

## **BM#01 "The Keystone of Our Religion"**

- I. Introduction: Three Important Questions
- II. The Book of Mormon: Keystone to Our Religion
- III. Witnesses of the Book of Mormon
- IV. Book of Mormon Written for Our Day
- V. Book of Mormon Can Bring Us Nearer to God
- VI. Conclusions

### **I. Introduction**

There are three important questions that we need to consider as we begin our study of the Book of Mormon.

They are: (1) What is the Book of Mormon? (2) Why is the Book of Mormon important? and, (3) Why should I read it?

#### **#1 What is the Book of Mormon?**

It is an abridgement by Mormon of ancient records written by prophets of God who lived upon the Western hemisphere of ancient America. It is about three groups of people. The first group is known as the Jaredities [B/M, Ether 1:42-43; 2-3; 6:1-18]. They came to the Americas (approximately 2000 B.C.) at the time of the destruction of the Tower of Babel. The second group is the family of Lehi who left Jerusalem (approximate 600 B.C.). They later divided into two groups known as the Nephites and the Lamanites in 588-570 B.C. [B/M, 2 Nephi 5:5-8]. The Nephites were completely destroyed in approximately 421 B.C. The third group known as the Mulekites came to ancient America from Jerusalem, shortly after the death of Zedekiah, King of Judah in 600 A.D. They later joined with the Nephites (approximately 120 B.C.). (see Mosiah 25:13.)

The Guide to the Scriptures states,

**"Book of Mormon.** Moroni, the last of the Nephite prophet-historians, sealed up the abridged records of these people and hid them in about A.D. 421. In 1823, the resurrected Moroni visited Joseph Smith and later delivered to him these ancient and sacred records to be translated and brought forth to the world as another testament of Jesus Christ." (*The Guide to the Scriptures*. Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2001).

## **#2 Why is the Book of Mormon important?**

The title page of the Book of Mormon, written by Mormon, states the purpose for which it was written,

"...to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations." (**Title Page.** *The Book of Mormon.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981).

The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testament, contains the recorded words of prophets as they received them by revelation from God the Eternal Father through his Son. These words were spoken in the Old Testament by Jehovah or as he is known in the New Testament, Jesus Christ.

The Book of Mormon, likewise contains the words of God the Eternal Father given by his Son, Jesus Christ, through his prophets living in ancient America. Therefore, they provide, for us "Another Testament of Jesus Christ". The words of the Book of Mormon provide a second witness of the eternal truths found in the Bible. It confirms the Bible for the skeptics.

As a result of the Bible having been translated many times by well-meaning scribes, who gave their best efforts, parts of it have been lost or altered leading to confusion in its meaning. The Book of Mormon has only been translated once by a modern-day prophet of God, Joseph Smith while, acting under direct revelation from God. This difference has resulted in the increased clarity and understanding to be found in the Book of Mormon.

## **#3 Why should I read the Book of Mormon?**

The Book of Mormon contains the word of God given by revelation for his children. Our Heavenly Father, knowing the challenges and difficulties we would face during our mortal journey, has given us his words for guidance and direction. He gave counsel to those living in ancient America so that they would know his will for them. From their records, Mormon, under divine direction and knowing our day, extracted the messages that would be of greatest help during our day.

Ezra Taft Benson states,

"...the Book of Mormon...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.' (B/M, 2 Nephi 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.' (B/M, Jacob 1:3). Enos and Jarom both indicated that they too were writing not for their own people but for future generations. (See B/M, Enos 1:15-16; B/M, Jarom 1:2).

Mormon himself said, 'Yea, I speak unto you, ye remnant of the house of Israel.' (B/M, Mormon 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 the 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.' (B/M, Mormon 8:34-35)." (*A Witness and A Warning*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988, 19-20).

There is a promise included within the pages of the Book of Mormon that invites each individual to learn for themselves the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon:

B/M, Moroni 10:4-6

**4 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.**

**5 And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.**

**6 And whatsoever thing is good is just and true;**

**wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but  
acknowledgeth that he is.**

May I encourage each of you to keep an open mind as you continue to increase your knowledge regarding the Book of Mormon. As you do so, you will also come to know for yourself the truthfulness of this scripture.

