospel may be saved.

Concerning this record the Prophet Joseph Smith said: "I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."

In addition to Joseph Smith, the Lord provided for eleven others (These are the formal witnesses. There are also other witnesses besides these.) to see the gold plates for themselves and to be special witnesses of the truth and divinity of the Book of Mormon. Their written testimonies are included herewith as "The Testimony of Three Witnesses" and "The Testimony of Eight Witnesses."

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder in their hearts the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if the book is true. Those who pursue this course and ask in faith will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost. (See Moroni 10: 3-5.)

Those who gain this divine witness from the Holy Spirit will also come to know by the same power that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that Joseph Smith is his revelator and prophet in these last days,

and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord's kingdom once again established on the earth, preparatory to the second coming of the Messiah.

The Lord's Law of Witnesses:

(Bruce R. McConkie: "Whenever the Lord has established a dispensation by revealing his gospel and by conferring priesthood and keys upon men, he has acted in accordance with the law of witnesses, which he himself ordained. This law is: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." (2 Cor. 13:1, Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:15-16; John 8:12-29.) Never does one man stand alone in establishing a new dispensation or revealed truth, or in carrying the burden of such a message and warning to the world. In every dispensation, from Adam to the present, two or more witnesses have always joined their testimonies, thus leaving their hearers without excuse in the day of judgment should the testimony be rejected. MD, p. 436.)

(How many witnesses are there to the Book of Mormon? 16 – Joseph Smith, the 8, the 3, Lucy Mack Smith, Emma Smith, Mary Whitmer and Jesus Christ.)

THE TESTIMONY OF THREE WITNESSES

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken. And we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true. And it is marvelous in our eyes. Nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.

OLIVER COWDERY
DAVID WHITMER (never returned)
MARTIN HARRIS

The three witnesses also saw the breastplate, the Urim and Thummim and the sword of Laban, and the Liahona. D&C 17:1-3; Alma 37:38.

(Although Joseph does not describe this event in the *History of the Church*, David Whitmer is quoted as follows: "We not only saw the plates of the Book of Mormon but also the brass plates, the plates of the Book of Ether, the plates containing the records of the wickedness and secret combinations of the people of the world down to the time of their being engraved, and many other plates ... there appeared as it were, a table with many records or plates upon it, besides the plates of the Book of Mormon, also the Sword of Laban, the Directors i.e., the ball which Lehi had-and the Interpreters [Urim and Thummim]. I saw them just as plain as I see this bed (striking the bed beside

him with his hand), and I heard the voice of the Lord, as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life declaring that the records of the plates of the Book of Mormon were translated by the gift and power of God.” (1878 interview between Orson Pratt and David Whitmer, recorded in *Book of Mormon Compendium*, pp. 55-56))

THE TESTIMONY OF EIGHT WITNESSES

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That Joseph Smith, Jun., the translator of this work, has shown unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen. And we lie not, God bearing witness of it.

CHRISTIAN WHITMER
JACOB WHITMER (fell away)
PETER WHITMER, JUN.
JOHN WHITMER (fell away)

HIRAM PAGE (fell away)
JOSEPH SMITH, SEN.
HYRUM SMITH
SAMUEL H. SMITH

TESTIMONY OF THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH

The Prophet Joseph Smith’s own words about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon are:

“On the evening of the . . . twenty-first of September [1823] . . . I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God

“While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.

“He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrists; so, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open, so that I could see into his bosom.

“Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him, I was afraid; but the fear soon left me.

“He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.

“He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants;

“Also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted *Seers* in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.

* * * * *

“Again, he told me, that when I got those plates of which he had spoken—for the time that they should be obtained was not yet fulfilled—I should not show them to any person; neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim; only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them; if I did I should be destroyed. While he was conversing with me about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited, and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it.

“After this communication, I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person of him who had been speaking to me, and it continued to do so, until the room was again left dark, except just around him, when instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended until he entirely disappeared, and the room was left as it had been before this heavenly light had made its appearance.

“I lay musing on the singularity of the scene, and marveling greatly at what had been told to me by this extraordinary messenger; when, in the midst of my meditation, I suddenly discovered that my room was again beginning to get lighted, and in an instant, as it were, the same heavenly messenger was again by my bedside.

“He commenced, and again related the very same things which he had done at his first visit, without the least variation; which having done, he informed me of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence; and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation. Having related these things, he again ascended as he had done before.

