



Type: Magazine Article

Testimony Through Reading the Book of Mormon

Author(s): Matthew Cowley

Source: *Relief Society Magazine*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (January 1953), pp. 6–12

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Abstract: A testimony of the Book of Mormon can be gained while reading the book. By reading the standard works, individuals can come to know God.

Testimony Through Reading The Book of Mormon

Elder Matthew Cowley
Of the Council of the Twelve

[Address Delivered at the Annual General Relief Society Conference, Wednesday, October 1, 1952]

(Spoke briefly in Maori)

I had to greet my friends from Hawaii, and my brother here from New Zealand. I feel somewhat like the minister who had not had time to prepare his sermon during the week, and when he arose on Sunday before his congregation, he said: "Brothers and sisters, I have not had any time during the week because of my social obligations to prepare my sermon, so I will just have to stand up and let the Lord speak through me, but next week I will promise to do better."

That is the position I am in today, but I know I will not do better next week, if the Lord will speak through me, and, of course, that depends entirely upon you. This business of inspiration, I think, originates with the congregation, not with the speaker. The prayers of the congregation should go to God, and back from God to the speaker, then back from the speaker to the congregation, so if there is no inspiration in what I say this afternoon, it is entirely your fault. It is your responsibility.

I feel very humble in trying to pinch-hit for President Smith. I use that expression because the World Series is on now, but I know that were he here, you would receive a message which would stir you up

in your desires to study the sacred record which we know as The Book of Mormon.

I believe you know him well enough to know that he would speak very strongly to you about the gospel in The Book of Mormon, about the moral standards taught in The Book of Mormon, and about the spirit of The Book of Mormon, so I trust that while I speak a few moments to you, that I may, in a very weak way, bear my testimony as he would bear it were he here.

I want to say that I have never met a more kindly, more considerate, more loving man in all my life than President Joseph Fielding Smith. He is one of the most loving characters I have ever been associated with, and I trust that God will give him strength and a long life to continue his great mission here in the earth in delivering his powerful discourses to the children of Zion.

This morning, in referring to the No-Liquor-Tobacco Committee, I was reminded that (it has not been published yet) the name of the Committee is the "Personal Standards Committee." We finally discovered that liquor and tobacco are not the only sins in the Church, that there are other sins just as grievous, just as damaging, as the use of tobacco and liquor. So under

this new name of "Personal Standards Committee" we incorporate all vices which man is addicted to or may be addicted to. After all, this life is just one eternal round of sin and death, repentance, and forgiveness.

So you mothers here, I would urge you to be vitally interested in the program which we have under the heading of the "Personal Standards Committee." You do not know what your own lives and your own influences mean in the lives of young people, and the lives of children.

I was talking the other day to one of my friends, a life-long friend, who belongs to the Alcoholics Anonymous, who was drunk for twenty-seven years, and then finally turned his life back to God. He is now active in the Church and has not had a drink for fifteen years. I asked him how he was able to overcome that habit. I asked him if it was due entirely to the program of A.A., and he said to me: "Matt, if I had not had the fortification which came to me in my childhood from a righteous mother, I never would have been able to overcome this terrible habit. The influence of that mother in my home is what has given me the courage and the strength and the fortitude to overcome this drinking habit."

WHAT a tribute to a mother! Now, you sisters, you are the mothers of men, and you may not live to see the fruits of your teaching in the lives of your children. Maybe from some of your homes there will come children who have not lived as you would like them to live. You may not see them turn

their lives back to God, but the day will come, if you give them the fortification in their childhood, in those years when their souls and minds are pliable, the day will come when they will have the strength, because of you, to turn their lives and their characters back to God and be influenced by him. God bless you in this great and noble work of teaching your children and the children of others the ways of righteousness, because that which you implant in youth will crop up from time to time in later life, and it may be the very influence you are wielding, of which you do not see the immediate results, that will be an anchor to the faith of these young people.

As the chairman of that Committee, I wanted to get in that much, anyway, to you sisters. After all, you belong to the great sorority of saviorhood. You may not hold the Priesthood. Men are different, men have to have something given to them to make them saviors of men, but not mothers, not women. You are born with an inherent right, an inherent authority, to be the saviors of human souls. You are the co-creators with God of his children. Therefore, it is expected of you by a right divine that you be the saviors and the regenerating force in the lives of God's children here upon the earth.

I would like to bear my testimony to you about the book which you are studying in the Relief Society, The Book of Mormon. I know nothing about archaeology. I have not studied the maps which apparently relate to The Book of Mormon, the travels of the Lehites, the Lamanites, and so forth. I

know very little about the outside evidences of The Book of Mormon, but I have a testimony of the divinity of this book, and that testimony has come to me from within the two covers of the book itself.

To me, archaeology, and all that archaeologists discover, which may in a way prove the genuineness of the book—these discoveries are lost in the spirit of the book itself, and if you can't find a testimony within the covers of this book, there is no need to look elsewhere.

