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The Second Coming of Jesus

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W. Jeffrey Marsh

The doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is clarified by the Book of Mormon. It is a great testament of Jesus' return. It contains prophecies about the last days, and it presents a history that in many ways is similar to our own. Its writers saw our time and wrote for our needs as they preserved the record of a people who experienced the coming of Christ. The Book of Mormon makes clear that with an understanding of the Second Coming and a knowledge of how to prepare for it, we can look forward to the event with anticipation and hope.

The Book of Mormon makes a profound contribution to our understanding of gospel doctrine. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie noted, "Almost all of the doctrines of the gospel are taught in the Book of Mormon with much greater clarity and perfection than those same doctrines are revealed in the Bible. Anyone who will place in parallel columns the teachings of these two great books on such subjects as the atonement, plan of salvation, gathering of Israel, baptism, gifts of the Spirit, miracles, revelation, faith, charity, (or any of a hundred other subjects), will find conclusive proof of the superiority of Book of Mormon teachings."¹

This is certainly true regarding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth in the latter days. The Book of Mormon clarifies the doctrine of the Second Coming in at least four ways: first, it contains specific prophecies about the last days preceding the Second Coming; second, recorded history in the Nephite record is a type of our day – our modern history echoes Book of Mormon history; third, the prophet-writers of the Book of Mormon saw our day in vision and spoke about modern events; and fourth, the

Book of Mormon contains a record of a people who experienced a prophesied coming of the risen Christ. Their experience is in many ways a shadow of things to come.

Thus, the Book of Mormon not only stands next to the Gospels as “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” but it stands also as a testament of his Second Coming.

With so much valuable information about the Second Coming and instructions about how to prepare for that great event, the Book of Mormon truly is a priceless possession in the hands of Latter-day Saints. It is “one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. . . . [It was] prepared by the hand of the Lord over a period of more than a thousand years, then hidden up by Him so that it would be preserved in its purity for our generation.”²

Prophecies of the Last Days

From the opening pages to Moroni’s closing testimony, the Book of Mormon plainly describes events of the latter days. The following are only a few of the many signs of the Second Coming depicted in this sacred record:

The Restoration of the Gospel

In 1 Nephi 14, Nephi is shown a vision of the growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the opposition God’s restored kingdom would face in the latter days. He is shown the restoration of the gospel to the earth (14:7, 10). He sees that in proportion to the growth of the Church, wickedness would spread across all nations (14:11), and that as a result, the members of the Church, though few in number, would be “upon all the face of the earth” (14:12). Nephi also saw that the wicked would come against the Saints (14:13), but that the power of God would descend upon the “covenant people of the Lord,” and they would be “armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory” (14:14). The wrath of God would then be poured out on the wicked, and nothing would prevent the Father from fulfilling his covenants “which he hath made to his people who are the house of Israel” (14:15–17). The restoration prophesied by Nephi has

already taken place. It is real, and its work is growing to fulfill its destiny.

The Ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith

The Book of Mormon contains a prophecy recorded by Joseph who was sold into Egypt. He foresaw that one of his descendants would be a "choice seer" (2 Ne. 3:6). This seer would be "esteemed highly," because through him the Father would "do a work . . . of great worth" that would restore a "knowledge of the covenants" God made with the ancient prophets (3:7). This seer would be "like unto Moses" (3:9). He would gather Israel and bring forth another record, which would "grow together" with the Bible to establish peace and bear witness of Jesus Christ (3:11-12). Like Joseph sold into Egypt, this choice seer's name would be Joseph, as would his father's (3:15).

The Savior also prophesied about Joseph Smith, telling the Nephites about the "great and marvelous work" the latter-day prophet would do, and how he would suffer persecution but have power to bring forth the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 21:9-11).

Isaiah also foresaw the Prophet Joseph's role in translating the Book of Mormon (2 Ne. 27:9, 15-20). Both Isaiah and Moroni described the calling of the three witnesses who, with Joseph Smith, would be privileged to see and bear witness of the angel Moroni and the Book of Mormon plates (see 2 Ne. 27:12-13; Ether 5:1-4).