## **II. The Book of Mormon: Keystone to Our Religion**

Joseph Smith states,

"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." (**Introduction.** *The Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

The observation of the Book of Mormon being "the most correct of any book on earth" has reference to it having been written by prophets inspired by divine revelation. This statement becomes even more exclusive when it is coupled with "a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts." Unlike other books, the purpose of the Book of Mormon is to assist an individual to become closer to God.

Joseph Smith states that the Book of Mormon is the "keystone of our religion." Let us examine this statement more closely.

What is a "keystone?"

The Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual states,

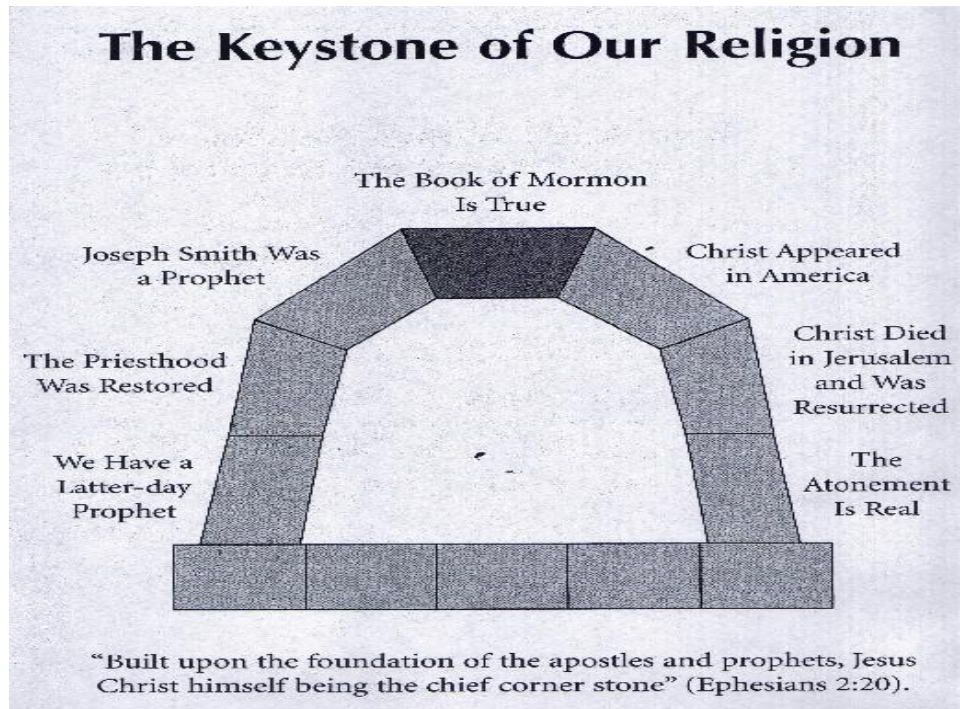
"The keystone of an arch holds the other stones in place and prevents the arch from collapsing." (*Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 2).

John W. Welch and Gregory Welch state,

"In this chart, the archway stones representing the restored priesthood and living prophets are similarly reinforced by the keystone truth, as are the stone representing the reality of Christ's redemptive mission. In addition, the Book of Mormon ties together the New and Old Testaments by overtly explaining how the law of Moses was fulfilled in Christ, and

it further upholds and complements the Bible by serving as another divinely inspired covenantal testament of Jesus Christ." (Quote and Chart I, in *Charting the Book of Mormon*. Provo, Utah: Foundation of Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, Chart 2).

**Chart I. The Keystone of Our Religion:**



Joseph Smith declared,

"April 24, 1834. Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none." (*History of the Church*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1951, [Second Edition, Revised, 1969], 52).

Ezra Taft Benson states,

"...if [the Book of Mormon]...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." (*A Witness and A Warning*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988, 19-20).

