

BM LESSON #47  
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“TO KEEP THEM IN THE RIGHT WAY”  
(Moroni 1-6)

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK:** Orson Hyde, speaking of Moroni, said:

In those early and perilous times, our men were few, and our resources limited. Poverty was among the most potent enemies we had to encounter; yet our arms were successful; and it may not be amiss to ask here, by whose power victory so often perched on our banner? It was by the agency of that same angel of God that appeared unto Joseph Smith, and revealed to him the history of the early inhabitants of this country, whose mounds, bones and remains of towns, cities and fortifications speak from the dust in the ears of the living with the voice of undeniable truth. This same angel presides over the destinies of America, and feels a lively interest in all our doings. He was in the camp of Washington; and, by an invisible hand, led on our fathers to conquest and victory; and all this to open and prepare the way for the Church and kingdom of God to be established on the western hemisphere, for the redemption of Israel and the salvation of the world.

This same angel was with Columbus, and gave him deep impressions, by dreams and by visions, respecting this New World. Trammelled by poverty and by an unpopular cause, yet his persevering and unyielding heart would not allow an obstacle in his way too great for him to overcome; and the angel of God helped him--was with him on the stormy deep, calmed and troubled elements, and guided his frail vessel to the desired haven. Under the guardianship of this same angel, or Prince of America, have the United States grown, increased, and flourished, like the sturdy oak by the rivers of water. (Orson Hyde, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol.6, p.368)

INTRODUCTION: The records make it clear that the primary religious activity of the decade of the restoration centered in the Book of Mormon. With the exception of the restoration of the priesthood in 1829, nearly every major event between the first vision and the organization of the church related to that book. Moroni first appeared in 1823, and then yearly until 1827 when Joseph received custody of the plates. From late 1827 until early 1830 he was involved in the translation of the record, although most of the work was done in a short period in 1829. The first copies of the book were bound in the final days of March, 1830, and one week later the church was organized.

Why this early emphasis on the Book of Mormon? The scriptures and our history suggest several reasons, but one that we might consider is the need for early church members to have a basic handbook of instruction about how to run a branch and conduct the affairs of the church. The first six chapters of Moroni provide just such a handbook.

## **1. HAVING SURVIVED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE NEPHITES, MORONI CONTINUES HIS WRITINGS.**

(Moroni 1)

I am unusually pleased that we should have a book named after Moroni. He was a major figure in the restoration of this church. We have records of 22 different appearances of Moroni to Joseph Smith. There is likewise an account of his appearance to Heber C. Kimball two weeks before Pres. Kimball's death. And there are indications that he dedicated the sites of at least four temples.

But in addition to that he was a great example of selflessness and obedience. Nephi began the record by saying "I will go and do," and Moroni ended it by going and doing what he had been commanded to do. Between 385 and 421 AD, Moroni had one purpose in life: to discharge his duty to the Lord and to us by caring for the plates and adding such material as he knew we might one day need. That amounts to somewhere around 37 years. Moroni was a "finisher." Thinking of him earlier this year, I remembered a lesson taught by President

Monson:

“One Wednesday I paused before the elegant show window of a prestigious furniture store. That which caught and held my attention was not the beautifully designed sofa nor the comfortable appearing chair that stood at its side. Neither was it the beautiful chandelier positioned overhead. Rather, my eyes rested on a small sign that had been placed at the bottom right-hand corner of the window. Its message was brief: “FINISHERS WANTED.”

“The store had need of those persons who possessed the talent and the skill to make ready for final sale the expensive furniture the firm manufactured and sold. “Finishers Wanted.” The words remained with me as I returned to the pressing activities of the day.

“In life, as in business, there has always been a need for those persons who could be called finishers. Their ranks are few, their opportunities many, their contributions great.” (Thomas S. Monson, “Finishers Wanted,” *Ensign*, June 1989, 2)

When I did the math on those years Moroni served, I was reminded of a story from Elder Dallin H. Oaks in the *Ensign*, about a man named Levi Savage, a Latter-day Saint pioneer of Arizona.

“Year by year, he did all that duty required. He entered polygamy and reared a large family. In his old age he wanted a little rest. He would not ask to be relieved. The following item is from a letter dated March 29, 1918, sent by the president of the church to the president of the Snowflake Stake.

“ ‘We have just received a letter dated 27th instant from Parley Savage, son of Levi M. Savage of Woodruff Arizona, stating in effect that his father who is now near 70 years old, is obliged to work for his living, that he is doing day’s work on the Woodruff Dam, walking six miles to and from the place of his work; that he has been eager for years to leave Woodruff, that he thought that after

40 years on the Little Colorado, shoveling sand a great part of that time into the river only to see it washed away, was sufficient to bring him release, but he is willing to stay provided we think it best for him to do so.'

"The president of all the Mormons sent the assurance that Bishop Savage should 'consider himself free to make his home elsewhere.' However, according to his own journal, Savage changed his mind and remained some time longer, until a new dam was built 'to get the water into the valley again,' after which he felt relieved of a duty imposed by priesthood authority in 1871 [47 years before]." (*Ensign*, October 1972, p. 24)

Moroni thought his work with the plates was finished when he engraved the final character of the book of Ether. But finding himself yet alive, and with time and room, he made a decision to write more.

Moroni 1:2 suggests that there were yet Nephites alive, for Moroni speaks of the Lamanites putting them to death even at this late date. But the test for survival is a willingness to deny the Christ, and Moroni makes it clear that he will die if it comes that for him.

"And I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ; wherefore, I wander whithersoever I can for the safety of mine own life." (Moroni 1:3)

And perhaps it did. At least one account suggests that Joseph Smith was shown the fate of Moroni, who died at the hands of the Lamanites (see Charles D. Evans Mss 3864, Church Historians Office).