Joseph Smith's life, mission, and even his name were known long before he was born. Imagine how humbling it must have been for him to be reading these prophecies as he translated the Book of Mormon.

The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

2 Nephi 27 describes the events of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. It clarifies Isaiah 29, showing its fulfillment in the latter days. Isaiah saw that an apostasy from truth would cover the earth (2 Ne. 27:5), and that the Book of Mormon would contain the words of a fallen nation that would help end the long night of darkness (27:6, 29-30). He saw that a portion of the record would be sealed (27:7-8), that Joseph Smith would receive the record

(27:9), and that Martin Harris would deliver a copy of some of the words from the book to the learned professor Charles Anthon, who, when hearing that part of it was sealed, would say, "I cannot read a sealed book" (27:15–18; JS–H 1:63–65). Isaiah also understood that Joseph Smith would not be "learned" but would be given power from God to translate the record. The translation would be a miraculous event, part of the Lord's "marvelous work and a wonder" (2 Ne. 27:26). The speed with which the Prophet Joseph Smith translated the record was a miracle. The quantity of his work is impressive, but so also is the quality. It is obvious that the Book of Mormon came through, not from, Joseph Smith. The Savior, after the Book of Mormon was published, said that Joseph Smith "has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true" (D&C 17:6).

Isaiah also foresaw the blessings that would result from the Book of Mormon coming forth—"the wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish" (2 Ne. 27:26), those ignorant of the truth would find it (27:29), righteousness would increase on the earth (27:30), the wicked would be reproved (27:31–32), the children of Israel would grow and prosper (27:33), the Savior would be honored again on the earth (27:34), those who "erred in spirit shall come to understanding," and our Father's children would again be able to "learn doctrine" – true doctrine (27:35).

The Restoration of Judah

Beginning in 2 Nephi, Nephi prophesies of the Jewish captivity in Babylon, the return of the Jews to the land of Israel, their rejection of the Christ during his earthly ministry, and the subsequent scattering of the Jews among all nations (2 Ne. 6:8–11; 10:3–6; 25:14–15). He then sees the latter-day restoration of the Jewish people to the Holy Land. The Book of Mormon prophesies that they will not be gathered to the "lands of their inheritance" until they "come to a knowledge of their Redeemer" (6:11), until "they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God" (9:2), until "they shall believe in me, that I am Christ" (10:7), and "worship the Father in [my] name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah" (25:16).

Over five hundred years after Nephi's prophecy, the Savior added that Judah would be gathered together "in mine own due time" (3 Ne. 20:29). "When the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them; and they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name. . . . Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance" (20:30-31, 33). This prophesied gathering to the land of Israel is yet to come. Until then, the Savior warned, "Ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel; for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn" (29:8). Truly there are some wonderful blessings awaiting all of God's children in these latter days.

The Promised Land

The Americas are a consecrated land that has been placed under an everlasting decree. That decree is recorded in the Book of Mormon: "Wherefore he that doth possess [this land] shall serve God or shall be swept off" (Ether 2:9-10). This promised land can only remain "free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations" on the condition of service to God (2:12). If the inhabitants of the promised land ever become "fully ripened in iniquity," they will be "swept off" (2 Ne. 28:16). The Book of Mormon solemnly tells of two previous nations that were swept off the face of the American continent in fulfillment of God's promise.

In addition to teaching about the promised land in general terms, Book of Mormon prophets were also shown specific historical events and the rise of modern nations in the land of promise (see 1 Ne. 13:1-19; 2 Ne. 1:6-11).