“By this time, so deep were the impressions made on my mind, that sleep had fled from my eyes, and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard. But what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before; and added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father’s family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building His kingdom; otherwise I could not get them.

“After this third visit, he again ascended into heaven as before, and I was again left to ponder on the strangeness of what I had just experienced; when almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me the third time, the cock crowed, and I found that day was approaching, so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night.

“I shortly after arose from my bed, and, as usual, went to the necessary labors of the day; but, in attempting to work as at other times, I found my strength so exhausted as to render me entirely unable. My father, who was laboring along with me, discovered something to be wrong with me, and told me to go home. I started with the intention of going to the house; but, in attempting to cross the fence out of the field where we were, my strength entirely failed me, and I fell helpless on the ground, and for a time was quite unconscious of anything.

“The first thing that I can recollect was a voice speaking unto me, calling me by name. I looked up, and beheld the same messenger standing over my head, surrounded by light as before. He then again related unto me all that he had related to me the previous night, and commanded me to go to my father and tell him of the vision and commandments which I had received.

“I obeyed; I returned to my father in the field, and rehearsed the whole matter to him. He replied to me that it was of God, and told me to go and do as commanded by the messenger. I left the field, and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited; and owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant that I arrived there.

“Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario county, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood. On the west side of this hill, not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth.

“Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in, and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger. The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement. In the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things with them.

“I made an attempt to take them out, but was forbidden by the messenger, and was again informed that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time; but he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates.

“Accordingly, as I had been commanded, I went at the end of each year, and at each time I found the same messenger there, and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews, respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner His kingdom was to be conducted in the last days.

* * * * *

“At length the time arrived for obtaining the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate. On the twenty-second day of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, having gone as usual at the end of another year to the place where they were deposited, the same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me with this charge: That I should be responsible for them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected.

“I soon found out the reason why I had received such strict charges to keep them safe, and why it was

that the messenger had said that when I had done what was required at my hand, he would call for them. For no sooner was it known that I had them, than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose. The persecution became more bitter and severe than before, and multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from me if possible. But by the wisdom of God, they remained safe in my hands, until I had accomplished by them what was required at my hand. When, according to arrangements, the messenger called for them, I delivered them up to him; and he has them in his charge until this day, being the second day of May, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight.”

For the complete record, see Joseph Smith—History, in the Pearl of Great Price, and *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, volume 1, chapters 1 through 6.

The ancient record thus brought forth from the earth as the voice of a people speaking from the dust, and translated into modern speech by the gift and power of God as attested by Divine affirmation, was first published to the world in the year 1830 as THE BOOK OF MORMON.

(There were at least three women who were also witnesses of the plates themselves or other ancient objects uncovered at the hill Cumorah: Joseph showed his mother the breastplate and the Urim and Thummim, as mentioned in her original history, (Smith, Joseph Smith, 111; 1853 ed., 101, 107) Emma Smith, the prophet’s wife, dusted around the plates in her home and felt the pliable leaves through a cloth (Saints’ Herald, 26:289-90) She said: “I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.” (Bidamon, 290); and Mary Whitmer was shown the plates as a reward for her willing service in having Joseph Smith, Emma, and Oliver Cowdery stay at the Whitmer home during the last few weeks of the translation (Jenson, 621).)

("[According to David Whitmer,] soon after our [Joseph, Oliver, and David] arrival home [in Fayette], I saw something which led me to the belief that the plates were placed or concealed in my father's barn. I frankly asked Joseph if my supposition was right, and he told me it was. Sometime after this, my mother was going to milk the cows, when she was met out near the yard by the same old man (judging by her description of him) who said to her: 'You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you are tired because of the increase of your toil; it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened.' Thereupon he showed her the plates. My father and mother had a large family of their own, the addition to it therefore of Joseph, his wife Emma and Oliver very greatly increased the toil and anxiety of my mother. And although she had never complained she had sometimes felt that her labor was too much, or at least she was perhaps beginning to feel so. This circumstance, however, completely removed all such feelings and nerved her up for her increased responsibilities." ("Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith," *Millennial Star* 40 (9 Dec 1878):772-73 as taken from *Testimony of the Book of Mormon Witnesses* by Preston Nibley))

