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What I Like to Teach About the Book of Mormon

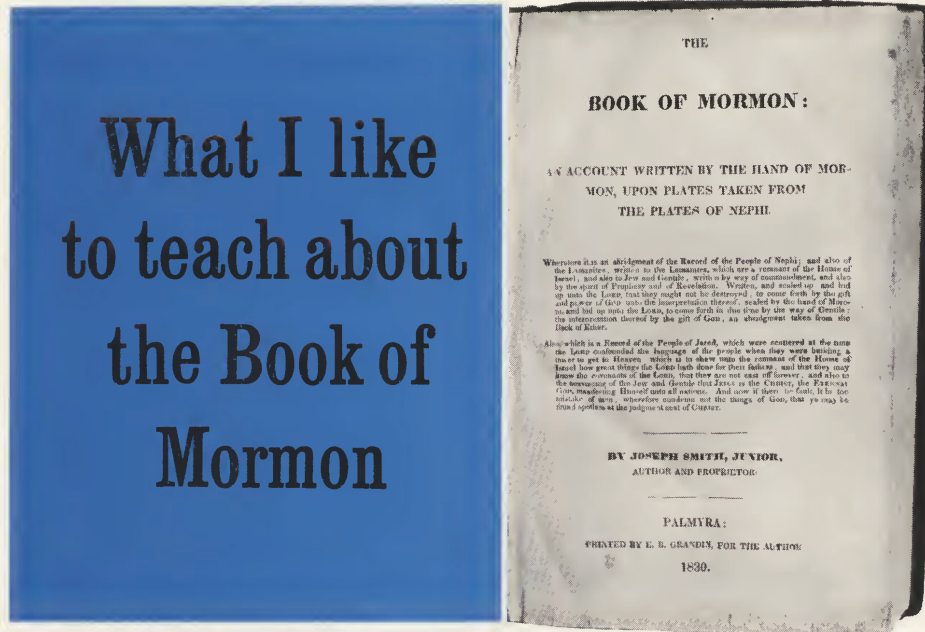
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Abstract: Nephi warned future readers that the Book of Mormon was not a history (2 Nephi 5:32–33). Rather, the book is an instrument to bring people to Christ. Nephi, Lehi, Abinadi, Jacob, Alma, and other prophets knew the mission of Christ and taught it.



BY LYMAN C. BERRETT / DISTRICT CO-ORDINATOR OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SEMINARIES

The writer believes the Book of Mormon to be exactly what it purports to be, an abridgment of records which have been preserved "... 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." (Preface to the Book of Mormon.)

Therefore, the writer likes to teach the Book of Mormon as an instrument to build a testimony of Jesus Christ in the hearts of young people and to give understanding concerning his role in the affairs of mankind. There is no reason to use the Book of Mormon as a text for history, geography, or anthropology. Certainly the words of Nephi are explicit in this regard:

"And I engraved that which is pleasing unto God. And if my people are pleased with the things of God they will be pleased with mine engravings which are upon the plates.

"And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates." (2 Nephi 5:32-33.)

There is great need to convince Jew and gentile

that Jesus is the Christ. This is apparent from reading the book, *The Life of Jesus*, by Maurice Goguel. This writer devotes the first chapter of his book to: (1) the emergence of the historical problem concerning Jesus, (2) the birth of criticism of the four gospels that tell the story of Jesus—his life, miracles, teachings, and death, (3) liberal Christian schools of thought regarding Jesus, and (4) theories of the non-historicity of Jesus.

Goguel suggests that the work of some of the prominent scholars of the nineteenth century gave rise to the negations of Jesus by certain critics. He states, "The first author of the nineteenth century to pronounce definitely against the actual existence of Jesus was Bruno Bauer."

There is an ever-growing number—scholars, ministers, researchers, and laymen—who question the historicity of Jesus. This, together with the rise of the advocates of the "social-gospel" theory has made inroads into the beliefs of some people. As serious as the problem is, it seems that one of the great needs today is to get the message of the Book of Mormon into the hearts of those who claim discipleship to Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Savior of this world, and to define the roll of Jesus Christ in the affairs of mankind.