If the center stone of the arch is removed, the arch will collapse. This holds true for the Book of Mormon serving as the keystone for the Church of Jesus Christ. If the center stone remains firm, then the arch is also solid.

Ezra Taft Benson states,

"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—Keystone of Our Religion," in *Ensign*, November 1986, 6).

### **#1 Witness of Christ**

The Title page of the Book of Mormon states its purpose,

"...to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord has done for their fathers; '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—" (**Title Page.** *The Book of Mormon.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981).

The purpose of the Book of Mormon is to show, teach, and convince the House of Israel and the Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ.

Ezra Taft Benson states,

"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...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." ("The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," in *Ensign*, November 1986, 6).

How focused is the Book of Mormon upon being a witness of Jesus Christ?

Susan Easton Black states,

"...of the 6,607 verses in the Book of Mormon, 3,925 verses or every 1.7 verses gives reference to Christ." (*Finding Christ through the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987, 16).

## **#2 Doctrine**

Bruce R. McConkie states,

**"Doctrine.** *Doctrines* are teachings. They are classified as true or false. *True doctrine* come from God, the source and fountain of all truth, and are the teachings and concepts found in the gospel. *False doctrines* are from beneath [Satan]...*Gospel doctrine* is synonymous with the truths of salvation. It comprises the tenets, teachings, and true theories found in the scriptures; it includes the principles, precepts, and revealed philosophies of pure religion; prophetic dogmas, maxims, and views are embraced within its folds;...The Book of Mormon has come forth in this day so that men might 'learn doctrine,' (Isa. 29:24; 2 Ne. 27:35). The Bible and the Book of Mormon 'shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines.' (2 Ne. 3:12)." (*Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [Second Edition, 1966], 204).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"Let us briefly take a dozen illustrations of the priceless gems of spiritual truths which, were it not for the Book of Mormon, we would not have: (1) Jesus as the Son of God; (2) Jesus as the Christ; (3) Christ as the Promised Messiah; (4) The Fall of Adam; (5) The Plan of Salvation; (6) The Atonement; (7) The Resurrection; (8) The Spirit World; (9) The Necessity of Ordinances; (10) The Doctrine of Justification (including the relationship between grace and works); (11) The Gathering of Israel; and, (12) Continual Revelation...[They conclude] The pen of man knows no more perfect witness of God and Christ, of the Atonement, of the manner by which sins are remitted, or of those doctrines that lead us back to the divine presence than the Book of Mormon." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 1*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987, [11<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1999], 9-16).

Brent L. Top adds,

"Other important principles and ordinances of the gospel are clarified as well. The book's teachings on faith, repentance, baptism, enduring to the end, the sacrament, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the plan of salvation, the universal resurrection, and the judgment of God are doctrinal diamonds." ("The Remarkable Book That Changes Lives. [www.meridianmagazine.com/gospeldoctrine/bom/040102remarkable.html](http://www.meridianmagazine.com/gospeldoctrine/bom/040102remarkable.html)).

All of the true doctrines to be found in the Holy Bible, are found also in the Book of Mormon and more. In comparison, it is often presented with great clarity, breadth and power of expression in the Book of Mormon. The following example is offered by McConkie and Millet.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet observe,

"Within the covers of the Bible we can read an account of the Creation, of Adam's fall, and of the events that surrounded Christ's atoning sacrifice. Yet it is to the Book of Mormon that we must turn to learn *why* things were created as they were, *why* it was essential to the eternal plan for the salvation of man that Adam fall, and *why* the blood of Christ needed to be shed in an infinite sacrifice." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 1*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987, [11<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1999], 199-200).

James E. Faust states,

"The Book of Mormon is a keystone because it establishes and ties together eternal principles and precepts, rounding out basic doctrines of salvation. It is the crowning gem in the diadem of our holy scriptures." ("The Keystone of Our Religion," in *Ensign*, January 2004, 3).