("[John C. Whitmer said that] my grandmother told me that the strange visitor met her as she was going to milk the cows. At first she was afraid of him, but he spoke so kindly to her, explaining to her the nature of the work of translation to go on in her house, that she felt a thrill of inexpressible joy, which removed all fear from her. Comforting words were spoken, promising her strength and pleasure in her increased labors, and salvation at the end. Moroni took from his knapsack the plates and exhibited them as already explained by David. The personage then suddenly vanished with the plates, and where he went, she could not tell. From that time my grandmother was enabled to perform her household duties with comparative ease, feeling no inclination to murmur because her lot was a hard one." (Edward

Stevenson, "The Thirteenth Witness to the Plates of the Book of Mormon," MS 55 (1893):215 as taken from Testimony of the Book of Mormon Witnesses by Preston Nibley))

Another Testimony of the Book of Mormon: ("One of the most solemn oaths ever given to man is found in these words of the Lord relative to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. 'He [meaning Joseph Smith] has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, saith the Lord, 'and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true.' (D&C 17:6) This is God's testimony of the Book of Mormon. In it Deity himself has laid his godhood on the line. Either the book is true or God ceases to be God. There neither is nor can be any more formal or powerful language known to men or gods." Bruce R. McConkie, CR, April 1982, p. 50.)

Why was Joseph not permitted to remove the plates upon his first visit to Cumorah? Oliver Cowdery wrote of obtaining the plates: After arriving at the repository, a little exertion in removing the soil from the edges of the top of the box, and a light pry, brought to his natural vision its contents. No sooner did he behold this sacred treasure than his hopes were renewed, and he supposed his success certain and without first attempting to take it from its long place of deposit he thought, perhaps, there might be something more, equally as valuable, and to take only the plates, might give others an opportunity of obtaining the remainder, which could he secure, would still add to his store of wealth. These, in short, were his reflections, without once thinking of the solemn instruction of the heavenly messenger, and that all must be done with an express view of glorifying God. On attempting to take possession of the record a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him, in a measure, of his natural strength. He desisted for an instant, and then made another attempt, but was more sensibly shocked than before. What was the occasion of this he knew not—there was the pure unsullied record, as has been described—he had heard of the powers of enchantment, and a thousand like stories, which held the hidden treasures of the earth, and supposed that physical exertion and personal strength was only necessary to enable him to yet obtain the object of his wish. He therefore made the third attempt with an increased exertion, when his strength failed him more than at either of the former times, and without premeditating he exclaimed, "Why can I not obtain this book?" "Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord," answered a voice, within a seeming short distance. He looked and to his astonishment there stood the angel who had previously given him the directions concerning this matter. In an instant, all the former instructions, the great intelligence concerning Israel and the last days were brought to his mind: he thought of the time when his heart was fervently engaged in prayer to the Lord, when his spirit was contrite, and when his holy messenger from the skies unfolded the wonderful things connected with this record. He had come to be sure, and found the word of the angel fulfilled concerning the reality of the record, but he had failed to remember the great end for which they had been kept, and in consequence could not have power to take them into his possession and bear them away.

At that instant he looked to the Lord in prayer, and as he prayed darkness began to disperse from his mind and his soul was lit up as it was the evening before, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit; and again did the Lord manifest his condescension and mercy; the heavens were opened and the glory of the Lord shone around about and rested upon him. While thus he stood gazing and admiring, the angel said, "Look!" and as he thus spake he beheld the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates. All this passed before him, and the heavenly messenger said, "All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that ye may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one. Behold, whatever entices and leads to good and to do good, is of God, and whatever does not is of that wicked one: it is he that fills the hearts of men with evil, to walk in darkness and blaspheme God; and you may learn from henceforth, that his ways are to destruction, but the way of holiness is peace and rest."

You will remember that I said, two invisible powers were operating upon the mind of our brother while going to Cumorah. In this, then, I discover wisdom in the dealings of the Lord: it was impossible for any man to translate the Book of Mormon by the gift of God, endure the afflictions, and temptations, and devices of Satan, without being overthrown, unless he had been previously benefited with a certain round of experience: and had our brother obtained the record the first time, not knowing how to detect the works of darkness, he might have been deprived of the blessing of sending forth the word of truth to this generation. Therefore, God knowing that Satan would thus lead his mind astray, began at that early hour, that when the full time should arrive, he might have a servant prepared to fill his purpose. So, however afflicting to his feelings this repulse might have been, he had reason to rejoice before the Lord and be thankful for the favors and mercies shown: that whatever other instruction was necessary to the accomplishing of this great work, he had learned, by experience, how to discern between the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the devil.