False Philosophies, False Prophets, and False Christs

Book of Mormon prophets saw that none would be able to stop their record from coming forth because it would be done by the power of God (see Morm. 8:25-26). They describe in detail many of the false ideas, foolish philosophies, and spiritual degeneracy that would abound in our day when their record would

appear (Morm. 8:26–41). They wrote the Book of Mormon to help confound false doctrines and stop contention (2 Ne. 3:12). The Book of Mormon “fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. . . . 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.”³

Besides identifying apostate doctrines, the Book of Mormon also depicts the character and nature of false prophets and false Christs (false ways to salvation). One of the prophecies of the last days is “false prophets [who] if possible . . . shall deceive the very elect” (JS-M 1:22). The types of apostates and dissidents in the Book of Mormon are similar to the those we have today. The Book of Mormon “exposes the enemies of Christ.”⁴ For example, Sherem was a member of the Church who denied Christ and taught that salvation could be found in the law of Moses, which he contended “is the right way” (Jacob 7:7; see 7:1–27). Nehor introduced priestcraft⁵ into the Church, teaching that “all mankind” would “be saved,” so there was no need to fear or repent (see Alma 1). Korihor ridiculed belief in Christ and his Atonement as a “foolish tradition” coming from the effects of a “frenzied mind” (Alma 30:13–14, 16). Korihor’s false doctrine was composed of most of the false philosophies we are challenged by today, including (but not limited to): contradicting faith with logic and common sense (he said no one could “know of anything which is to come”), 30:13, 28; ridicule of sacred things, 30:14; empiricism (If I can’t see it, I won’t believe it), 30:15; ridicule of those who are righteous, 30:16; humanism (all ethics are relative because there are no eternal standards), 30:17; rejection of the doctrines of life after death and accountability for deeds done in the flesh, 30:18; and complete denial of the signs that testify there is a God and Creator greater than ourselves, 30:43–46.

In the Book of Mormon we also find valuable lessons for dealing with persecution from apostates and anger from dissidents. We are taught not to become anti-anti-Mormon (see 1 Ne. 8:26–27, 33–34; Alma 1:21; 4 Ne. 1:34; Moro. 7:3–5). We also learn that often those who persecute the Saints are those who were once members of the Church (see Hel. 4:4). Like Amulon, Amlici, Sherem, and their modern counterparts, people who leave the

Church often cannot leave it alone: “After a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened” (Alma 24:30; see Mosiah 2:36–37; 16:5; 4 Ne. 1:38). We learn that charity, patience, and effective teaching that touches hearts enable people to change (see Hel. 5:17; 6:36–37).

As the world becomes more like it was in the days of Noah (JS–M 1:41), there will be an increased need to do good and resist evil. Reading the Book of Mormon, President Benson promised, can reveal false teachings and empower us to discern between Christ and anti-Christ (see Moro. 7:13–17): “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.”⁶

Missionary Work in the Latter-day Church

From the Book of Mormon we learn much about how to do missionary work (see, for example, how the sons of Mosiah—particularly Ammon—taught the gospel and won the hearts of the Lamanites in Alma 17–18). The prophet Zenos’s allegory alludes to the missionary work to be done preceding the Second Coming (Jacob 5:61, 71–72). His prophetic writings are now coming to pass as the gospel moves across the globe in preparation for the Lord’s return.

The Savior declared that “this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations” (JS–M 1:31). This is part of the covenant God made with Abraham, and Nephi foresaw that the Abrahamic covenant would “be fulfilled in the latter days.” As the Saints share the gospel, they bless “all the kindreds of the earth” just as Abraham was promised (1 Ne. 15:18; Abr. 2:11).

The Savior also said that his “elect [shall] be gathered from the four quarters of the earth” (JS–M 1:27). The Book of Mormon

is the instrument God prepared to gather out the righteous from all nations (Moses 7:62). It is the standard we are to use in proclaiming the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (3 Ne. 21:2-7).

At the time of his appearance in ancient America, the Savior prophesied that the Gentiles living in the latter days who will not believe in the Book of Mormon “shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant” (3 Ne. 21:11). Once it came off the press, nothing could stop the Book of Mormon from fulfilling God’s promise to gather the elect from all nations.

The Building of New Jerusalem

The Savior described how latter-day Israel will build a city “which shall be called the New Jerusalem” (3 Ne. 21:23). When it is built, “the power of heaven [shall] come down among them; and,” the Savior declared, “I also will be in the midst” (21:25). The Father will commence his work among “the tribes which have been lost” (21:26-27). They shall be gathered in from “all nations” and eventually be led “home to the land of their inheritance” (21:28-29).