### **#3 Testimony**

Many have sought to know for themselves the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. They have read the Book of Mormon with real intent to know if it was true. Each time they began their reading, they earnestly prayed to God the Eternal Father, in the Name of Jesus Christ, if the Book of Mormon was true. For some the answer came immediately; for others, it did not come until they had finished the last page or even later. All who are sincere in their desire for truth have in



time come to know for themselves the Book of Mormon is the word of God. God is no respecter of persons. All may know his truth if they will ask. They can know for themselves that Joseph Smith did not write this book, nor could have any man done so. It had to come from God himself. It is important to also know that it was not written either by Satan or one of his servants for they are not proponents of the kingdom of God on earth, but its distracters. As one continues to read, page after page, often they find themselves being impacted by a spirit of peace and goodness. This is the witness of the Holy Ghost witnessing its truthfulness.

James E. Faust shared the following experience related to him by F. Burton Howard,

"Sister Celia Cruz Ayala of the Puerto Rico San Juan Mission decided to give the Book of Mormon to a friend. She wrapped it in attractive paper and set out to deliver her present.

"On the way she was attacked by a bandit who stole her purse and with it the wrapped copy of the Book of Mormon. A few days later she received this letter:

"Mrs. Cruz:

"Forgive me, forgive me. You will never know how sorry I am for attacking you. But because of it, my life has changed and will continue to change. That book [the Book of Mormon] has helped me in my life. The dream of that man of God has shaken me...I am returning your five pesos for I can't spend them. I want you to know that you seemed to have a radiance about you. That light seemed to stop me [from harming you, so] I ran away instead.

"I want you to know that you will see me again, but when you do, you won't recognize me, for I will be your brother...Here, where I live, I have to find the Lord and go to the church you belong to.

"The message you wrote in that book brought tears to my eyes. Since Wednesday night I have not been able to stop reading it. I have prayed and asked God to forgive me, [and] I ask you to forgive me...I thought your wrapped gift was something I could sell. [Instead,] it has made me want to make my life over. Forgive me, forgive me, I beg you.

"Your absent friend.'

"[James E. Faust concludes,] Such is the conversion power of the Book of Mormon." ("What I Want My Son to Know before He Leaves on His Mission," in *Ensign*, May, 1996, 42).

### III. Witnesses of the Book of Mormon

#### Testimony of the Witnesses

Chart II. 12 Witnesses of the Book of Mormon

12 WITNESSES OF THE BOOK OF MORMON					
WITNESS	BIRTH DATE	AGE SHOWN PLATES	FELLOWSHIP	OCCUPATION	DEATH
1. JOSEPH SMITH	21 Dec 1805 Sharon, Vermont	17	Bapt. 15 May 1829 *Always faithful	Prophet	27 June 1844
<b>THREE WITNESSES:</b> (Shown plates by an angel in June 1829)					
1. Oliver Cowdery	3 Oct 1806 Wells, Vermont	21	Exc. 12 Apr 1838 Rebap. Nov 1848	Teacher Lawyer	3 Mar 1850 Richmond, Mo.
2. David Whitmer	7 Jan 1805 Harrisburg, Penn.	24	Exc. 13 Apr 1838 **Never returned	Forger	25 Jan 1888 Richmond, Mo.
3. Martin Harris	18 May 1783 Easton, N.Y.	46	Exc. Dec 1837 Rebap. 1842 & 1870	Farmer	10 July 1875 Clarkston, Utah
<b>EIGHT WITNESSES:</b> (Shown the plates by Joseph Smith in June or July 1829)					
1. Christian Whitmer	18 Jan 1798 Harrisburg, Penn.	31	Bapt. 11 Apr 1830 *Always faithful	Shoemaker	27 Nov 1835 Clay Co. Mo.
2. Jacob Whitmer	27 Jan 1800 Harrisburg, Penn.	29	Apostatized 1838 **Never returned	Shoemaker	21 Apr 1856 Richmond, Mo.
3. Peter Whitmer, Jr.	27 Sept 1809 Harrisburg, Penn.	19	Bapt. June 1829 *Always faithful	Tailor, Farmer	22 Sept 1836 Liberty, Mo.
4. John Whitmer	27 Aug 1802 Harrisburg, Penn.	26	Exc. 10 Mar 1838 **Never returned	Farmer	11 July 1878 Far West, Mo.
5. Hiram Page	1800 Vermont	29	Left church 1838 **Never returned	Physician, Farmer	12 Aug 1852 Missouri
6. Joseph Smith, Sr.	12 July 1771 Topshfield, Mass.	57	Bapt. 6 Apr 1830 *Always faithful	Farmer	14 Sept 1840 Naumoo, Ill.
7. Hymen Smith	9 Feb 1800 Tunbridge, Ver.	21	Bapt. June 1829 *Always Faithful	Farmer	27 June 1844 Carthage, Ill.
8. Samuel Smith	11 Mar 1808 Tunbridge, Ver.	29	Bapt. 15 May 1829 *Always faithful	Farmer	30 July 1844 Naumoo, Ill.
	(Average Age)	(29)	(* & Always faithful; & left church; ** & Never returned)		