(What was it like to be one of the Three Witnesses?) David Whitmer wrote: It was in June, 1829—the latter part of the month, and the Eight Witnesses saw them, I think, the next day or the day after (i.e. one or two days after). Joseph showed them the plates himself, but the angel showed us (the Three Witnesses) the plates, as I suppose to fulfill the words of the book itself. Martin Harris was not with us at this time; he obtained a view of them afterwards (the same day). Joseph, Oliver and myself were together when I saw them. We not only saw the plates of the Book of Mormon but also the brass plates, the plates of the Book of Ether, the plates containing the records of the wickedness and secret combinations of the people of the world down to the time of their being engraved, and many other plates. The fact is, it was just as though Joseph, Oliver and I were sitting just here on a log, when we were overshadowed by a light. It was not like the light of the sun nor like that of a fire, but more glorious and beautiful. It extended away round us, I cannot tell how far, but in the midst of this light about as far off as he sits (pointing to John C. Whitmer, sitting a few feet from him), there appeared as it were, a table with many records or plates upon it, besides the plates of the Book of Mormon, also the Sword of Laban, the Directors—i.e., the ball which Lehi had—and the Interpreters. I saw them just as plain as I see this bed (striking the bed beside him with his hand), and I heard the voice of the Lord, as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life, declaring that the records of the plates of the Book of Mormon were translated by the gift and power of God. When I was returning to Fayette, with Joseph and Oliver, all of us riding in the wagon, Oliver and I on an old-fashioned, wooden, spring seat and Joseph behind us; while traveling along in a clear open place, a very pleasant, nice-looking old man suddenly appeared by the side of our wagon and saluted us with, "Good morning, it is very warm," at the same time wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation, and, by a sign from Joseph, I invited him to ride if he was going our way. But he said very pleasantly, "No, I am going to Cumorah." This name was something new to me, I did not know what Cumorah meant. We all gazed at him and at each other, and as I looked around inquiringly of Joseph, the old man instantly disappeared, so that I did not see him again.

J. F. S. Did you notice his appearance?

D. W. I should think I did. He was, I should think, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches tall and heavy set, about such a man as James Vancleave there, but heavier; his face was as large, he was dressed in a suit of brown woolen clothes, his hair and beard were white, like Brother Pratt's, but his beard was not so heavy. I also remember that he had on his back a sort of knapsack with something in, shaped like a book. It was the messenger who had the plates, who had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony. Soon after our arrival home, I saw something which led me to the belief that the plates were placed or concealed in my father's barn. I frankly asked Joseph if my supposition was right, he told me it was. Some time after this, my mother was going to milk the cows, when she was met out

near the yard by the same old man (judging by her description of him) who said to her: "You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you are tired because of the increase in your toil; it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened." Thereupon he showed her the plates. My father and mother had a large family of their own; the addition to it, therefore, of Joseph, his wife Emma, and Oliver very greatly increased the toil and anxiety of my mother. And although she had never complained, she had sometimes felt that her labor was too much, or at least she was perhaps beginning to feel so. This circumstance, however, completely removed all such feelings and nerved her up for her increased responsibilities.

(What do the sealed portion of the plates contain?)

Bruce R. McConkie wrote: When, during the Millennium, the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon is translated, it will give an account of life in preexistence; of the creation of all things; of the Fall and the Atonement and the Second Coming; of temple ordinances in their fulness; of the ministry and mission of translated beings; of life in the spirit world, in both paradise and hell; of the kingdoms of glory to be inhabited by resurrected beings; and many such things (see, e.g., Ether 1:3-5).

As of now, the world is not ready to receive these truths. For one thing, these added doctrines will completely destroy the whole theory of organic evolution as it is now almost universally taught in the halls of academia. For another they will set forth an entirely different concept and time frame of the Creation, both of this earth and all forms of life, and of the sidereal heavens themselves, than is postulated in all the theories of men. And sadly, there are those who, if forced to make a choice at this time, would select Darwin over Deity. (*Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie*, p. 277.)

Additional Reading:

President Ezra Taft Benson, *The Book of Mormon – Keystone of our Religion*, Ensign, November 1986



My beloved brethren and sisters, today I would like to speak about one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. The gift I am thinking of is more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel. I speak of the gift of the Book of Mormon, given to mankind 156 years ago.

This gift was prepared by the hand of the Lord over a period of more than a thousand years, then hidden up by Him so that it would be preserved in its purity for our generation. Perhaps there is nothing that

testifies more clearly of the importance of this modern book of scripture than what the Lord Himself has said about it.

