

## Ezra Taft Benson & the Book of Mormon

**“The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God,” *Ensign*, May 1975, 63–65.**

... The Book of Mormon brings men to Christ through two basic means. First, it tells in a plain manner of Christ and his gospel. It testifies of his divinity and of the necessity for a Redeemer and the need of our putting trust in him. It bears witness of the Fall and the Atonement and the first principles of the gospel, including our need of a broken heart and a contrite spirit and a spiritual rebirth. It proclaims we must endure to the end in righteousness and live the moral life of a Saint.

Second, the Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention. (See 2 Ne. 3:12.) It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. 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....

We are to use the Book of Mormon in handling objections to the Church. God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ revealed themselves to Joseph Smith in a marvelous vision. After that glorious event, Joseph Smith told a minister about it. Joseph was surprised to hear the minister say that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days, that all such things had ceased. (See JS—H 1:21.)

This remark symbolizes practically all of the objections that have ever been made against the Church by nonmembers and dissident members alike. Namely, they do not believe that God reveals his will today to the Church through prophets of God. All objections, whether they be on abortion, plural marriage, seventh-day worship, etc., basically hinge on whether Joseph Smith and his successors were and are prophets of God receiving divine revelation. Here, then, is a procedure to handle most objections through the use of the Book of Mormon.

First, understand the objection.

Second, give the answer from revelation.

Third, show how the correctness of the answer really depends on whether or not we have modern revelation through modern prophets.

Fourth, explain that whether or not we have modern prophets and revelation really depends on whether the Book of Mormon is true.

Therefore, the only problem the objector has to resolve for himself is whether the Book of Mormon is true. For if the Book of Mormon is true, then Jesus is the Christ, Joseph Smith was his prophet, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, and it is being led today by a prophet receiving revelation.

Our main task is to declare the gospel and do it effectively. We are not obligated to answer every objection. Every man eventually is backed up to the wall of faith, and there he must make his stand. “And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye,” said Nephi, “for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things.” (2 Ne. 33:11.)

Every man must judge for himself, knowing God will hold him accountable.

The Book of Mormon is to be used “for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel,” the Lord says, and its words “shall hiss forth unto the ends of the earth.” (2 Ne. 29:2.) We, the members of the Church, and particularly the missionaries, have to be the “hissers,” or the tellers and testifiers, of the Book of Mormon unto the ends of the earth.

The Book of Mormon is the great standard we are to use. It shows that Joseph Smith was a prophet. It contains the words of Christ, and its great mission is to bring men to Christ and all other things are secondary. The golden question of the Book of Mormon is “Do you want to learn more of Christ?” The Book of Mormon is the great finder of the golden contact. It does not contain things which are “pleasing unto the world” (1 Ne. 6:5), and so the worldly are not interested in it. It is a great **sieve**.

Anyone who has diligently sought to know the doctrines and teachings of the Book of Mormon and has used it conscientiously in missionary work knows within his soul that this is the instrument which God has given to the missionaries to convince the Jew and Gentile and Lamanite of the truthfulness of our message.

Now, we have not been using the Book of Mormon as we should. Our homes are not as strong unless we are using it to bring our children to Christ. Our families may be corrupted by worldly trends and teachings unless we know how to use the book to expose and combat the falsehoods in **socialism, organic evolution, rationalism, humanism, etc.** Our missionaries are not as effective unless they are “hissing forth” with it. **Social, ethical, cultural, or educational converts will not survive** under the heat of the day unless their taproots go down to the fulness of the gospel which the Book of Mormon contains. Our Church classes are not as spirit-filled unless we hold it up as a standard. And our nation will continue to degenerate unless we read and heed the words of the God of this land, Jesus Christ, and quit building up and upholding the secret combinations which the Book of Mormon tells us proved the downfall of both previous American civilizations.

Some of the early missionaries, on returning home, were reproved by the Lord in section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants because they had treated lightly the Book of Mormon. As a result, their minds had been darkened. The Lord said that this kind of treatment of the Book of Mormon brought the whole Church under condemnation, even all of 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.” (See D&C 84:54–57.) Are we still under that condemnation?

Reading the Book of Mormon is one of the greatest persuaders to get men on missions. We need more missionaries. But we also need better-prepared missionaries coming out of the wards and branches and homes where they know and love the Book of Mormon. A great challenge and day of preparation is at hand for missionaries to meet and teach with the Book of Mormon. We need missionaries to match our message.

And now grave consequences hang on our response to the Book of Mormon. “Those who receive it,” said the Lord, “in faith, and work righteousness, shall receive a crown of eternal life;

“But those who harden their hearts in unbelief, and reject it, it shall turn to their own condemnation—

“For the Lord God has spoken it.” (D&C 20:14–16.) ...

