

Engaging Gospel Doctrine: 173

BoM Lesson 1: “The Keystone of Our Religion”

Link to Online Lesson: [“The Keystone of Our Religion”](#)

Class Member Reading: [1 Nephi 13:38–41](#); [19:23](#); [2 Nephi 25:21–22](#); [27:22](#); [29:6–9](#); [Mormon 8:26–41](#); [Ether 5:2–4](#); [Moroni 1:4](#); [10:3–5](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 10:45–46](#); [20:8–12](#); [84:54–58](#); [title page](#), the [introduction](#), the [Testimony of Three Witnesses](#), the [Testimony of Eight Witnesses](#), and the [Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith](#).

1 Ne. 13:38-41

38 And it came to pass that I beheld the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the **book of the Lamb of God**, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of **the Jew**, (fun to think of this as a specific person but my hunch is that it refers to the Jewish people) that it came forth from the Gentiles unto the remnant of the seed of my brethren.

39 And after it had come forth unto them I beheld other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the **convincing 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 true**.

40 And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall **establish the truth of the first**, which are of the twelve 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 Savior 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, as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; wherefore **they both shall be established in one**; for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth. This used to be one of my favorite chapters of scripture and contributed to my passion for the history of the Bible. I took it very seriously, specifically, and literally. It is worth noting that this description does not match what we know of the transmission of the Bible, but rather corresponds with Joseph’s understanding of the Bible. The idea that other groups took away the evidence that proves your group right is a comment one shared by early Christians and Muslims as well as Mormons. These ideas are pretty problematic, that your scriptures prove your interpretation of another groups’ scriptures over their own interpretation of their own scriptures.

1 Ne. 19:23

23 And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; 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**. Purpose of the Book of Mormon: to persuade the reader to believe in Jesus. “Likening the scriptures” is a valuable tool that deserves the emphasis it receives.

2 Ne. 25:21-22

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21 Wherefore, for this cause hath 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, that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand.

22 Wherefore, these things shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God; and the nations who shall possess them shall be **judged of them according to the words which are written**.

2 Ne. 27:22

22 Wherefore, when thou hast read the words which I have commanded thee, and obtained the witnesses 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 wisdom to **reveal all things** unto the children of men. *I like to think this is a gradual revelation of “all things”, and that we are in the midst of it.*

2 Ne. 29:6-9

6 Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, 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 nations than one?** Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word 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 testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations 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 same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever. *In addition to appreciating the Book of Mormon, I love the reminder that “there are more nations than one”! Teaching World Religions has been a life-changing experience. I think that other world scripture and other texts are inspired of God and can come together to testify to the truths of the gospel.*

Mormon 8:26-41

26 And no one need say they shall not come, for they surely shall, for the Lord hath spoken it; for out 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 miracles are done away; and it shall come even as if one should speak from the dead.

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

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 the pride of their hearts**; yea, even in a day when leaders of churches

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and teachers shall rise in the **pride of their hearts**, even to the envying of them who belong to their churches. **Corrupt religions and leaders... true problems.**

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

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

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 whoredoms, and all manner of abominations; when there shall be many who will say, **Do this, or do 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. **(Talk about moral absolutism vs. moral relativism)**

32 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and **for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins**. **Catholics had indulgences, but this problem extends further than that. If you have to invest in a church in order to receive salvation, that is a problem.**

33 O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people, why have ye built up churches unto yourselves to get gain? Why have ye **transfigured the holy word of God**, that ye might bring damnation upon your souls? **(Evocative wording, twisting the truth into a vehicle for damnation)** Behold, look ye unto the revelations 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 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; **Do we contribute toward conflict, or reconciliation and love?** and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the **pride of your hearts**. **Striking repetition!!**

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. **Challenging, damning verse. Especially important now with such radical inequality of wealth and power.**

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? **I’ve always been struck by the power of “pollutions” used as an insult.**

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?** **I think this is one of the most powerful verses in all scripture. Where are our priorities? Do we support life and well-being, or seek inanimate objects to distract and comfort us? Science shows that caring for others actually makes us more happy than buying things.**

40 Yea, why do ye build up your secret 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 blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer.

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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.

Moroni 1:4

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 worth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day, according to the will of the Lord. [Moroni... one of my favorite characters in the Book of Mormon. Poor guy keeps expressing shock that he is still alive!](#)

Moroni 10:3-5

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 merciful** 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 **ponder it** in your hearts.

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.**

D&C 10:45-46

45 Behold, there are many things engraven upon the plates of Nephi which do throw greater views upon my gospel; therefore, it is wisdom in me that you should translate 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 gospel which my holy prophets, yea, and also my disciples, desired in their prayers should come forth unto this people.

D&C 20-:8-12

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8 And gave him **power from on high**, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the Book of Mormon;

9 Which contains a record of a fallen people, and the **fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ** to the Gentiles and to the Jews also;

10 Which was **given by inspiration**, and is **confirmed to others by the ministering of angels**, and is declared unto the world by them—

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

12 Thereby showing that **he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever**. Amen. This section brings up good questions. What is the “fulness of the gospel”? What is “inspiration”? In what sense are the scriptures “true”? Or “holy”, for that matter?

D&C 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. **How do we reverence and take seriously the gifts we have received?**

Title Page

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—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—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**

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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.

Introduction

It is surprisingly (or perhaps not?) difficult to track down exactly who wrote this Introduction. Lds.org tells us it was added in the 1981 edition.

The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible (similarities to the Bible, including word for word similarities, both make it feel familiar and bring up interesting literary and historical questions). It is a record of God’s dealings with ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains 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 among the 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 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.”

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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. **We can know the truth of all things through the Holy Ghost... but there is also a logical progression to these promises.**

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
Martin Harris

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

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Peter Whitmer, Jun.
John Whitmer
Hiram Page
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 wrist; 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. ...

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“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 till 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 for 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

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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

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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 a more complete account, see Joseph Smith—History in the Pearl of Great Price.

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.

(Read the Testimonies of Mary Whitmer and Emma Smith from Hardy, Reader’s Edition, 639-642)

Additional Reading: [The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion](#)” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 4–7; see also Conference Report, Oct. 1986, 3–7).

The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion

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

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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.

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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.”

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“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

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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.

Scripture Chain: [N/A](#)