By His own mouth He has borne witness (1) that it is true (D&C 17:6), (2) that it contains the truth and His words (D&C 19:26), (3) that it was translated by power from on high (D&C 20:8), (4) that it contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ (D&C 20:9, D&C 42:12), (5) that it was given by inspiration and confirmed by the ministering of angels (D&C 20:10), (6) that it gives evidence that the holy scriptures are true (D&C 20:11), and (7) that those who receive it in faith shall receive eternal life (D&C 20:14).

A second powerful testimony to the importance of the Book of Mormon is to note where the Lord placed its coming forth in the timetable of the unfolding Restoration. The only thing that preceded it was the First Vision. In that marvelous manifestation, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned the true nature of God and that God had a work for him to do. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon was the next thing to follow.

Think of that in terms of what it implies. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon preceded the restoration of the priesthood. It was published just a few days before the Church was organized. The Saints were given the Book of Mormon to read before they were given the revelations outlining such great doctrines as the three degrees of glory, celestial marriage, or work for the dead. It came before priesthood quorums and Church organization. Doesn't this tell us something about how the Lord views this sacred work?

Once we realize how the Lord feels about this book, it should not surprise us that He also gives us solemn warnings about how we receive it. After indicating that those who receive the Book of Mormon with faith, working righteousness, will receive a crown of eternal glory (see D&C 20:14), the Lord follows with this warning: "But those who harden their hearts in unbelief, and reject it, it shall turn to their own condemnation" (D&C 20:15).

In 1829, the Lord warned the Saints that they are not to trifle with sacred things (see D&C 6:12). Surely the Book of Mormon is a sacred thing, and yet many trifle with it, or in other words, take it lightly, treat it as though it is of little importance.

In 1832, as some early missionaries returned from their fields of labor, the Lord reproved them for treating the Book of Mormon lightly. As a result of that attitude, he said, their minds had been darkened. Not only had treating this sacred book lightly brought a loss of light to themselves, it had also brought the whole Church under condemnation, even all the children of Zion. And then the Lord said, "And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon" (D&C 84:54-57).

Has the fact that we have had the Book of Mormon with us for over a century and a half made it seem less significant to us today? Do we remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon? In the Bible we have the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word *testament* is the English rendering of a Greek word that can also be translated as *covenant*. Is this what the Lord meant when He called the Book of Mormon the "new covenant"? It is indeed another testament or witness of Jesus. This is one of the reasons why we have recently added the words "Another Testament of Jesus Christ" to the title of the Book of Mormon.

If the early Saints were rebuked for treating the Book of Mormon lightly, are we under any less condemnation if we do the same? The Lord Himself bears testimony that it is of eternal significance. Can a small number of us bring the whole Church under condemnation because we trifle with sacred things? What will we say at the Judgment when we stand before Him and meet His probing gaze if we are among those described as forgetting the new covenant?

There are three great reasons why Latter-day Saints should make the study of the Book of Mormon a lifetime pursuit.

The *first* is that the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion. This was the Prophet Joseph Smith's statement. He testified that "the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion" (Introduction to the Book of Mormon). A keystone is the central stone in an arch. It holds all the other stones in place, and if removed, the arch crumbles.

There are three ways in which the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion. It is the keystone in our witness of Christ. It is the keystone of our doctrine. It is the keystone of testimony.

The Book of Mormon is the keystone in our witness of Jesus Christ, who is Himself the cornerstone of everything we do. It bears witness of His reality with power and clarity. Unlike the Bible, which passed through generations of copyists, translators, and corrupt religionists who tampered with the text, the Book of Mormon came from writer to reader in just one inspired step of translation. Therefore, its testimony of the Master is clear, undiluted, and full of power. But it does even more. Much of the Christian world today rejects the divinity of the Savior. They question His miraculous birth, His perfect life, and the reality of His glorious resurrection. The Book of Mormon teaches in plain and unmistakable terms about the truth of all of those. It also provides the most complete explanation of the doctrine of the Atonement. Truly, this divinely inspired book is a keystone in bearing witness to the world that Jesus is the Christ (see title page of the Book of Mormon).