## **2. MORONI TEACHES ABOUT ESSENTIAL GOSPEL ORDINANCES.**

(Moroni 2-5)

Moroni tells us that he recorded the material in these chapters, "that perhaps they may be of worth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day, according to the will of the Lord." (Moroni 1:4) I know of no record indicating that they were of such use to the Lamanites, although they may have been, but it seems that their usefulness to the early church would have been significant. With so many being converted by the Book of Mormon, with branches being organized with little or no priesthood leadership experience, this experience could have been of great worth to the newest of members.

Chapters 2 through 5 contain the following:

- How to give the gift of the Holy Ghost
- How to ordain elders, priests, and teachers
- The sacramental prayers
- Who should be baptized
- Necessity of meeting often
- No iniquity in the church
- Instructions on conducting meetings

The inclusion of the sacramental prayers in these verses offer us an opportunity to take a careful, thoughtful look at them at our own pace, What is there in these prayers that explains why we call participation in this ordinance a *covenant*? What do we covenant to do when we drink the cup and eat the bread? Why are we commanded to ask the Father to "sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it . . ." ? What two things ought we to be doing as we eat the bread? *Remembering* and *witnessing*.

What do we promise (or witness that we will do) as we eat the bread? That we will

1. Take his name

2. Keep his commandments
3. Always remember him

Such plain language invites introspection. Paul tells us to examine ourselves before we partake (see 1 Cor 11:28). We can ask at least these questions as we do conduct this examination during quiet moments of reflection before partaking:

1. Have I taken his name? Have I been a Christian in my conduct this week? Have I behaved as a member of his family would behave (see Mosiah 5:7)?
2. Have I kept his commandments? If not, have I repented for any mistakes I have made since the last time I partook?
3. Have I remembered him—his life, his mercy, his atonement, his teachings, his expectations—in all of my activities in the past week?

By partaking of the bread we indicate that we are *willing* to do the things included in the prayer. The language of the prayer for the water suggests that we witness by partaking that we *do* always remember him. There seems to be a sequence here. *I will remember him and I do remember him.*

The final and the most important test of our sacrament experience is found in the promise at the end of both prayers: if we partake worthily, we will have his Spirit to be with us. Once again the simplicity of the language does not give us much room to wiggle. If we do not have the manifestations of the Holy Ghost in our lives, it would seem that we are not partaking, or not partaking worthily, of these emblems.

### **3. MORONI EXPLAINS THE REQUIREMENTS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND THE NEED FOR RECORD KEEPING AND FELLOWSHIPING**

(Moroni 6)

Moroni gives an excellent explanation of the necessary preparation for baptism in Moroni 6:1-3.

1. Those baptized had to bring forth fruit to demonstrate that they were worthy.
2. Those baptized needed to have a broken heart and a contrite spirit.
3. They needed to witness to the church that they had indeed repented of all their sins.
4. They were expected to take upon them the name of Christ.
5. They should have a "determination to serve him to the end."

They were then baptized and cleansed by the Holy Spirit and were "numbered among (accounted with) the people of the church. In order to protect and preserve them in their membership, their names were taken that they might be remembered and nourished.

The purpose of that nourishment is clearly explained: they were nourished "to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith" (Moroni 6:4).

In the same way that we have promised to remember Christ, his church has prepared and planned to remember us. No one should drift or wander or run away from the kingdom unnoticed.

What an effort we make to nourish our members! Our meetings, our home

and visiting teachers, our emphasis on Family Home Evening and scripture study and prayer all come from a recognition that we need to be “nourished by the good word of God.” This need seems particularly crucial for new members. President Hinckley has spoken about this:

“As I have said before, [new members] need a friend. They need something to do, a responsibility. They need nurturing with the good word of God. They come into the Church with enthusiasm for what they have found. We must immediately build on that enthusiasm. You have people in your wards who can be friends to every convert. They can listen to them, guide them, answer their questions, and be there to help in all circumstances and in all conditions. Brethren, this loss must stop. It is unnecessary. I am satisfied the Lord is not pleased with us. I invite you, every one of you, to make this a matter of priority in your administrative work. I invite every member to reach out in friendship and love for those who come into the Church as converts.” (C.R., Oct. 1997)

Moroni offers a wonderful explanation of the purpose of church meetings:

And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.  
(Moroni 6:5)

I love the phrase, “to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.” What a sweet concept.

Moroni explained the need to keep the church free from iniquity. People who sinned and would not confess nor repent had their names removed from the rolls . . .

But as oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with real intent,



they were forgiven. (Moroni 6:8, see also Mosiah 26:30)

Moroni 6:9 seems to describe meetings without much pre-planned structure. The people met and participated according to the workings of the Spirit. Of course there were leaders who presided, and it may well be that the workings of the Spirit moved those leaders as they planned the meetings, in much the same way that we operate now. But the feeling of the verse suggests meetings like the fast and testimony meetings in the ward I attended in my youth. But the most important aspect of those meetings was the direction of the Spirit. This is precisely true in our day as well. The significance of that spiritual direction was emphasized in 1831:

“But notwithstanding those things which are written, it always has been given to the elders of my church from the beginning, and ever shall be, to conduct all meetings as they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit (Doctrine and Covenants. 46:2)

**CONCLUSION:** We ought to have a deep sense of gratitude to Moroni. His example is superb. His message is invaluable. His contribution to the restoration remarkable. We ought to follow his counsel and that of our own prophet and strengthen one another. We ought to do all that is in our power to insure that no one falls away unnoticed or unloved while we are on the job.

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