There was no doubt in the minds of Book of Mormon prophets as to the reality of Jesus Christ. They knew and taught that Jesus was the Messiah, that his mission was one of redemption, and that Christ would come in fulfilment of words spoken by former prophets who had proclaimed that "... God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth. . . . also that he should go and bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted." (Mosiah 13:34-35.)

Nephi even explained the time that the Savior would come to the earth, saying: "Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world." (1 Nephi 10:4.)

Lehi continued, explaining that a great number of prophets had testified of the coming of the Messiah who was the Redeemer of the world, and that mankind was in a lost and fallen state and ever would be if they did not rely upon the Redeemer. Abinadi added emphasis to the role of Christ in the plan of redemption with these words: "For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished." (Mosiah 15:19.)

Abinadi further emphasized the necessity of mankind accepting the mission of the Savior with these words: "But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore, he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God . . . ;

"And now if Christ had not come into the world, speaking of things to come as though they have already come, there could have been no redemption." (*Ibid.*, 16:5-6.)

Nephi writes that he delights in the words of Isaiah, for Isaiah had seen the Redeemer. (2 Nephi 11:2.) He further rejoiced in explaining to the people that if Christ were not to come, all mankind must perish. He also delighted to prophesy concerning Christ, for he had foreseen his coming and the redemption. (*Ibid.*, 25:13.)

Jacob understood the law of Moses as a means of "pointing" the people to the Savior. "And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, . . ." (Jacob 4:5.) Abinadi also understood the law of Moses as a "... law of per-

formances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him.

"For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?" (Mosiah 13:30, 33.)

Alma, Amulek, the sons of Mosiah, Alma the younger, Helaman, Nephi the son of Helaman, and Samuel the Lamanite, all taught that the Savior would come and redeem his people. They were certain that he would come. There was no question of his being real in their minds. They knew the importance of his mission, and their efforts were to the end that people were made aware of the personal importance of living Christ's teachings. After the visit of the Savior to this continent, a detailed account of his ministry is given by Mormon.

The Book of Mormon gives some interesting accounts of men whose lives were drastically changed by accepting the gospel, and who became "new creatures." The experience of Alma the younger is one good example. Alma and the sons of Mosiah went about the land persecuting the Church. They had a miraculous conversion and, in Alma's words, his soul was redeemed from the "gall of bitterness." Note his declaration to his son Helaman: "For I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.

"And he said unto me: If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God.

"And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs.

"I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

"Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

"And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was

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harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

"Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my

heart: *O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me*, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

"And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

"And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

"Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea,

and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy." (Alma 36:6, 9, 10, 12, 15, 17-21. Italics added.)

Thus the Book of Mormon leaves no doubt about the reality of Jesus Christ and the importance of his mission.

The foreword of the Book of Mormon specifies that this book also shows the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord has done for their fathers. In the light of this, consider these words: "... we have obtained a land of promise, a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord God covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord.

"[And] . . . there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord.

"Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall the land be for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever." (2 Nephi 1:5-7.)

What a great promise made to the inhabitants of this land! It is a land that is choice above all others and was, at that time, kept from the knowledge of other countries in order that it wouldn't be overrun by those who would not appreciate it as a choice land. (*Ibid.*, 1:8.)

What a great thing the Lord has done for the House of Israel! He led them to a land that is choice above all other lands, preserved it until such a time as was propitious for others to know about it and then led choice groups of people here, promising protection to them as inhabitants of the land!