The Book of Mormon is also the keystone of the doctrine of the Resurrection. As mentioned before, the Lord Himself has stated that the Book of Mormon contains the "fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (D&C 20:9). That does not mean it contains every teaching, every doctrine ever revealed. Rather, it means that in the Book of Mormon we will find the fulness of those doctrines required for our salvation. And they are taught plainly and simply so that even children can learn the ways of salvation and exaltation. The Book of Mormon offers so much that broadens our understandings of the doctrines of salvation. Without it, much of what is taught in other scriptures would not be nearly so plain and precious.

Finally, the Book of Mormon is the keystone of testimony. Just as the arch crumbles if the keystone is removed, so does all the Church stand or fall with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. The enemies of the Church understand this clearly. This is why they go to such great lengths to try to disprove the Book of Mormon, for if it can be discredited, the Prophet Joseph Smith goes with it. So does our claim to priesthood keys, and revelation, and the restored Church. But in like manner, if the Book of Mormon be true—and millions have now testified that they have the witness of the Spirit that it is indeed true—then one must accept the claims of the Restoration and all that accompanies it.

Yes, my beloved brothers and sisters, the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion—the keystone of our testimony, the keystone of our doctrine, and the keystone in the witness of our Lord and Savior.

The *second* great reason why we must make the Book of Mormon a center focus of study is that it was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. Mormon wrote near the end of the Nephite civilization. Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, he abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us.

Each of the major writers of the Book of Mormon testified that he wrote for future generations. Nephi said: “The Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation” (2 Ne. 25:21). His brother Jacob, who succeeded him, wrote similar words: “For [Nephi] said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation” (Jacob 1:3). Enos and Jarom both indicated that they too were writing not for their own peoples but for future generations (see Enos 1:15-16, Jarom 1:2).

Mormon himself said, “Yea, I speak unto you, ye remnant of the house of Israel” (Morm. 7:1). And Moroni, the last of the inspired writers, actually saw our day and time. “Behold,” he said, “the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.

“Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Morm. 8:34-35).

If they saw our day and chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, “Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?”

And there is example after example of how that question will be answered. For example, in the Book of Mormon we find a pattern for preparing for the Second Coming. A major portion of the book centers on the few decades just prior to Christ’s coming to America. By careful study of that time period, we can determine why some were destroyed in the terrible judgments that preceded His coming and what brought others to stand at the temple in the land of Bountiful and thrust their hands into the wounds of His hands and feet.

From the Book of Mormon we learn how disciples of Christ live in times of war. From the Book of Mormon we see the evils of secret combinations portrayed in graphic and chilling reality. In the Book of Mormon we find lessons for dealing with persecution and apostasy. We learn much about how to do missionary work. And more than anywhere else, we see in the Book of Mormon the dangers of materialism and setting our hearts on the things of the world. Can anyone doubt that this book was meant for us and that in it we find great power, great comfort, and great protection?

The *third* reason why the Book of Mormon is of such value to Latter-day Saints is given in the same statement by the Prophet Joseph Smith cited previously. He said, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (*History of the Church*, 4:461). That is the third reason for studying the book. It helps us draw nearer to God. Is there not something deep in our hearts that longs to draw nearer to God, to be more like Him in our daily walk, to feel His presence with us constantly? If so, then the Book of Mormon will help us do so more than any other book.

It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called “the words of life” (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance.

Our beloved brother, President Marion G. Romney, who celebrated his eighty-ninth birthday last month and who knows of himself of the power that resides in this book, testified of the blessings that can come into the lives of those who will read and study the Book of Mormon. He said:

“I feel certain that if, in our homes, parents will read from the Book of Mormon prayerfully and regularly, both by themselves and with their children, the spirit of that great book will come to permeate our homes and all who dwell therein. The spirit of reverence will increase; mutual respect and consideration for each other will grow. The spirit of contention will depart. Parents will counsel their children in greater love and wisdom. Children will be more responsive and submissive to the counsel of their parents. Righteousness will increase. Faith, hope, and charity—the pure love of Christ—will abound in our homes and lives, bringing in their wake peace, joy, and happiness” (*Ensign*, May 1980, p. 67).

These promises—increased love and harmony in the home, greater respect between parent and child, increased spirituality and righteousness—are not idle promises, but exactly what the Prophet Joseph Smith meant when he said the Book of Mormon will help us draw nearer to God.

Brethren and sisters, I implore you with all my heart that you consider with great solemnity the importance of the Book of Mormon to you personally and to the Church collectively.

Over ten years ago I made the following statement regarding the Book of Mormon:

“Do eternal consequences rest upon our response to this book? Yes, either to our blessing or our condemnation.