WHEN I was a missionary on these grounds many years ago, I followed a group of tourists around. I have forgotten who conducted the party, but I was just following. It might have been President Levi Edgar Young, and in that group was a Japanese from Harvard, who was a doctor of philosophy.

I recall that at the end of the tour around the block, he went to the guide, and he said, "I have been a little disappointed in this tour."

The guide said, "Why?"

He said, "You have not said anything about that book which you people have."

Well, he just had not had time to talk about The Book of Mormon, and so the guide said, "If you have time I will be glad to take you into the Bureau and present you with one of these books."

So they went in, and he took a Book of Mormon, he autographed it, and presented it to this Japanese doctor of philosophy, and then he started to tell him the story of the coming forth of The Book of Mormon, and this Japanese stopped him immediately.

"I do not want to hear anything about the outside evidences pertaining to this book. I will read the book itself, and then I will tell you where it came from. Then these other stories won't mean a thing to me. If this came from God, I will find that disclosed within the book itself. If it did not come from God, no matter what story you would tell me would have no influence upon my belief or disbelief in this record. I am a Christian. I do not know where the New Testament came from, but I have read the New Testament, and after I read it, I became a follower of Christ, because in that book is the life of One who was perfect, and I caught a spirit from the New Testament which turned me from the gods of the Japanese to the God of Christianity."

We have so much collateral reading in this Church. With all due respect to those who write books, I think there is only one place where we can really get a testimony of the divine mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith, a testimony of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that is right back to the source material—the standard works of the Church, because within these covers, the voice rings out, "God hath spoken."

THESSE are not the opinions of men. These are not the opinions of men as to where Lehi and his party landed, either in the Pacific or the Atlantic. These are not the conclusions of the students of archaeology, of the drawers of maps. This is the word of God himself, and so, studying The Book of Mormon, brothers and sisters, you

are getting back to God himself, and my, what this book contains!

Voting was referred to this morning. Brother Lee read from the Book of Mosiah, I think it was, about the voting of the people on this continent. I think that is the first record in sacred history of voting, and it occurred on this continent. We are facing an election this year. We learn from this book that man is endowed with certain rights, just as the Declaration of Independence states. We have the right to liberty, to freedom, to the pursuit of happiness. We have the right of the franchise. We are told in this book that no kings can reign upon this continent, that this must always be a continent governed under the principles of a republican form of government.

We are told that this land is choice above all other lands. All of these things are contained within this sacred book.

You know when this book was written, these United States were confined to just the fringe of this great continent. Daniel Webster had said that all of this western area was worth nothing. He said he would not vote one penny of the taxes of the people of the United States to extend the then boundaries of the United States, but here in this sacred record, it set forth that this land—the whole land—was a land choice above all other lands. We must preserve it as a land choice above all other lands.

God was working in that generation, not only with the Prophet Joseph Smith, in giving unto him the plates upon which this record was inscribed, but he was working upon the minds of men who were raised

up for the purpose of bringing to these people of the United States, called forth from all nations of the earth, the greatest principles of freedom and liberty that have ever been vouchsafed to man.

The eyes of the world since that day have been upon this land, choice above all other lands. Were we to let down the bars now against immigration, people would flock here by the millions, because they know that this is a land choice above all other lands. This is where God has made of all nations one people, and I add my request to Brother Lee's that you people use your influence to get those of voting age out to vote.

YOU know, the slaves never had the franchise. Before the Civil War they were not allowed to vote. We have voluntary slavery in this country because we have millions who will not go out to vote who have the right to do so. They are slaves of their own choosing, because if we do not participate in preserving this land choice above all other lands, then to that degree we are bringing back to this land, slavery.

Now, it is all within the book, brothers and sisters. Christ came to this continent. Why not? God is the father of us all. Christ, when he left the other hemisphere, told his disciples, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring . . . and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

He came. He established the Church here. He chose twelve disciples. He gave them the authority to teach the gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof. Baptism

became essential here as it had been among the Jews whom he taught. And so we have the only witness in all the world to the divinity of the Holy Bible. The evidences of archaeology are not conclusive. The discoveries of men who dig in the earth are not conclusive witnesses of the divinity of the Bible or of The Book of Mormon. But The Book of Mormon is conclusive in its testimony and witness that the Bible is the word of God, and the Bible is conclusive in its testimony that The Book of Mormon is the word of God. One as a witness for the other, and God himself said that these two records would become one in his hand. He did not say that there would only be one record, only one stick, but he said two, and that those two would become one in his hand.

So the missionaries go forth with two books in their hands to proclaim the word of God, not with one. I urge you to read The Book of Mormon. I learned the Maori language, what little I know of it, not from studying the grammars of the language, but from studying The Book of Mormon, and after reading diligently and with fasting and praying, The Book of Mormon in the Maori language for eleven weeks, I stood up for fifteen minutes and bore my testimony in that language. I caught the spirit of that book and it revealed to me in a way that I cannot explain the language of those children of Israel.

Later on I assisted in a new translation of The Book of Mormon into the Maori language, and after fasting and praying, I learned what it is to translate under the inspira-

tion and the power of God himself.