Secret Combinations

“From the Book of Mormon we see the evils of secret combinations portrayed in graphic and chilling reality”⁷ (see Ether 8:11-18; Hel. 2:2-13). Moroni testified that he had been commanded to write about the destructive nature of secret combinations so “that evil may be done away.” And “that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually” (Ether 8:26).

The Book of Mormon teaches that the Lord never works in secret combinations (Ether 8:19) and that these evil combinations caused the destruction of the Nephite and Jaredite civilizations (8:21). Moroni warned that any nation that upholds “such secret combinations . . . until they shall spread over the nation, behold, [that nation] shall be destroyed” (8:22). Moroni’s heartfelt plea to us is that we will “suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you” and that “when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation”

(8:23–24). He solemnly declared that secret combinations are “built up by the devil,” and they seek to “overthrow the freedom of all” (8:25).

Wars and Rumors of War

One of the revealed signs of the Second Coming is that there would be numerous conflicts across the earth: “Behold, I speak these things unto you for the elect’s sake; and you also shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled, for all I have told you must come to pass; but the end is not yet. Behold I speak for mine elect’s sake; for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (JS–M 1:23, 29).

Truly one of the most heart-rending signs of our time is war. Elder Marion G. Romney declared, “Latter-day Saints know that this earth will never again, during its telestial existence, be free from civil disturbance and war.”⁸ General Omar O. Bradley said, “We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. . . . Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.”⁹

The Book of Mormon authors knew we would be living in just such a day. At one point in the narrative, Mormon suddenly stops writing about missionary work and states: “Now we shall say no more concerning their preaching, except that they preached the word, and the truth, according to the spirit of prophecy and revelation; and they preached after the holy order of God by which they were called. And now I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites” (Alma 43:2–3).

Given that the Latter-day Saints would be actively engaged in missionary work, why would a prophet-editor turn to an account of their wars? President Benson answered, “From the Book of Mormon we learn how disciples of Christ live in times of war.”¹⁰

Alma chapters 43–62 offer unique and helpful perspectives to questions such as these: How do we deal with serious political situations and war while trying to build up a Zion of peace and love? When should a nation go to war? What rights and freedoms are worth defending? Should a nation disarm during a time of peace? What kind of leaders should be chosen during times of

conflict? How can we be Christians and not lose the Spirit while defending our countries? What can we do to merit God's help in times of armed conflict?

Latter-day Saints must understand that there is no such thing as geographical safety. It matters more how we live than where. Just as God destroyed wicked people in the past, so will he destroy the wicked in the latter days. For that reason the Lord has called prophets to warn us, just as he did in the past. Those in the Book of Mormon who listened to the words of the prophets and kept the commandments were spared (see Alma 49:30; 50:20–22; 3 Ne. 9:12–13). The Book of Mormon is like a watchman on the tower, teaching us how to separate ourselves from spiritual Babylon so the Spirit can guide, protect, and shield us.

The Sign of the Son of Man

Referring to the last great sign to be seen by all in the heavens before the Second Coming, the Savior taught: "The powers of heaven shall be shaken, then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory (JS-M 1:36). In latter-day revelation the Savior reaffirmed that "all people shall see [the great sign in heaven] together" (D&C 88:93).

Although all people will see this sign the Prophet Joseph Smith said that when it is given, the world "will say it is a planet, a comet, etc. But the Son of man will come as the sign of the coming of the Son of Man, which will be as the light of the morning cometh out of the east."¹¹

At the coming of him who is called the "bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16), the earth will be flooded with light. Not coincidentally, the Book of Mormon describes a similar event that occurred at the birth of Christ. The night before he came to earth, darkness was banished as a sign of his appearing: "For behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came. . . . And they began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear" (3 Ne. 1:15, 17; see Hel. 14:3–4).

"As with other signs," one author wrote, "spiritually discerning people will recognize the great sign's true meaning and pre-

pare themselves to worship the Son of God"¹² (see D&C 45:39–40, 44).

