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## Lesson XVII. Continual Revelation

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**Abstract:** Introduction—The Book of Mormon an incident—Significance of the incident—God unchangeable—The Holy Ghost an eternal witness—Nephite prophets not exceptions—The special gift of the prophet—Ask and ye shall receive—Instructions varied—Revelation progressive and cumulative—Wo to those who deny—They understand not the Gospel—The testimony of the Book of Mormon—The truth of the Bible teachings established—Summary.

# GUIDE DEPARTMENT.

## Teachings of the Book of Mormon.

### LESSON XVII.

#### CONTINUAL REVELATION.

The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is an incident in the story of the restoration of the Gospel. It must not be thought that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is founded upon the authority of the Book of Mormon. Nor must it be thought that the marvelous system of life-philosophy known as the Gospel is taken from the Book of Mormon. The restoration of the Gospel in the dispensation of the fulness of times is a fact outside of and independent of the Book of Mormon. In the divine economy, the Gospel would certainly have been restored in proper time, whether or not there had been revealed a Book of Mormon. The authority of the Holy Priesthood is derived, not from the Book of Mormon, but from God Himself through the direct ministration of holy angels. The Gospel plan of salvation is derived, not from the Book of Mormon, but from God Himself through direct and continual revelation. Indeed, the converse of what has been stated above may also be said to be true. Even if the Book of Mormon had been revealed and translated by divine power, there could have been no lawful institution of the Church of Christ, nor could there have been an authoritative restoration of the Gospel plan, had there been no further revelations nor divine ministrations. That is why we say that the Church is founded upon the

principle of revelation. That is why the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was but an incident in the story of the restoration of the Gospel.

The incident, however, like all incidents of importance, has peculiar significance. One may well ask, What is the special mission of the Book of Mormon? Why were the records of the ancient peoples of America revealed in the dispensation of the fulness of times? The first of the Nephites answered these questions thus: "These last records [the Book of Mormon and others] which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first [the Bible], 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 peoples, 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."<sup>a</sup>

This, then, is the special mission of the Book of Mormon. It bears witness of the divine inspiration of the holy men whose deeds are recorded in the Old and New Testaments. It confirms the teachings of the Bible by presenting anew the plan of salvation in simplicity and

<sup>a</sup>I Nephi 13:40, 41.

in a fair degree of fulness. It establishes the essential fact that all men must come to Jesus, or they cannot be saved. In the studies we have pursued this year we have learned what the Book of Mormon teaches of the Father in heaven, of the spiritual and the natural world, of the divine nature of man, of the purpose of the fall, of the effect of the atonement, of the purpose and value of priesthood, of the Church of Christ, of the righteousness of faith, of sin and the law, of the doctrine of reward, of the intermediate state, of the resurrection, of the salvation of the dead, of the second coming, and of the final judgment. In all these points of doctrine, we have learned that the Book of Mormon corroborates and confirms what we have learned of them in years past. The Book of Mormon helps to establish the truth of the Bible. But it must not be forgotten that we have the Book of Mormon as a result of Modern Revelation. Those who accept the Book of Mormon and repose faith in it, accept also Joseph Smith as a prophet of God. They accept the doctrine that God can, will, and does reveal His word to His servants in the present day as well as in days gone by. In short, the miraculous coming forth of the Book of Mormon was possible only through the operation of the principle—the doctrine—of continual revelation. It will be interesting, therefore, to discover what the Book of Mormon teaches concerning this principle.

In the Nephite theology it was assumed that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The thought that God was—or could possibly be—a fickle God was abhorrent to the Nephite prophet. In a remarkable passage referring to the coming forth of the Book of

Mormon, the Lord said to the first Nephi, "I am a God of miracles: and I will show unto the world that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever."<sup>b</sup> Such a declaration can mean but one thing. What God has done at one time He can and may do at other times as occasions require. He is a God of miracles. He has performed many miracles in the past. He can and may perform miracles in the present day as well as in the past. God walked and talked with certain highly favored men in olden times. He may do so now with holy men if the occasion requires. For God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Not only is God Himself unchangeable, but the Holy Ghost, the special witness of the Godhead, bears record of Messiah, "from the beginning of the world until this time, and from this time henceforth and forever."<sup>c</sup> For, asserts the Nephite theology, Jesus "manifesteth Himself unto all those who believe in Him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men, according to their faith."<sup>d</sup> Only by a process of continual revelation, according to this statement, can an individual, or a people, gain a true testimony of Jesus the Christ.

It was because the necessity of continual revelation was so thoroughly understood by the Nephite prophets that they felt themselves no exception to the rule when God revealed His will to them. After Nephi had heard the recital of his father's marvelous vision, he too desired to see, by the power of the Holy Ghost, what his father had

<sup>b</sup>1 Nephi 27:23.

<sup>c</sup>1 Nephi 12:18.

<sup>d</sup>1 Nephi 26:12, 13.

seen. For the power of the Holy Ghost, concludes Nephi, "is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek Him, as well in times of old as in the time that He should manifest Himself unto the children of men."<sup>e</sup> There was no question or doubt in the mind of Nephi as to the divine truth of the doctrine of continual revelation. So also Alma argued that it was as easy for God to reveal Himself at one time as at another. Arguing with his son Corianton on the necessity of revealing the great plan of atonement before its accomplishment, Alma asks, "Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be made known unto this people, as well as unto their children? Is it not as easy at this time, for the Lord to send His angel to declare these glad tidings unto us, as unto our children; or as after the time of His coming?"<sup>f</sup> And of course conversely, Is it not as easy for the Lord to reveal Himself now as at any time in the past?

