

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS/CHURCH HISTORY
LESSON #4

by Ted Gibbons

**“REMEMBER THE NEW COVENANT, EVEN
THE BOOK OF MORMON”**

(JS—H 1:27-65; D&C 3,5,10,17; 20:5-15; 84:54-62)

INTRODUCTION: Most of the people who attack the *Book of Mormon* have never read it. I have found some success in refuting the charges of our detractors when I have given them a copy of the book and asked them to get back to me when they can tell me what the it *really* says.

The truth is that there is *power* in the book, and most people who read it, feel it. The *Book of Mormon* is more than a collection of printed words, even more than a collection of *inspired* printed words. Infused in its testimonies and doctrines and applications is a stream of divine beauty that changes lives. When someone who loves the Lord, someone with a sincere heart and with real intent opens it and begins to study, the miracle happens. It happens every time.

Perhaps this manifestation is a function of the Lord's desire for us to believe and to know the truth. Alma told the humble Zoramites that God “desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on his word. And now he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also.” With absolutely no evidence but my own feelings and the messages of these scriptures, I would suggest that many of Heavenly Father's children have begun to read this book while unseen angels peered over their shoulders, filled with power, waiting for the right moment to touch a heart.

If the book is a physical manifestation of the covenant the Lord has made with his children, it is indeed a covenant worth remembering.

**1. JOSEPH SMITH'S PREPARATION TO RECEIVE AND TRANSLATE
THE BOOK OF MORMON.**

The book of Mormon was the most important treasure of an entire nation,

prepared during a thousand years of history. Can you appreciate why seven years passed from the time of the First Vision until the golden record was actually entrusted to the young prophet?

The interval between the experience in the Sacred Grove and the visit of Moroni intrigues me. It is as though the Lord gave Joseph a great gift—a revelation of truth the likes of which the world had not seen in 1700 years—and then sat back to watch and see how he would respond to it.

Then Moroni came, with his announcement of the gold plates and his scriptural quotations and his warnings. Joseph saw the plates, but was forbidden from taking or even touching them. Four more years would pass before the Lord and the plates' custodian felt Joseph was prepared to take the responsibility for the most important religious record in the history of the world.

I think the matter here is not *willingness*. Joseph was certainly willing to do the work. It is not even the call. Joseph had been called. What was needed was commitment and determination. Joseph needed to know that he could do what he was required to do, regardless of the personal hazard or sacrifice involved. He had to show himself—not just declare himself—trustworthy. That is probably what required seven years of preparation.

Of the time between the vision and the angel, Joseph wrote:

During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision and the year eighteen hundred and twenty-three--having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects of the day, and being of very tender years, and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends and to have treated me kindly, and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me--*I was left to all kinds of temptations; and, mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into errors, and displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature; which, I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God.* In making this confession, no one

need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. A disposition to commit such was never in my nature. But *I was guilty of levity, and sometimes associated with jovial company, etc., not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been.* But this will not seem very strange to any one who recollects my youth, and is acquainted with my native cheery temperament. consequence of these things, I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections . . . (JSH 1:28,29, emphasis added)

2. THE MIRACLE OF THE BOOK OF MORMON'S PRESERVATION.

But even after all the preparation, Satan's efforts thwarted for a time the translation and publication of the work. The loss of the 116 pages of manuscript taught Joseph one of the most painful lessons he ever learned.

The Lord knew what was going to happen of course. He prepared for Joseph's mistake a thousand years before it happened, by inspiring the young prophet Nephi to make two records covering the same period of time. In a passage that seems to refer to Joseph Smith, Jesus declared:

But behold, the life of my servant shall be in my hand; therefore they shall not hurt him, although he shall be marred because of them. Yet I will heal him, for I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil. (3 Nephi 21:10)

the final phrase of the verse above was quoted again by the Lord as he dealt with the loss of the 116 pages. Speaking of those who had stolen the record and were planning to use it to discredit the prophet and his translation, the Lord said, "I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil." (D&C 10:43)

There is a lesson here. Knowing that the Lord prepared for the mistake of Joseph Smith 1000 years before it happened should give those among us who are not yet perfect some comfort. The Lord will have prepared for our mistakes as well, and will, when we are ready, "make a way to escape." (1 Cor. 10:13)

“You should not have feared man more than God,” the Lord taught Joseph with regard to the loss of the manuscript. “You should have been faithful . . .” (D&C 3:7,8) *If you had been* (and if we will be)

he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble. (D&C 3:8)

These are sobering promises to all of us who waver when the world is too much with us. If we are faithful in fearing God more than man, God will (1) extend his arm; (2) he will support us against all the fiery darts of the adversary; (3) he will be with us in every time of trouble.