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.**

**“Jesus Christ—Gifts & Expectations,” BYU Devotional, 10 December 1974, typewritten manuscript, 3–5; see also *The New Era*, May 1975.)**

... Sometimes in our attempts to mimic the world and contrary to the prophet’s counsel we run after the world’s false educational, political, musical, and dress ideas. New worldly standards take over, a gradual breakdown occurs and finally, after much suffering, a humble people are ready to be taught once again a higher law.

Now during all this gradual lowering of standards, the righteous should be living up to the highest personal standards they can; not forcing those standards on others, but preparing for and awaiting a better day which surely must come.

Which leads me to another principle and that is that a leader cannot lead without followers. If better standards are to be observed, there must be a better people to do it.

The Book of Mormon talks about “clearing” away the branches, “which bring forth bitter fruit according to the strength of the good and the size thereof; and ye shall not clear away the bad thereof all at once, lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft, and the graft thereof shall perish ... wherefore ye shall clear away the bad according as the good shall grow, that the root and the top may be equal in strength until the good shall overcome the bad ...” (Jacob 5:65, 66.)

Only a Zion-people can bring in a Zion-society. And as the Zion-people increase, so we will be able to incorporate more of the principles of Zion until we have a people prepared to receive the Lord.

That means that on this campus [BYU-Provo], in due time, there will be an increasing number of text books written by inspired men of the Church. There will be less and less of a tendency to subscribe to the false teachings of men. There will be more and more a tendency to first lay the groundwork of the gospel truth in every subject, and then if necessary, show where the world may fall short of that standard.

In due time there will be increased teaching by the Spirit of God, but that can only take place if there is a decreased promotion of the precepts of men.

We seek that which is praiseworthy, lovely, virtuous, and of good report and we salute Beethoven, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, and Michelangelo. In due time, we will also have more of our own giants—particularly great father-patriarchs and noble companions and mothers of men. There is certain music heard and art seen and clothes worn on this campus that must pass away—not because the styles change—but because our standards will be improved.

When individual actions of some Church members disturb you, here's another principle to consider. And this is the principle of stewardship. As the kingdom grows larger, more and more responsibilities have to be delegated and stewardships handed out. Men respond in different degrees of valiancy to their stewardships. God is very patient and long-suffering as He waits for some of us to rise to our responsibilities. He usually gives a man a long enough rope and a long enough time to either pull himself up to the presence of God or drop off somewhere below. But while God is patient, no puny arm of man in his stewardship can long impede or pervert the work of the Lord. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind ever so finely.

Because God has given men their agency, there will always be those who will misuse it. The gospel net draws in the good and the bad, the best and the worst. The worst because the devil, before the final cleansing, put some of his followers within the kingdom in order to try and destroy it. We have some of them within the kingdom today, and in due course their number shall be known. Time has a way of taking care of all things, of elevating the good and bringing down the bad. If we see things going on within the kingdom that disturb us, we might first resolve if the matter falls within our stewardship. We then might go to the person or people involved. If it is of such a nature that we think it should be called to the attention of higher authority, then we can, in a kindly and quiet manner, take the necessary steps at the proper level.

To publish differences we may think we have with the leaders of the Church, to create strife and division, is a sure road to apostasy. Our task is to stick with the kingdom, to not let anything or anybody disaffect or sour us towards that great gift which Christ has given us—His Church.

The Church is true. Keep its laws; attend its meetings; sustain its leaders; accept its callings; get its recommend; enjoy its blessings.

... in addition to the gifts of the life of Christ, His prophet, and his Church is the gift of scripture, particularly the Book of Mormon.... That book was written for our day. Mormon, who compiled it, saw us in vision and was directed to put into the book those things God felt we would especially need in our time. There was inspiration in making the Book of Mormon a required religion class on this campus. The faculty and student body should know the Book of Mormon better than any other book. Not only should we know what history and faith promoting stories it contains, but **we should understand its teachings**. If we really did our homework and approached the Book of Mormon **doctrinally**, we could expose the errors and find the truths to combat many of the current false theories and philosophies of men, including **socialism, humanism, organic evolution**, and others.

I have noted within the Church the difference in discernment, in insight, conviction, and spirit between those who know and love the Book of Mormon and those who do not. That book is a great **sifter**.

#### **“The Gift of Modern Revelation,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 80.**

The Book of Mormon must be re-enthroned in the minds and hearts of our people. We must honor it by reading it, studying it, by taking its precepts into our lives and transforming them into lives required of the true followers of Christ. Speaking of the central role of the Book of Mormon in our worship, President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

“It seems to me that any member of this Church would never be satisfied until he or she had read the Book of Mormon time and time again, and thoroughly considered it so that he or she could bear witness that it is in very deed a record with the inspiration of the Almighty upon it, and that its history is true....

*“No member of this Church can stand approved in the presence of God who has not seriously and carefully read the Book of Mormon”* [in Conference Report, October 1961, 18; italics added.]

#### **“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion”, *Ensign*, November 1986, 4–7.**

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?