The Cleansing of the Earth

At the Second Coming, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and this planet will be “cleansed from all sin” (JST Luke 17:39–40). When the Lord appears, his celestial glory will destroy the wicked (2 Thes. 2:8; D&C 5:19), and he will see to it that “his vineyard [is] no more corrupt” (Jacob 5:75). The earth will continue to exist, but the wicked will be destroyed from off of it (JS–M 1:31). The Book of Mormon speaks plainly of this event: “Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men; . . . all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned. . . . Wherefore, he will preserve the righteous by his power, even if it so be that the fulness of his wrath must come, and the righteous be preserved, even unto the destruction of their enemies by fire. Wherefore, the righteous need not fear; for thus saith the prophet, they shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire” (1 Ne. 22:15, 17).

The Second Coming ushers in a great millennial day of peace that will last for a thousand years. The Book of Mormon shows what happened among the Nephites and Lamanites as a result of the Savior’s appearance to them: they experienced a mini-millennium that lasted about two hundred years. The socio-political changes were astounding: “The people were all converted unto the Lord . . . and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. . . . There was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Ne. 1:2, 15–17).

The Book of Mormon as a Type of Our Day

Truly the Book of Mormon is a great help for those who wish to study the signs of the Second Coming. But, as President Benson observed, the Book of Mormon does even more: "The record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior's visit reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior's Second Coming."¹³ Thus, the Book of Mormon is a type of our day — it both foretells and foreshadows modern events. In fact, the events recorded in the Book of Mormon so closely resemble those of our day that they provide for us "a pattern for preparing for the Second Coming."¹⁴

It would be wise, however, to add a note of caution. It is easy to tell by observation that there are parallels between the period before Christ's coming in America and our own time. But the Book of Mormon never tells us that the events leading to Christ's appearance to the Nephites and Lamanites will be repeated in the last days. President Benson's cautious and well-chosen phrase "many parallels" does not mean that *everything* will have its latter-day counterpart. We should be cautious about taking the parallels beyond what is stated. For example, it seems that the Nephite Church fell into apostasy as the rest of the society fell into chaos. We cannot say from this that the same will happen in the last days. In fact, modern revelation seems to say that the Church will be stronger than ever and prepared to meet Christ when he returns.

Still, there is much we can learn by careful observation. So much attention is given to a very small portion of the Book of Mormon's history. Although the book describes events from the time of the Tower of Babel (perhaps about 2200 B.C.) until about A.D. 421 (when the Nephite nation was destroyed), the major emphasis in the book is the 164 years preceding the Savior's appearance. So although the book covers over twenty-six hundred years of history, 6 percent of the time period covered gets 56 percent of the book's pages.¹⁵ President Benson summarized it this way: "A major portion of the book centers on the few decades just prior to Christ's coming to America. By careful study of that time period, we can determine why some were destroyed in the terrible judgments that preceded His coming and what brought others to

stand at the temple in the land of Bountiful and thrust their hands into the wounds of His hands and feet.”¹⁶

What happened in the Book of Mormon decades before, then during and after the Savior’s appearance? A brief summary can help us appreciate how events in our day really do resemble the decades prior to Christ’s visit as described in the Book of Mormon.

Beginning in the Book of Alma, we read about the rapid growth of the Church (Alma 1:26–33; 4:4–5). We see how iniquity hindered the progress of the Church (4:6–10) and how preaching the word of God “in pure testimony” pulled down pride and contention from the people (4:18–20 and 31:5). We are shown how missionaries effectively preached the gospel, even when sent to hostile nations (Alma 22–26). We are taught about how internal strife and political corruption in a nation can cause a government to be nearly overthrown (Alma 60–61; Hel. 6:37–40). We see prophets declaring the signs of the Savior’s imminent appearance (Hel. 14). Within a short time the signs were all fulfilled (3 Nephi 1), and then the Savior appeared (3 Nephi 11). After Jesus’ appearance, the Nephites and Lamanites experienced an era of peace for over two hundred years (4 Nephi). Are these not types and patterns of our day, the Second Coming, and the Millennium?

