

An Ancient Record - With Relevancy

*by Neal A. Maxwell**

For any ancient record to have relevancy, a bearing on the matters at hand, in the swift-moving last half of the twentieth century is unusual; in the case of the Book of Mormon, it is an inspired circumstance. We who are close to this record may neglect the obvious: Just as the star that shone over Bethlehem had its orbit pre-planned millennia before that sacred birth, so the Book of Mormon was long, long ago destined to "come forth" in our age "unto the convincing of mankind that Jesus is the Christ. . . ." In a world in which many doubt increasingly the existence of God, or in which many see him as an unreachable "life force" (not a personal, loving Father), or in which some believe that God is a "kindly grandfather" who will indulge his children in sin without caring or judging, the main message of the Book of Mormon could not be more germane or more pertinent.

Yet, as is often the case with scriptures, the relevancy of this book is simultaneous at several levels of learning. Not only does it speak to us in sepulchral and somber tones about the core messages of the gospel, but it is a record inlaid with insights of many kinds that sparkle brightly and become clear to us as the light of our life's needs illuminates the pages of the book; different verses and concepts "shine forth," depending upon our experiences and our readiness to read this record "with real intent."

Learn From the Past

For instance, in all ages there probably has been a "generation gap" with attendant challenges, but in

our time another dimension has been added: the experience gap. Events and changes once stretched over decades now are compressed into months or even weeks; technology and the "knowledge explosion" have resulted in a condition in which parents and their children have grown up in very different worlds. Once the way of life was so stable that the life experiences of young and old were very similar. How shall the young and old comport themselves to cope with this new condition? As Moroni nears the end of his editorial labors, knowing that "ye shall hear my words," he suggests how we as readers can best approach the book with its religious history:

Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been. (Mormon 9:31.)

The older or outgoing generation, having learned some vital things at great pain and sacrifice, is understandably anxious to transmit these lessons to the rising generation without having its "imperfections" (which are acknowledged) obscure the very things it most wants the next generation to hear. The succeeding generations are counseled not to be too quick to condemn—for they have yet to wear the moccasins of decision-making and full responsibility. Those who follow are urged to "learn to be more wise than we have been," a moving and humble expression of

For Course 7, lesson 47 (August 2), "The Book of Mormon Is a Record—How We Got It"; for Course 12, lessons 1 and 3 (September 6, 20), "Introduction to the Book of Mormon" and "Winning Through Desire and Belief"; for Course 18, lessons 1 and 4 (September 13, October 4), "Walking in His Steps" and "The Believing Heart"; for Course 27, lesson 42 (August 23), "Living Waters"; for Course 28, lesson 3 (September 20), "Purposes of the Book of Mormon"; and of general interest.

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hope, in which predecessors show that they genuinely want their successors to "top them" spiritually.

In this simple verse are multiple applications for today. Moroni, as the last editor, knew better than any mortal the "imperfections" of those who had written before him. In the solemn stillness that he experienced, as perhaps the most lonely editor of all time, Moroni saw in the spiritual shortcomings of his ancestors not reasons to rage at their failures, which he inherited and even suffered for, but reasons to be glad and to "give thanks unto God" for what he could learn from the past.

So it should be in our homes, our politics, and our classrooms!

We must face our failures, individual and societal, squarely and honestly—not by indulging in the "luxury" of recrimination, but rather for the purpose of learning to be more wise. In such a simple and straightforward setting the generations can relate not as adversaries but as friends who seek to read the past in order to fashion a better future; their evaluations are made as they "hold hands" so that they can touch each other, intellectually and spiritually, in spite of being on different levels of experience. Complete compatibility of experience is unlikely, but a flow of trust between the generations can compensate for it in large measure.

A Secondary Faith

A second example of the relevancy of this book is seen in its verification of the way in which those who know the gospel is true can have impact on the lives of those who are anxious to believe but who need to be helped. A powerful king and all his household were converted by Aaron and his brethren partly on the strength of Aaron's testimony. The king had been "somewhat troubled in mind" by the earlier words of Ammon, whom he had freed from

prison. Aaron pressed the king by saying, "Believest thou that there is a God?" And the king answered: "I know that the Amalekites say that there is a God, and I have granted unto them that they should build sanctuaries, that they may assemble themselves together to worship him. *And if now thou sayest there is a God, behold I will believe.*" (Alma 22:7.)

Relying on the faith of others is, hopefully, a temporary trust, a secondary faith, until one can have the witness of the spirit and "know of a surety." The stripling Ammonites clearly drew upon the faith of their mothers, who had taught them so well that the young could say, "We do not doubt our mothers knew it." (Alma 56:48.) Significantly, among the gifts of the spirit are two which are germane to this concept:

To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful. (Doctrine and Covenants 46:13, 14.)

Realizing the role of reliance in terms of testimony can help us in our homes, in our classes, and in the world of work. It should sober those of us who "know." We need to live sufficiently free of hypocrisy that believing on our words is not made difficult for those who must rely upon us, in part, for their faith.

For the teacher: A brief, but usually productive exercise can illustrate the above concept. Ask each class member to reflect briefly on an individual whose testimony was a powerful influence at a crucial point in his life. Select two or three class members to respond briefly. Usually the quality of life of these influential individuals made it easier to believe, or to rely upon, their words.

Library File Reference: BOOK OF MORMON; COMMUNICATION; TEACHING.

THE MILLENNIUM (Concluded from page 237.)

Thus we may assume that all the righteous, those worthy to be called saints, who have known God and have obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ, who have lived and died or been translated, or who may have been resurrected, as well as those awaiting resurrection in the spirit world, together with those living upon the earth at his coming, will be quickened by resurrection in the "twinkling of an eye," and caught up to meet him in the clouds.

The greatness, the startling power, and the majesty of his second coming to the world at large has been described by the prophets, who, by revelation, vision, and manifestation from the Lord himself, have come to know of this glorious event which has been anticipated in the hearts of good men from the beginning.

Library File Reference: MILLENNIUM.