Reference: Chart II. 12 Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. John D. Hawkes. *Book of Mormon Digest Teaching and Study Text*. Salt Lake City: Liahona Publishing Trust, 1966, [14<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1998], 8).

Since the Book of Mormon initially came forth to the world, it has contained the witness of three individuals, followed by eight others. These eleven individuals have provided for the reader their solemn testimony regarding the truths of the Book of Mormon. While their testimonies are unique based upon the witness they received, it has stood the test of time. While not all remained faithful to their membership in the Church, none ever denied their testimony of the Book of Mormon.

### **Testimony of Three Witnesses:**

The importance of the three witnesses is given by the Lord himself.

B/M, Ether 5:2-4

**2 And behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work;**

**3 And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true.**

**4 And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established; and the testimony 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.**

The three witnesses are: Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. These individuals were selected by the Lord to given their testimony to the world.

The three witnesses saw the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. They saw the engravings upon the plates. They saw the angel Moroni who appeared to them and declared the truthfulness of the work before them. They were commanded by the voice of the Lord to bear their witness.

Both Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery had served as scribes to Joseph Smith during the translation of the plates. Each

were baptized into the Church, however, each left the fellowship of the Church for a period of time with Martin and Oliver later being re-baptized. David Whitmer left the Church in April, 1839, and did not return. None of the three ever denied their testimony as recorded in the Book of Mormon.

### **Testimony of the Eight Witnesses:**

The eight witnesses saw the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. They were shown the plates by Joseph Smith himself. They also saw the plates which had the appearance of gold, including the engravings, and individually handled them.

The eight are: Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jun., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Sen., Hyrum Smith, and Samuel H. Smith. Joseph Smith, Sen. is Joseph Smith's father and Hyrum and Samuel are his two living brothers. Jacob and John Whitmer, and Hiram Page, would later leave the Church. Again, none of the eight ever denied their testimony as recorded in the Book of Mormon.

### **The Most Important Witness is Yours:**

The testimony that will come to you of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon will be unique to you.

Boyd K. Packer states,

"He read the promise in Moroni 10:4-5, and tried to follow those instructions as I understood them.

"If I expected a glorious manifestation to come at once as an overpowering experience, it did not happen. Nevertheless, it felt good, and I began to believe.

"Do not be disappointed if you have read and reread and yet have not received a powerful witness.

"Do the best you can. '...it is expedient that he [you] should be diligent, that thereby he [you] might win the prize, therefore, all things must be done in order' (B/M, Mosiah 4:27)." ("The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ—Plain and Precious Things," in *Ensign*, May, 2005, 6, 8).

As you persevere, you will come to know for yourself the truth of the Book of Mormon. As you read, as Boyd K. Packer

states, "it will feel good, and you will begin to believe." That's how it happened for me. I did not understand all that I was initially reading, but it felt good to me. Over time, I came to know by the witness of the Holy Ghost, that the Book of Mormon was true. Over the years, that testimony has grown ever stronger, but because I know that Satan's power is strong, I daily continue to nourish my testimony.