... 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?...

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....

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, 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.”

**“Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, November 1988, 4–5.**

... At present, the Book of Mormon is studied in our Sunday School and seminary classes every fourth year. This four-year pattern, however, must *not* [italics in original] be followed by Church members in their personal and family study. We need to read daily from the pages of the book that will get a man “nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” (*History of the Church*, 4:461.)

And when we are called upon to study or teach other scriptures, we need to strengthen that undertaking by frequent reference to the additional insights which the Book of Mormon may provide on the subject. (See 1 Ne 13:40; 2 Ne 3:12.) ...

The time is long overdue for a massive flooding of the earth with the Book of Mormon for the many reasons which the Lord has given. In this age of the electronic media and the mass distribution of the printed word, God will hold us accountable if we do not now move the Book of Mormon in a monumental way.

We have the Book of Mormon, we have the members, we have the missionaries, we have the resources, and the world has the need. The time is now!

My beloved brothers and sisters, we hardly fathom the power of the Book of Mormon, nor the divine role it must play, nor the extent to which it must be moved.

“Few men on earth,” said Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “either in or out of the Church, have caught the vision of what the Book of Mormon is all about. Few are they among men who know the part it has played and will yet play in preparing the way for the coming of Him of whom it is a new witness. ... The Book of Mormon shall so affect men that the whole earth and all its peoples will have been influenced and governed by it. ... There is no greater issue ever to confront mankind in modern times than this: Is the Book of Mormon the mind and will and voice of God to all men?” (*Millennial Messiah*, 159, 170, 179.) We testify that it is.

Now, my good Saints, we have a great work to perform in a very short time. We must flood the earth with the Book of Mormon—and get out from under God’s condemnation for having treated it lightly. (See D&C 84:54–58.)

**“Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 4–5.**

During the past few years a number of resources have been set in place in the Church to help us. New editions of the scriptures have been published—are we taking advantage of them? More temples are located closer to our people—are we going to the house of the Lord more frequently? The consolidated meeting schedule was set up—are we taking advantage of the increased time with our families? A special home evening manual was provided—are we using it? A new hymnal has just been published—are we singing more songs of the heart? (See D&C 25: 12.) And so the list goes on and on. We have received much help. We don’t need changed programs now as much as we need changed people!

We remember our beloved President Kimball for many marvelous words of counsel, among which was his encouragement to “lengthen our stride.” We needed that direction, for the Book of Mormon warns us of the tactics of the adversary in the last days: “And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.” (2 Ne. 28:21.)

There are many “awake” passages in the Book of Mormon, such as: “O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell ... awake ... [and] put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust.” (2 Ne. 1:13, 23.) As a people, it seems we can survive persecution easier and better than we can peace and prosperity...

In the category of sins, the Book of Mormon places unchastity next to murder. (See Alma 39:5.) As Alma states, “Now ... I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, ... for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.” (Alma 39:9.) If we are to cleanse the inner vessel, we must forsake immorality and be clean.

Unless we read the Book of Mormon and give heed to its teachings, the Lord has stated in section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants that the whole Church is under condemnation: “And this condemnation resteth upon the children of

Zion, even all.” (D&C 84: 56.) The Lord continues: “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.” (D&C 84:57.)

Now we not only need to say more about the Book of Mormon, but we need to do more with it. Why? The Lord answers: “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 84:58.) We have felt that scourge and judgment!

... The Book of Mormon has not been, nor is it yet, the center of our personal study, family teaching, preaching, and missionary work. Of this we must repent. I do not know of a man living today who has been more true to the Book of Mormon than President Marion G. Romney. In a general conference address, he declared that the Book of Mormon was “the most effective piece of missionary literature we have.” He quoted the Doctrine and Covenants, which states that “the Book of Mormon and the holy scriptures are given of me for your instruction” (D&C 33:16) and that “the elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon.” (D&C 42:12.) President Romney added, “It is of course obvious that unless we read, study, and learn the principles which are in the Book of Mormon, we, the elders, priests, and teachers of this church, cannot comply with this direction to teach them.

“But there is another reason why we should read it,” President Romney continued. “By doing so we will fill and refresh our minds with the constant flow of that ‘water’ which Jesus said would be in us—‘a well of water springing up into everlasting life.’ (John 4:14.) We must obtain a continuing supply of this water if we are to resist evil and retain the blessings of being born again. ...

“If we would avoid adopting the evils of the world, we must pursue a course which will daily feed our minds with and call them back to the things of the Spirit. I know of no better way to do this than by reading the Book of Mormon.”

And then he concluded: “And so, I counsel you, my beloved brothers and sisters and friends everywhere, to make reading in the Book of Mormon a few minutes each day a lifelong practice. “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 that counsel. Righteousness will increase. Faith, hope, and charity—the pure love of Christ—will abound in our homes and lives, bringing in their wake peace, joy, and happiness.” (Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1960, 110–113.)