In the Nephite theology it was clearly taught, then, that God might reveal Himself in any age, to any people, that the true testimony of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus can be gained only through the gift of revelation, and that the Nephite prophets were not exceptions when they received the word of God by revelation.<sup>g</sup> Indeed, it was taught that one of the special gifts of the prophet was to discern by the Spirit whatsoever should befall the children of men. Moreover, it was declared that God will give liberally to anyone who shall ask in faith;<sup>h</sup> that revelation is cumulative, line upon line, precept upon precept;<sup>i</sup> and that

God may vary His instructions from generation to generation to suit the needs of the people.<sup>j</sup> These doctrines require the active operation of the principle of continual revelation.

Thus the Book of Mormon teaches positively the principle of continual revelation. Negatively, too, the principle is upheld by the Book of Mormon. Foreseeing the time when people should stumble, and many should fall, because new revelation was given to the world, the Lord asked through His prophet, "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?"<sup>k</sup> Then again He declared, "Wo be unto him that shall say, We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough."<sup>l</sup> And Mormon asserted boldly that any "who deny the revelations of God, and say that they are done away, that there are no revelations, nor prophecies nor gifts, nor healing, nor speaking with tongues, and the interpretation of tongues \* \* \* [know] not the Gospel of Christ."<sup>m</sup>

The testimony of the Book of Mormon is therefore very clearly and strongly that angels have not ceased and will not cease to minister to men;<sup>n</sup> that spiritual gifts can never be done away;<sup>o</sup> and that if spiritual blessings have ceased among any people, it is because of the unbelief of that people.<sup>p</sup> And in maintaining these points, the

<sup>e</sup>I Nephi 10:17-19.

<sup>f</sup>Alma 39:18, 19.

<sup>g</sup>I Nephi 22:2.

<sup>h</sup>II Nephi 4:35; III Nephi 27:29.

<sup>i</sup>II Nephi 28:30.

<sup>j</sup>II Nephi 29:9.

<sup>k</sup>II Nephi 29:8.

<sup>l</sup>II Nephi 28:29.

<sup>m</sup>Mor. 9:7-11; 15-19.

<sup>n</sup>Mor. 7:29.

<sup>o</sup>Moro. 10:19-ff.

<sup>p</sup>Moro. 7:37, 38.

Book of Mormon, itself the product of continual revelation, upholds and supports that fundamental, and essential principle. And by upholding the principle of continual revelation, the Book of Mormon proves itself true to its divine mission of establishing the truth of the Bible. For in the Bible also it is taught, that, "Where there is no vision the people perish,"<sup>q</sup> and that, "The Lord God will do nothing, but He reveleth His secret unto His servants the prophets."<sup>r</sup>

In this lesson we have learned that the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is an incident in the story of the restoration of the Gospel; that the special mission of the Book of Mormon is to establish the truth of the Bible and to bear record of the Lamb of God; that in the Nephite theology it was assumed that God is unchangeable; that the Holy Ghost bears witness of Jesus always; that the Nephite prophets did not consider themselves exceptions when they received revelation; that one of the special missions of the prophet is to discern the word of God by the Spirit; that anyone may receive the word of God who will ask in faith; that revelation is cumulative; that God may vary His instructions; that those who deny revelation do not understand the Gospel; that, therefore, the Book of Mormon testifies of the truth of the doctrine of continual revelation; and that in doing so it helps to establish the truth of the Bible.

#### OUTLINE.

Introduction—The Book of Mormon an incident—Significance of the

<sup>q</sup>Prov. 29:18.

<sup>r</sup>Amos 3:7.

incident—God unchangeable—The Holy Ghost an eternal witness—Nephite prophets not exceptions—The special gift of the prophet—Ask and ye shall receive—Instructions varied—Revelation progressive and cumulative—Wo to those who deny—They understand not the Gospel—The testimony of the Book of Mormon—The truth of the Bible teachings established—Summary.

#### QUESTIONS.

1. Why is the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to be considered merely an incident in the story of the restoration of the Gospel?
2. What is the special mission of the Book of Mormon?
3. How is the Book of Mormon the product of continual revelation?
4. What does the Book of Mormon teach concerning the unchangeable character of God?
5. How does this teaching affect the doctrine of continual revelation?
6. How is God a God of miracles?
7. What seems to be the special mission of the Holy Ghost?
8. How does this special mission affect the doctrine of continual revelation?
9. Show how the Nephite prophets thought themselves no exception to the rule when they received revelation from God.
10. What was, in the Nephite theology, one of the special gifts of the prophet?
11. What further does the Book of Mormon teach concerning the nature and growth of revelation?
12. How is the principle of continual revelation upheld negatively in the Book of Mormon?
13. What is the testimony of the Book of Mormon concerning the ministration of angels and the operation of spiritual gifts?
14. How does the Book of Mormon, by upholding the principle of continual revelation, establish the truth of the Bible?
15. Summarize the teachings of this lesson.
16. What is your own testimony of the principle of continual revelation?