The rebuke the Lord gives to Joseph here is, as the Lord has declared about his word, “sharper than a two-edged sword.” (See D&C 6:2; 11:2; 14:2, etc) Consider the following:

For although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him. (D&C 3:4)

And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. (D&C 6:6)

And when thou deliveredst up that which God had given thee sight and power to translate, thou deliveredst up that which was sacred into the hands of a wicked man, Who has set at naught the counsels of God, and has broken the most sacred promises which were made before God, and has depended upon his own judgment and boasted in his own wisdom. (D&C 3:12,13)

For thou hast suffered the counsel of thy director to be trampled upon from the beginning. (D&C 3:15)

These verse are powerful evidence of the truthfulness of Joseph’s testimony

of the restoration. If he had been making all of this stuff up, if the whole affair were an attempt to deceive people, he would never have included these verses in a book of his revelations. In fact, he would never have reported the story of the 116 pages at all. But it did happen, and the affair teaches us great lessons about the purposes of God and our own responsibilities in those purposes.

As a result of this experience, and others, Joseph adopted a rule for himself: "When the Lord commands, do it." (HC, vol. 2, p. 170. Cited by Ezra Taft Benson, Conference Report, October 1961, p.74) That is worth writing on your refrigerator. Make it your motto as well. When you know what the Lord wants you to do, whether it is family prayer or family home evening or personal time with the scriptures or forgiveness of an errant neighbor—whatever it is, *do it*.

The Lord offers a meaningful explanation of the way he works in D&C 3. Speaking to Joseph, who might have worried that he had done irreparable damage to the kingdom, and speaking of wicked men who would try to do such damage to the power and usefulness of the Book of Mormon, The Lord said:

THE works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught. For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round. Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men . . . (D&C 3:1-3)

The question is never, *Will God's work get done?* The question is, *Since God's work will get done, do I want to be a part of it or not?*

3. WITNESSES OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

The Lord provided witnesses to the reality of this work. One group of three saw an angel and heard the voice of God and bore witness of the divine nature of the work done by Joseph Smith. The other group of eight saw and

handled the plates, which were shown to them by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Consider the difference in the experiences of these two groups. Why did the Lord give them separate and distinct kinds of knowledge? What do you think the Lord meant to convey to the world with such disparate but powerful testimonies? Why not have the eleven all together? Why not an angel for all or for none of them?

Why do these two testimonies—one given in a fulness of divine power and the other given in a most simple and straight-forward kind of way—add strength to the position of the Book of Mormon?

Since the witnesses of those early brethren, millions of others have added their own witness. Have you? Have you borne your testimony of the Book to your family and friends? To your neighbors and others? Is your testimony recorded like that of the three and the eight so that your children and your children's children will know how you felt about the book? There is room on the page before the title page for you to write your own testimony. Your loved ones and your descendants, including those yet unborn, have a right to know how you feel and why you feel as you do.

4. OUR DUTY IS TO “REMEMBER THE NEW COVENANT, EVEN THE BOOK OF MORMON.”

The Lord promised Joseph Smith,

. . . my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, *even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people*-- And to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers--And this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations. And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain

these records--that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; (D&C 3:16-19, emphasis added)

The major purpose of this work is to bring the knowledge of the Savior unto the Lord's people. The major work of the Church in every dispensation has been to bring souls to Christ. Can you see the relationship? The purpose of this book is do the major work of the Church.

Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. (2 Nephi 2:8)

The Lord told the church in D&C 84 that they were under condemnation for their neglect of the Book of Mormon (see D&C 84:55). It seems to me that that condemnation came for two reasons. One, the saints had neglected to *share* the book, and, Two, they had neglected to *use* the book.

We have a divine obligation, ratified and verified by the prophets, to get this book of power into the hands of the Lord's people. We must share it. We can donate to the Book of Mormon funds in our wards. We can offer copies to friends and acquaintances. We must flood the earth with it, as President Benson instructed.

You know of my great love for the Book of Mormon. Sister Benson and I try to read it every morning, and we have a great love for that book. The Book of Mormon is the instrument that God has designed to "sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out His elect unto the New Jerusalem." This sacred volume of scripture has not been, nor is it yet, central in our preaching, our teaching, and our missionary work. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.60)

But flooding is not enough. Even if we donate \$25,000.00 to the Book of

Mormon fund. Even if we give copies to every neighbor and friend and stranger we ever meet, we will not have done enough. Part of the condemnation spoken of in D&C 84 comes upon us because we suffer with our families from problems that the Book of Mormon shows us how to solve.

We have assumed far too many times that once we know the book is true, we have done the most important thing with it that we can do. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The testimony of the book comes early in the process, and often comes easily. The great challenge is in application. We do not approach the Lord nearly as much in bearing testimony of the Book of Mormon as we do in “abiding by its precepts.” (Introduction to the Book of Mormon, paragraph 6) We must use the book.

CONCLUSION: Remember the parable of the talents in Matthew 25: 14-30? Consider the Book of Mormon as one of the talents given us by the Master. What have you done with yours? Have you multiplied your testimony by sharing it with others? Have you given this source of divine power to even one other person in this century? Or has the book been buried on your shelf, hidden and forgotten, useless to you and to those with whom you have contact? You remember what the Lord said the servant who buried his talent? He was under condemnation indeed, for the Lord told him he would lose what he had along with all the potential for growth that he had missed.

May we move forward with great determination to use this book as it was meant to be used, and to share it so that others may use it as well!

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