#### **IV. Book of Mormon Written for Our Day**

It has always amazed me that a book that was written so many years ago, would be able to warn me regarding the events that would occur in my lifetime. It is, to me, further evidence that the Book of Mormon was written by prophets of God, who in vision, saw our day.

Nephi, the son of Lehi, who wrote the first two books of the Book of Mormon, focused his teachings on the scriptures. He states:

B/M, 1 Nephi 19:23

**23 And I did read many things unto them [his brothers] which were written in the books of Moses [as recorded on the brass plates]; 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 Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.**

As we come to know that the scriptures contain the word of God, it is important that we incorporate their words of counsel and admonition into our lives. The words of the prophets are not always easy to receive, especially when we are guilty of the very sins they are addressing, but it is to our eternal benefit that we take their words into our hearts and make the necessary changes. If we will do so, we will have the spirit of the Holy Ghost to guide us in our lives. If we choose to reject their counsel, we will do so at the risk of our own eternal happiness.

The prophet Mormon, who abridged the records from which the Book of Mormon was written, states,

B/M, Mormon 8:35

**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.**

Mormon, from the vantage point of knowing our day, addresses the conditions that will exist when the Book of Mormon comes forth.

- A. A denial of the power of God, and an increase of pride and envy will be found among the leaders in the various church congregations.

B/M, Mormon 8:28

**28 Yea, it shall come in a day when the power of God shall be denied, and churches become defiled and be lifted up in 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.**

- B. Great pollutions will be manifest in the moral conduct of the citizenry.

B/M, Mormon 8:31

**31 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be great pollutions upon the face of the earth; there shall be murders, and robbing, and lying, and deceivings, and whoredomes, and all manner of abominations; when there shall be many who will say, Do this, or that, and it mattereth not, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day. But wo unto such, for they are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.**

- C. People will become so prideful in their conduct toward others that even the members of churches will be affected.

B/M, Mormon 8:36,

**36 And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of**

**iniquities; and your churches, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.**

D. As a result of the great importance attached to money, by the citizenry and the churches, the care of the poor and the needy, and the sick and afflicted will be neglected.

B/M, Mormon 8:37, 39

**37 For behold, ye do love money, 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.**

**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?**

E. The desire to be popular by the ministers of the churches by their congregations, will become so prevalent that they will neglect their duty to speak against the pollutions of their members.

B/M, Mormon 8:38

**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 ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies—because of the praise of the world?**

Ezra Taft Benson adds,

"The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ...The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time." ("The Book of Mormon is the Word of God," in *Ensign*, January 1988, 3).

While initially we may be offended by the words of the prophets, especially when they address our own personal sins, it is important that we stop and ask ourselves, "Am I among

those who have veered off from the straight and narrow path, and is in need of repentance?" If the answer is, "Yes," then let me begin today to make the necessary course adjustment. The truth is that the Prophets and Apostles often see trends and falsehoods, even before they have fully unfolded.

## **V. Book of Mormon Can Bring Us Nearer to God**

Joseph Smith states,

"I told the brethren [all] that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth,...and a man [anyone] would get nearer to the God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book." (**Introduction.** *The Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

The Oxford English Dictionary states,

**"Precept.** A general command or injunction; an instruction, direction, or rule for action or conduct; esp. Most commonly applied to divine commands." (*The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. P-Z. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, [8<sup>th</sup> Printing, June 1974], 1245).

Teaching according to the precepts of man differs from teaching the precepts of God. Communicating the precepts of man often involves a simple exchange of interesting information or additional facts. Communicating the precepts of God involves the spirit which in turn speaks directly to the souls of those who listen. The result is that both the teacher and the student are edified and enlightened. There is, for both, an inner feeling of joy and desire to live better. (See Loren C. Dunn. "Teaching by the Power of the Spirit," in *Ensign*, September, 1984.)