“Every Latter-day Saint should make the study of this book a lifetime pursuit. Otherwise he is placing his soul in jeopardy and neglecting that which could give spiritual and intellectual unity to his whole life. There is a difference between a convert who is built on the rock of Christ through the Book of Mormon and stays hold of that iron rod, and one who is not” (*Ensign*, May 1975, p. 65).

I reaffirm those words to you this day. Let us not remain under condemnation, with its scourge and judgment, by treating lightly this great and marvelous gift the Lord has given to us. Rather, let us win the promises associated with treasuring it up in our hearts.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 84, verses 54 to 58, we read:

“And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—

“Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation.

“And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all.

“And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written—

“That they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father’s kingdom; otherwise there remaineth a scourge and judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion.” [D&C 84:54-58]

Since last general conference, I have received many letters from Saints, both young and old, from all over the world who accepted the challenge to read and study the Book of Mormon.

I have been thrilled by their accounts of how their lives have been changed and how they have drawn closer to the Lord as a result of their commitment. These glorious testimonies have reaffirmed to my soul the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith that the Book of Mormon is truly “the keystone of our religion” and that a man and woman will “get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”

This is my prayer, that the Book of Mormon may become the keystone of our lives, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

A New Witness for Christ

*President Ezra Taft Benson
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles*



Ezra Taft Benson, “A New Witness for Christ,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 6

My beloved brethren and sisters, for some years now I have been deeply concerned that we are not using the Book of Mormon as God intends.

As I participated in the Mexico City Temple dedication, I received the distinct impression that God is not pleased with our neglect of the Book of Mormon.

In the eighty-fourth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord decreed that the whole Church was under condemnation, even all the children of Zion, because of the way they treated the Book of Mormon. “And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent,” said the Lord, “and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon.” (D&C 84:57).

Zion cannot fully arise and put on her beautiful garments if she is under this condemnation. (See D&C 82:14.)

This prompts five critical questions to which each of us must respond: Is the Book of Mormon the word of God? For whom was it meant? How important is this volume of scripture? What is its major purpose? How are we to use it?

First, is the Book of Mormon the word of God? Yes. God has so testified. (See D&C 20:8-10.) So have its writers (see 2 Ne. 33:10; Moro. 7:35), so has its translator (see A of F 1:8), so have its witnesses, and so do all those who have read it and received a personal revelation from God as to its truthfulness.

Second, for whom was the Book of Mormon meant? Moroni, the book's last writer, speaking to us said, "Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing." (Morm. 8:35). God inspired Mormon, its chief compiler, to put into the book what we would need in our day.

Third, how important is the Book of Mormon? Joseph Smith called it "the keystone of our religion." (*History of the Church*, 4:461).

"Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations," he said, "and where is our religion? We have none." (*History of the Church*, 2:52).

"This generation," said the Lord to Joseph Smith, the translator, "shall have my word through you" (D&C 5:10). And so it has.

"And those who receive [the Book of Mormon] in faith," the Lord states, "and work righteousness, shall receive a crown of eternal life;

"But those who harden their hearts in unbelief, and reject it, it shall turn to their own condemnation." (D&C 20:14-15).

Fourth, what is the major purpose of the Book of Mormon? To bring men to Christ and to be reconciled to him, and then to join his church—in that order. (See 2 Ne. 25:23; D&C 20:11-14, 35-37.)

The title page of the Book of Mormon states the book is for "the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God."

The Lord further instructed that the Book of Mormon proves that "God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old." (D&C 20:11).

The Book of Mormon being true, then God did inspire his prophet Joseph Smith to translate it and did call him to do the holy work of restoring His church, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Finally, how are we to use the book?

We must first read it and gain a testimony for ourselves. Men may deceive each other, but God does not deceive men. Therefore, the Book of Mormon sets forth the best test for determining its truthfulness—namely, read it and then ask God if it is true.

Moroni, in the book's final chapter, issued that divine challenge to every reader in these words:

“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Moro. 10:4).

This, then, is the supreme assurance for the honest in heart—to know by personal revelation from God that the Book of Mormon is true. Millions have put it to that test and know, and increasing millions will yet know.

Now the spirit, as well as the body, is in need of constant nourishment. Yesterday's meal is not enough to sustain today's needs. So also an infrequent reading of “the most correct of any book on earth,” as Joseph Smith called it, is not enough. (*History of the Church*, 4:461.)

