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How to Teach the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: This article states that teachers of the Book of Mormon may teach the historical, geographical, literary, or archaeological aspects of the book, but they should emphasize the doctrines and teachings of Jesus Christ and demonstrate in what manner the book assists individuals in our present day world conditions.



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HOW TO TEACH

BY WILLIAM
E. BERRETT

THE BOOK OF MORMON

Teaching the Book of Mormon is one of the most rewarding of teaching experiences. This is true because generally speaking the reward to a teacher is linked to the effect his teaching has upon his pupil, and the Book of Mormon properly taught has the power to change the whole life of one who studies it. It is the most important book to appear in American times, and it is destined, as was predicted by its translator, Joseph Smith, to divide the world into two camps.

Henry Wallace, one time Secretary of Agriculture, himself a non-Mormon, once said of it, "Of all the American religious books of the nineteenth century, it seems probable The Book of Mormon was the most powerful. It reached perhaps only one percent of the people of the United States, but it affected this one percent so powerfully and lastingly that all the people of the United States have been affected, especially by its contribution in opening up one of our great frontiers."¹

Indeed, the reading of it has not only affected the history of western America but has also affected its readers so powerfully as to cause them to give up their homes, families, and national allegiance, and to migrate halfway round the world where necessary to be able to affiliate with others similarly affected.

¹The United States Secretary of Agriculture, address before the New York Times National Book Fair, Nov., 1937.

The teacher of the Book of Mormon thus has in his hands a powerful book, and he would do well to warn his students in the beginning that this book may change their lives, their hopes, and their aspirations. Indeed he should warn them that this book will convince them that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Christ, the Redeemer of Mankind, that he lives and that we too will live again. For this is the objective of the author and should be the principal objective of one who teaches this book.

It is quite obvious that a teacher of the Book of Mormon will fail to achieve what its chief author, Mormon, meant the Book of Mormon to achieve unless the teacher has a divine objective and approaches his subject with an enthusiasm which can only come from a firm conviction of the truth of the record.

The teacher of the Book of Mormon will be most successful if he does four things:

*First: Keeps constantly in mind that the purpose of the book is to convince the reader "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, manifesting himself unto all nations. . . ."*²

The objective of each lesson then, should have some relationship to this over-all purpose. The teacher will find in doing this that the objective comes easily and need not be forced.

²Preface, Book of Mormon, title page.

The Book of Mormon is not a book on the geography of early America, and the teacher who is forever concerned with geographical questions will find the references too few and entirely inadequate for map-making. Further, he is apt to mislead the students because no two Book of Mormon geographers seem to reach the same conclusions as to the location of particular places, peoples, and events. No proposed map of the Book of Mormon has been or probably could be accepted by the Church as being authentic.

As it is impossible, at this time, to locate the civilizations referred to in the Book of Mormon, the use of archaeological findings in the Americas should be used cautiously regarding the establishment of the claim of the Book of Mormon that ancient civilization comparable to those in the Old World did exist in the Americas at the times required by the Book of Mormon account.

The use of archaeological findings at best but arouses interest in the Book of Mormon. A testimony concerning the truth of the doctrines contained therein must remain a matter of the Spirit, and the reader who wishes to know of the truth must forever turn to the formula so clearly set forth by Moroni: to study and ponder the contents of the book and then pray to God in faith for a revelation concerning the truth thereof.³ The teacher should already have applied that formula, so that he can present the contents of the book without doubt in his own mind and without conveying any shadow of doubt to his student—for the gift of discernment in the youth of the Church is everywhere manifest, and students discover hypocrisy in its earliest manifestations.

The Book of Mormon was not written to portray the nature of early American industry, commerce, art, law, or medicine, and while occasional statements are illuminating and suggestive, they are insufficient for discussion concerning those fields. Hence, the book is disappointing to those whose objectives are other

than those proclaimed in the preface.