Another example of the Book of Mormon’s relevance to our time is its power to illustrate how quickly pride can lead even righteous people into forbidden paths. “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.”¹⁷ As the time approached for both the Savior’s birth and his later appearance, wickedness began to increase: “And it came to pass that the people began to wax strong in wickedness and abominations; and they did not believe that there should be any more signs or wonders given; and Satan did go about, leading away the hearts of the people, tempting them and causing them that they should do great wickedness in the land” (3 Ne. 2:3). “Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this – Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world. And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity” (6:15–16).

Throughout the Book of Mormon, pride was always engendered by the riches of the earth (see Alma 4:8–10). Both Alma and Helaman warned about inequality and other effects of prosperity. In their day, members of the Church began to “set their hearts upon riches,” which resulted in contention, envyings, strife, malice, persecution of others, and even murder for more gain (Alma 4:8–9; Hel. 6:17).

Their warnings have been repeated by prophets in our day. Elder Boyd K. Packer noticed in the Book of Mormon that in periods of rapid Church growth, prosperity, acceptance by the world, and the appearance of dissenters, “the church began to fail in its progress” (Alma 4:10) and “dwindle [and] disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare them in the face” (Hel. 4:23).¹⁸

The disease that eventually destroyed the Nephites was a mix of pride, vanity, and hunger for power and money. In the closing chapters of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Moroni wrote, “Behold, the pride of this nation . . . hath proven their destruction” (Moro. 8:27). The proud will likewise be destroyed at the Second Coming (3 Ne. 25:1). Can anyone doubt that the Book of Mormon’s warning about pride was meant for our day when prosperity is greater than it has ever been? No other book of scripture, President Benson declared, teaches us how to deal with the universal sin of pride as well as the Book of Mormon: “This sacred volume was written for us – for our day. Its scriptures are to be likened unto ourselves.”¹⁹

To the Prophet Joseph Smith the Lord admonished, “It must needs be that the riches of the earth are mine to give; but beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old” (D&C 38:39).

Book of Mormon Prophets Saw Our Day in Vision

The majority of the writers and editors of the Book of Mormon were prophets, seers, and revelators. Seers can know “of things which are to come” and can make known things “which otherwise could not be known” (Mosiah 8:17). Book of Mormon prophets saw our day: “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Morm. 8:35).

There is no better evidence for this than the fact that the Book of Mormon addresses numerous specific issues that challenge our society (see Morm. 8:36–41). For example:

- Mormon notes the problems that result from educational systems that lack moral underpinnings. Education without morality has serious social consequences (Mosiah 24:4–8).
- Pahoran’s and Moroni’s letters to each other provide a description of the social upheaval that occurs when corruption in government erodes public trust (Alma 60–62).
- Mormon lamented that society in his day was saturated with wickedness, that they were “without Christ and God in the world.” The Spirit ceased to strive with them. They were “without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer” (Morm. 5:16–18). The Nephite society seemed to permit anything and soon lost everything.
- In a day of eroding family values, the Book of Mormon sounds a clarion call to strengthen the love in our homes. It illustrates many examples of kind and loving parents (1 Ne. 2:9–11; Alma 39). It teaches parents how to show love to their children (Mosiah 4:13–15). It admonishes husbands to love their wives (Jacob 2:35; 3:7; 3 Ne. 18:21). And it encourages families to gather together, face their homes and hearts toward the temple, and listen to the words of the living prophets (Mosiah 2:5–9).²⁰
- The Book of Mormon also teaches that private, personal behavior really does have an impact on society at large (see Alma 10:22–23). It points out that there is a difference between liberty and license (2 Ne. 2:27). And it is interesting to note that the words “free agency” do not appear in any of the standard works. In D&C 101:78 the term used is “moral agency,” implying we are free to make choices, but we are accountable to God and others for the choices we make.

The Appearance of the Son of God

Above all else, the Book of Mormon provides the most detailed account in any scripture of the appearance of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. His appearance was a real event at a specific

time in history that transcended all other events. But it is also a type of the Second Coming. The signs had all been given, “every whit” (3 Ne. 1:20), but some doubted and disbelieved what they had seen (see Hel. 4:23; 3 Ne. 2:1; 8:4).