Not all truths are of equal value, nor are all scriptures of the same worth. What better way to nourish the spirit than to frequently feast from the book which the Prophet Joseph said would get a man “nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book”? (*History of the Church*, 4:461.)

President Marion G. Romney understood this. Years ago he started a daily procedure, which he recommended to us, of reading the Book of Mormon each morning for thirty minutes. “I know that it kept me in harmony,” he said, “so far as I did keep in harmony, with the Spirit of the Lord.” Then he added, “It will hold us as close to the Spirit of the Lord as anything I know.” (In Conference Report, Apr. 1949, pp. 36, 41.)

The Book of Mormon is to be “a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel,” said the Lord. (2 Ne. 29:2.) It is a standard we should heed and follow.

In the twentieth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord devotes several verses to summarizing the vital truths which the Book of Mormon teaches. (See D&C 20:17-36.) It speaks of God, the creation of man, the Fall, the Atonement, the ascension of Christ into heaven, prophets, faith, repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost, endurance, prayer, justification and sanctification through grace, and loving and serving God.

We must know these essential truths. Aaron and Ammon and their brethren in the Book of Mormon taught these same kinds of truths to the Lamanite people (see Alma 18:22-39), who were “in the darkest abyss.” (Alma 26:3.) After accepting these eternal truths, the Book of Mormon states, those converted Lamanites never did fall away. (See Alma 23:6.)

If our children and grandchildren are taught and heed these same truths, will they fall away? We best instruct them in the Book of Mormon at our dinner table, by our firesides, at their bedsides, and in our letters and phone calls—in all of our goings and comings.

Some spiritually alert parents hold early-morning devotionals with their families in their homes. They have a hymn, prayer, and then read and discuss the Book of Mormon.

“The elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in ... the Book of Mormon,” says the Lord in the forty-second section of the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 42:12).

The Book of Mormon is for both member and nonmember. Combined with the Spirit of the Lord, the Book of Mormon is the greatest single tool which God has given us to convert the world. If we are to have the harvest of souls that President Kimball envisions, then we must use the instrument which God has designed for that task—the Book of Mormon.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated, “Men can get nearer to the Lord, can have more of the spirit of conversion and conformity in their hearts, can have stronger testimonies, and can gain a better understanding of the doctrines of salvation through the Book of Mormon than they can through the Bible. ... There will be more people saved in the kingdom of God—ten thousand times over—because of the Book of Mormon than there will be because of the Bible.” (Address at Book of Mormon Symposium, Brigham Young University, 18 Aug 1978).

The Christian world has the Bible—and so do we. The Bible speaks of a people, the Jews; their land, the Holy Land; their prophets; and the birth and ministry of Jesus Christ.

But was there only one tribe of Israel? What of Joseph, the birthright son, who saved all of Israel’s family from famine? What of Joseph, whose sons Israel blessed and said, “Let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac”? (Gen. 48:16). What of Joseph, whom Israel blessed and promised that he would be “a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall”? (Gen. 49:22.) Where is the record of Joseph?

We testify to the world that we have the record of Joseph—even the Book of Mormon. Like Judah, Joseph had a people—the Nephites and Lamanites. Like Judah, Joseph had a land—the Americas. Like Judah, Joseph had prophets, and his descendants also had a visitation from Jesus Christ, even the resurrected Lord.

“Know ye not,” the Lord says in the Book of Mormon, “that there are more nations than one? ...

“Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another?

“... And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another.” (2 Ne. 29:7-9).

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ.

The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace. (See 2 Ne. 3:12.)

We do not have to prove the Book of Mormon is true. The book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ.

I testify that the Book of Mormon is the word of God; and therefore Jesus is the Christ, Joseph Smith is a prophet, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, with its authorized servants to perform the ordinances of salvation today, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

(President Joseph Fielding Smith said: “It seems to me that any member of this Church would never be satisfied until he or she had read the Book of Mormon time and time again, and thoroughly considered it so that he or she could bear witness that it is in very deed a record with the inspiration of the Almighty upon it, and that its history is true... No member of this Church can stand approved in the presences of God who has not seriously and carefully read the Book of Mormon.” CR, Oct. 1961, p. 18.)

(President Ezra Taft Benson also said: “Members of the Church everywhere should know the Book of Mormon better than any other book. Not only should we know what history and faith-promoting stories it contains, but we should understand its teachings...I have noted within the Church the different in discernment, in insight, conviction, and spirit between those who know and love the Book of Mormon and those who do not. That book is a great sifter. New Era, May, 1975, p. 19.)