However, there is a sublime responsibility upon the people who live here. To keep this a choice land and to have God's protection, it is necessary "... that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only



"THE TARES AND THE WHEAT"

RICHARD L. EVANS

We have talked of two kinds of which the world of men is made: the fillers and the destroyers—those who build up and those who pull down, and have cited Phillips Brooks who said that there are some who "count the tares so loud that the field grows ashamed of itself."¹ Some further thoughts from this same source suggest the benefit and blessing of encouragement and appreciation and the destructive force of overemphasizing the negative side. "Your child, your scholar, your servant—you may fulfil him or you may destroy him," he said. "You destroy him if you [emphasize] everything that is bad and crude and ridiculous about him. . . . You destroy him if you make him feel himself weak and insignificant, and drive him to despair. You destroy him if you make his . . . feeling about his own life to be shame. On the other hand you fulfil him . . . if you catch everything that is good about him and water it with judicious encouragement and praise. You fulfil him if you recognize every feeblest and clumsiest effort to do right, if you inspire him with hope, if you make him seem to himself worth cultivating and watching and developing. . . . To say 'well-done' to any bit of work that has embodied good effort, is to . . . confirm and strengthen . . . but if you have nothing to say to your child or to your scholar [to your worker] except . . . that . . . his work is badly done, that he is wasting opportunities and losing the value of his life, then you are coming to him not to fulfil but to destroy . . . you who are set in positions of superintendence and authority: Make a great deal more of your right to praise the good than of your right to blame the bad. . . . It is so easy to give the bruised reed one blow and break it. . . . Never let a brave and serious struggle after truth and goodness, however weak it may be, pass unrecognized. . . ." ¹ This was among the important messages of the Master of mankind, who said: "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."² Among the greatest gifts that we can give are love, understanding, encouragement, and commendation for whatsoever should be encouraged and commended. There can be no real fulfilment of life in looking and living excessively or obsessively to the negative side. Blessed are those who help to lift men's lives.

¹Phillip Brooks, *Destruction and Fulfilment*.

²Matt. 5:17.

"The Spoken Word," from Temple Square, presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System, December 15, 1963. Copyright 1963.

God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them.

"And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.

"Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus

Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written." (Ether 2:8, 11-12.)

Times have changed since the Book of Mormon prophets wrote their messages to their people, but the problems of mankind have not changed. The great value of the Book of Mormon lies in the fact that its message is as vital and important today as it was two thousand years ago. Christ's way of life can change men as drastically today as it did Alma in his time. Joy in the redemption is as sweet today as it was for Alma, and the consequences of sin can be as bitter today as in Book of Mormon times.



... FROM WHICH TO BEGIN AGAIN ...

RICHARD L. EVANS

Sometimes time's passing is gentle. Sometimes it could put us in panic with its rude reality. But however acutely we become aware of the swift shortening of the seasons, there is yet such calm assurance as Nathaniel Hawthorne has left us to look to in these lines: "Our Creator would never have made such lovely days, and have given us the deep hearts to enjoy them, above and beyond all thought, unless we were meant to be immortal."¹ Swiftly once more we have moved through another series of seasons, as we do some looking back, some looking ahead, and some sensitive self-searching. And despite all outward circumstances, we well would come to an awareness that much depends upon ourselves. We have the choice of taking on the color and character of our environment or of helping to make and modify it by impressing upon our environment some of our own color and character. Also it is wise to learn to take time at its own pace, to be ourselves in season, and never try to live against the current of conscience, nor yet become complacent. We must fight evil on all fronts, in all its forms, and resist all things that should not be, but yet become reconciled to life and not expect all things to turn as we would turn them. Another thing about a passing season is that it gives us a beginning from which to go again—a place to start—a reason for resolution and reform, a new mark from which to move and measure the strength, the truth, the honesty of our intent. As a voice from the past, Emerson added: "Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is to you."² The past is what it is, the future may be made better by the uses of the present, not with complacency, but with a wholesome discontent, and with the assurance that nothing that is basically essential to our eternal opportunities is beyond our reasonable reach. And lest there be too much of looking back, the past is to learn from, but not to live in. God give us hope and faith, repentance and improvement, peace and high purpose for the future.

¹Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse*.
²Ralph Waldo Emerson.

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