Many of the signs preceding the Savior’s appearance in the Book of Mormon are also prophesied signs of his Second Coming. Compare the following events from their day with similar prophecies of the Second Coming to be fulfilled in the last days:

- The Lamanites “blossomed” and became righteous (3 Ne. 2:14–16; Hel. 6:1; cf. D&C 49:24).
- The righteous were gathered together (3 Ne. 3:22; cf. D&C 115:6).
- Many signs and wonders were shown (Hel. 14:6; cf. D&C 45:40).
- Physical disturbances increased; earthquakes and tempests caused the earth to shake and tremble (Hel. 14:20–24; 3 Ne. 8:6–18; cf. D&C 45:48).
- The sun, moon, and stars were darkened (3 Ne. 8:22; cf. D&C 34:9).
- The righteous were spared and the wicked were destroyed at his coming (3 Ne. 9:1–13; 10:12; cf. D&C 29:11).
- Those who were most prepared were those who sustained and followed the prophets (3 Ne. 10:12; cf. D&C 45:32; 124:45–46).
- When Christ spoke, his voice pierced the darkness and was heard everywhere at once, “I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. . . . The scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled” (3 Ne. 9:1, 15–16; cf. D&C 45:49).
- He came down from heaven and met his people at the temple (3 Ne. 11:1–11; cf. Mal. 3:1–5).
- He displayed the wounds in his hands and feet (3 Ne. 11:14; cf. D&C 45:51–52).
- His appearance began a resurrection of the righteous (3 Ne. 23:9–14; Hel. 14:25; cf. D&C 88:95–102).

- With great compassion and love, Jesus healed all who were lame, blind, maimed, or afflicted in any manner. He dried every tear and touched every heart (3 Nephi 17; cf. Rev. 21:4).

Has there ever been a moment like this in history? These events happened to them. They will happen again.

Anxiety or Anticipation

The scriptures refer to the Second Coming as a “great and dreadful day” (3 Ne. 25:5). How can it be both? President Benson said, “His coming will be both glorious and terrible, depending on the spiritual condition of those who remain.”²¹

The points of doctrine taught in the Book of Mormon enrich our understanding of the Second Coming and how to prepare for it. The Book of Mormon portrays that event as something to anticipate and look forward to with hope. It will prepare a people to meet the Lord when he returns. It reassures us that we can have faith in Christ, in his Church, in his timing, and in all the words of his anointed prophets: “And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day, but let it be sooner or later; in it I will rejoice. And it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming” (Alma 13:25–26).

The Book of Mormon contains the words of just and holy prophets who told us about the prophecies of the last days, about events in their day that resemble ours, and about the time when they met the resurrected Lord. Truly it is a handbook for the Saints living in the latter days.

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Notes

1. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 99.

2. Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 3.
3. Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1975, 94–95.
4. Ibid.
5. For a definition of “priestcraft” see 2 Ne. 26:29–30 and Alma 1:3–4.
6. Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 6.
7. Ibid., 5.
8. “Peace in this World,” *Improvement Era*, June 1967, 77.
9. Quoted in Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), 349.
10. Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 5.
11. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 287.
12. Hoyt W. Brewster, Jr., *Behold, I Come Quickly* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 187.
13. Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 37.
14. Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 5.
15. See E. Dale LeBaron, “The Book of Mormon: The Pattern in Preparing a People to Meet the Savior,” *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon, 1991 Sperry Symposium*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 72–73.
16. Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 5.
17. Ibid., 6.
18. Boyd K. Packer’s remarks at the All-Church Coordinating Council Meeting, Salt Lake City, 8 September 1987.
19. Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1989, 3.
20. In contrast, note what happened to Lot, who “pitched his tent towards Sodom” and forsook the counsel of the Prophet Abraham (see Gen. 13:12; Genesis 19).

21. Benson, "Prepare Yourself for the Great Day of the Lord," *New Era*, May 1982, 49.