Now we have with us here my good Israelite friend (Wi Pere Amaru). I am glad he has come to speak to us Gentiles, to bring to us a message right from the heart and blood of Israel. You know, in the 63d chapter of Alma, there is a little story which tells of Hagoth who was such an exceedingly curious man that he built a boat, and he went out on the seas, and he came back. He built other boats, and then finally the boats went forth and never returned. We are told in The Book of Mormon the place where those ships were built was near a narrow neck of land.

WHEN I was on my first mission as a young boy, I used to ask the oldtimers out there, "Where did you come from?" They would say (in Maori), "We came from the place where the sweet potato grows wild, where it is not planted, does not have to be cultivated."

There is only one place in all the world where the sweet potato grows wild, and that is within the environs of that narrow neck of land where Hagoth built his ships. They will tell you that they came from several degrees of distance (Maori). One degree of distance, a greater degree of distance, and then a far greater degree of distance.

Then they will tell you . . . (spoken in Maori). The Maori scholars tell you that . . . (spoken in Maori) means the place where the spirits are joined. But I have a little different interpretation of that. Wairua in the Maori language means "spirit." Wairua also means "two

waters," wai meaning water, rua meaning two.

In the Hawaiian language *Wailua* means "two waters"; in the Samoan language *Vailua* means "two waters." The word for spirit in those other languages isn't *Wairua*, the same as in the Moari language.

The Maori scholars say that they came from a far distant place, where the spirits are joined, or where the body returns to the spirit. But I say, knowing the story of Hagoth as I do, that they came from the joining place of two waters, a narrow neck of land between two bodies of water which joins those two great continents.

Now, I have said this much to give Brother *Wi Pere Amaru* an introduction to his own talk. I hope I have not gone too far, and I hope that you will grasp the spirit of this testimony, the testimony of these people. I have never met a Polynesian Islander yet who knew anything about archaeology. I have never met one yet who was concerned about drawing a line across the ocean on a map to show which way *Lehi* went and where he landed, or I have never met one yet who knows anything about any of these discoveries that man claims prove the divinity of *The Book of Mormon*, but I have never met a Polynesian Islander yet who ever read *The Book of Mormon* who did not say, "That book came from God," and it has thrilled my soul to hear non-members of the Church stand up and say, "That book came from God. That is our record."

It says right in the beginning that when *Lehi* and his party set forth they discovered they did not have

the records of their ancestors, and he sent his sons back to get those records. Ah, that is Polynesian. No native ever stands up in any kind of a gathering to give any kind of talk, political, religious, or otherwise, but what he immediately starts talking about his ancestors, "being born of goodly parents," and how they all believe they were born of goodly parents! I have met some of them who were terrible, but they claim they were good, and I guess they were.

They are wonderful people, and the fastest repenters I have ever seen in all my life. They will repent every week of the same offense, and you have to forgive them every week because they are so sweet and humble, and so sincere.

But behold, my brothers and sisters, one of the finest living Maoris I have ever known. He grew up in a little locality near the sea where there was no Priesthood. His grandmother, as he says, was the president of the branch. His grand-aunt was superintendent of the Sunday School, and his mother was the Relief Society teacher, and they were all rearing little children. I think they were all widows, weren't they *Wi Pere Amaru*?

THERE they were, faithful and devoted, and there they have built up strength because of their activities in the Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His mother has come to the temple, received her endowments, and been sealed to her noble husband. He has been here before, many years ago, and received two degrees at the Brigham Young University. Now he is at the Uni-

versity of Utah trying to win his Doctorate. He has come back with a wife and four beautiful children.

You know up there at the University there are one or two instructors, I think they have already said to him, I know they said to one of our other Maori boys, "Before you leave here we will destroy your testimony in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and your belief in your Church."

Do you know what they tell them? They laugh when they tell them, "You are talking to Israelites. You can teach us anything you want. We will try to pass in these

courses. We will try to get passing grades. But there is something down in here which the wisdom of man can never withdraw, and that is our faith in God, his protecting care over us, as his children scattered over thousands of miles in the Pacific."

God bless you, brothers and sisters. I have taken up too much time, but I have been thinking about the Maoris, and they never think of time. They will talk all day and all night, but I will say to Wi Pere Amaru, don't talk too long. I'm tired.

God bless us all, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Kindness

Ida Isaacson

Who has not made glad
And helped another on his way
Has failed his noblest impulses,
His counsel to obey.

Beyond Confining Bounds

Elena Hassell Stanley

Man moves toward a distant destiny
Beyond confining bounds of time and space;
At times he falters, finds he must retrace,
Then probe his soul to find the cryptic key.
From parchment scrolls of ancient Galilee,
He garners living gems of truth and grace,
As gates of darkness fall, love will replace
The law of tooth and claw, to set him free.

Man's wisdom is a very feeble flame;
It flickers, wavers, swayed by doubt and fear,
But reinforced by faith, glows brilliantly,
The radiant symbol of a greater name.
The road ahead emerges straight and clear
Transcending space into eternity.