The focus of the Book of Mormon is to bring us to Christ. It is another testament of Jesus Christ. As we read the Book of Mormon and follow its precepts, a change comes upon us. We want to be more like Our Savior. We become more thoughtful in our relations with those around us. We are more patient when we are offended because we become more aware of our own weaknesses. We become less judgmental for we know that the day will soon come when we will need others to be merciful toward us. We also feel more hopeful regarding the future, and therefore, better able to deal with the stress of the day. This change is due to the spirit of Christ as it emulates from the pages of the Book of Mormon.



When we become lax in our reading, we find the opposite effect upon our lives. We become more self-centered resulting in our becoming impatient, quick to judge, and less concerned about others. Our stress increases as does our distance from the spirit of Christ.

In September 22 and 23, 1832, the Prophet Joseph Smith received the following revelation from the Lord.

Doctrine and Covenants 84:54-58

**54 And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—  
55 Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation.  
56 And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all.  
57 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.  
58 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.**

As we repent from our neglect of reading the Book of Mormon and living its concepts in our daily lives, once again we will receive the approbation of the Lord and again receive his spirit.

## **VI. Conclusions**

We began this lesson by asking and then answering three important questions. They are: (1) What is the Book of Mormon? (2) Why is the Book of Mormon important? and, (3) Why should I read it? We learned that the Book of Mormon is Another Testament of Jesus Christ. It contains the teachings of Jesus Christ as revealed through his prophets to those living in ancient America. Why is the Book of Mormon important? Like the Holy Bible, it contains the word of God and stands as a second witness to the eternal truths found in the Bible. We later learn that following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, he appeared to those in ancient America and taught them important truths. Last, Why should I read it? The

Book of Mormon contains the word of God given by revelation for his children. God, due to his foreknowledge, knew of the challenges that we would be facing today. How to cope and to address the challenges we would face is found in the Book of Mormon. It was written for us. It also contains a promise whereby each person may come to know for themselves the truthfulness of the book.

Joseph Smith stated that "The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion..." (**Introduction.** *The Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

The three areas we noted are: (1) It is a witness of Christ; (2) It teaches important doctrine; and, (3) Anyone who is honest and sincere in their desire can know the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

We noted the written testimony of the witnesses as found in the Book of Mormon. They include the three witnesses, and the eight witnesses. We addressed the separate experiences they had and the endurance of their testimony, in spite of some leaving the church. We noted that the most important witness is that of the individual them self who is seeking to know the truth.

We addressed the fact that the Book of Mormon was written for our day. We noted five areas where prophecy found in the Book of Mormon is now coming to pass. As we proceed, we will note other areas that were prophesied that are being fulfilled today.

Lastly, we addressed the impact that reading the Book of Mormon can have in our desire to come nearer to God. As important as it is to read the Book of Mormon, it is important to follow its teachings in our daily life. The focus of the Book of Mormon is to bring us to Christ. This involves our becoming, with His help, more like Him. It is our reading of the Book of Mormon that gives us the strength and desire to persevere when life gets difficult. We draw strength from those who have gone before us. Our prayer becomes, "If we can't be made whole, will you make our backs stronger so that we can endure the adversity we are now experiencing?"

Gordon B. Hinckley states regarding the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon,

"The evidence for its truth, for its validity in a world that is prone to demand evidence, lies not in archaeology or anthropology, though these may be helpful to some. It lies not in word research or historical analysis, though these may be confirmatory. The evidence for its truth and validity lies within the covers of the book itself. The test of its truth lies in reading it. It is a book of God. Reasonable people may sincerely question its origin; but those who have read it prayerfully have come to know by a power beyond their natural senses that it is true; that it contains the word of God, that it outlines saving truths of the everlasting gospel, that it 'come forth by the gift and power of God...to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ' (Book of Mormon title page)." ("Four Cornerstones of Faith," in *Ensign*, February 2004, 6).

As Gordon B. Hinckley notes, while the external evidence may be helpful to some, the most important evidence is the witness of the Holy Ghost. This witness will come as you prayerfully read the words of the Book of Mormon.

Like our journey with the Old and New Testament which brought us increasing understanding, and newfound strength and hope, this is also the promise of the Book of Mormon.

In BM#02, we begin our reading of the Book of Mormon with chapters 1-7.