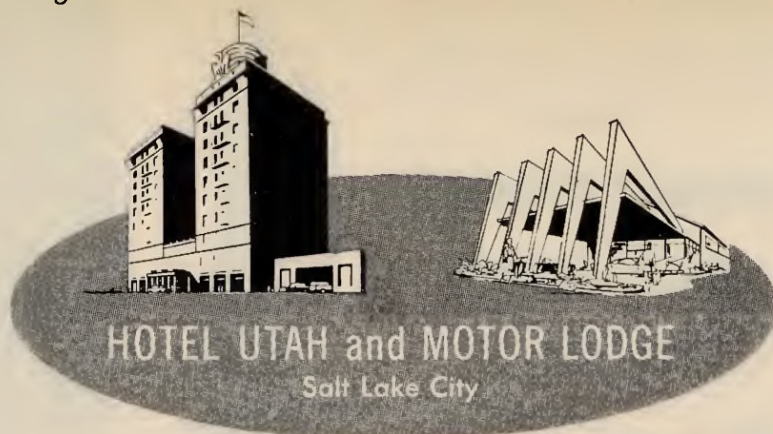
Second: Realizes that he is aided in teaching the principles of the gospel taught by the book by a stirring and graphic account of how those principles affected individuals and nations.

Histories generally relate chronologically the events of the times and nations concerned with little reference to primary causes which led to the rise and fall of nations. But in the Book of Mormon we have authors who largely ignore history, giving but a brief running outline, and devote themselves to a treatment of principles and their effect on persons and nations. And here we have a book unique among books. Here are portrayed the rise and fall of two nations, in each instance isolated from the rest of the world where causes and effects can be isolated from those intertwining factors which so confuse the historians of other peoples. Here are portrayed the great experiments in national life, and from a study of them the student should emerge with indisputable evidence of the relationship of beliefs and principles to individual and national welfare. The teacher should become aware of these great teachings of the Book of Mormon and not become enmeshed in having students trace genealogies, memorize names and places, and devise charts and graphs.

In this book we see faith and repentance in operation. We see the value of baptism and the influence of the Holy Ghost. We see what faith in Christ or loss of faith does to individuals and nations—and in the seeing, the principles cease to be abstract but take on substance and meaning for all generations. This is what the youth and the adult need. When we teach faith in God as an abstract principle, the students ask "So what?" The Book of Mormon gives the answer. The Nephites and Lamanites shared the same social, racial, and ethical background. They lived in comparable physical surroundings. The only variable is a spiritual variable—the difference in belief regarding God and the gospel of (Continued on page 856)

³Moroni 10:3-5.

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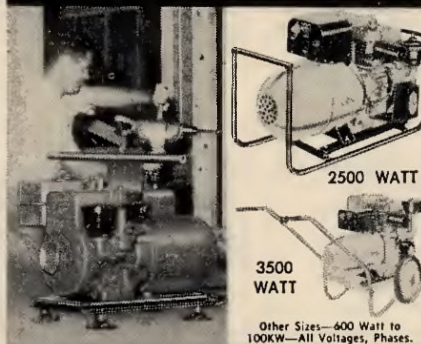
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How to Teach the Book of Mormon

(Continued from page 805)

Jesus Christ. But that variable is important. One people achieves great culture while the other sinks into barbarism.

The influence of God, when accepted, led to prosperity, peace, and happiness. The rejection of God led invariably to war, degradation, and oblivion. Thus the book becomes a promise and a warning to nations.

Third: Relate the principles and problems discussed in the book to present-day situations.

The Book of Mormon is not a book "to have read." The book is one to which we should constantly turn as a guide to present-day living. Nephi followed this principle in teaching his people the Hebrew scripture: "And I did read many things unto them . . . for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning. . . . I spake unto them saying: Hear ye the words of the prophet . . . and liken them unto yourselves. . . ." ⁴

⁴I Nephi 19:23-24

WINTER PEACE

BY ROWENA JENSEN BILLS

The valley rests in winter peace.
Harvesting done, the combines cease.
Each orchard tree, fruitless and bare,
Becomes a silhouette in prayer.
Inside, the fires burn yellow bright,
And hearts mellow from an inner sight
As slow winds push outside the door.
Cellars and cupboards hold in store
The lavish lush of summer's yield.
Books and music firmly shield
Young active minds while Mother knits—
Father dozes as he sits
Content to dream and secretly bring
Visions of another spring.