



Type: Magazine Article

The Book of Mormon is Relevant Today: Magnificent Miscellany

Author(s): Neal A. Maxwell

Source: *The Instructor*, Vol. 105, No. 9 (September 1970), pp. 316-317

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

MAGNIFICENT MISCELLANY

by Neal A. Maxwell

The Book of Mormon's millennium of religious history inevitably gives us data on a variety of topics. Some of these insights are tersely stated but are wise concepts or observations growing out of the ecclesiastical experience of Book of Mormon prophets. It is vital to bear in mind that the Book of Mormon gives the reader unvarnished slices of real life, which careful editors were inspired to pass on; their choices were not random choices. And therein lies the relevancy of this book for our time.

Notice, for instance, the implications of just part of a descriptive sentence about Morianton, an ancient Jaredite king: "And he did do justice unto the people, but not unto himself because of his many whoredoms." (Ether 10:11.)

How often in life do we see those about us whose treatment of others is better than their treatment of themselves? We need not deny the genuine contributions or qualities of such individuals, but neither can we help wondering *what might have been* if there had not been a fatal flaw in an outstanding individual's life. Personality and politics are entwined, and we all bear the consequences of each other's failures. It is one thing to struggle, with some success, to overcome our faults, however glacial the pace of victory may seem; it is another to be cavalier and callous in our treatment of self.

The second great commandment, "Love thy neighbour as *thyself*," bears on our interrelationships—the ecology of esteem: our capacity to love God, to love others, and to value life itself. The late President David O. McKay gave us added perspective about what matters: "No other success can compensate for failure in the home."

For Course 12, lesson 12 (November 29), "Key to Spiritual Growth"; for Course 14, lesson 2 (September 20), "Meaning and Value of Faith"; for Course 16, lesson 9 (November 15), "How Can I Live More Abundantly?" for Course 28, lesson 5 (October 4), "The Peoples of the Book of Mormon"; and of general interest.

The Erosion of Spiritual Experience

Alma, in talking to church members about the need for spiritual rebirth, inquires, "Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" (Alma 5:14.) In a significant amplification of that query just a few verses later he continues: ". . . If ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?" (Alma 5:26.)

Sin, and time not well spent, can erode even bright spiritual experiences unless we are constantly active and growing spiritually. Further, since our feelings do ebb and flow, we need to be experiencing the fruits of gospel living *now*, without inordinate reliance on past experiences for present joy. Previous satisfaction in Church service—isolated now by time or inactivity—is not a sufficient basis for faith to meet here-and-now challenges. Without "incoming" experiences to freshly reinforce us, our faith is often at the mercy of our moods and circumstances.

Reason and Inspiration

Over-reliance on reason alone, without the intelligent interplay of experience and inspiration, can reproduce in our lives today the same skepticism and hubris, individual and cultural, that afflicted the Nephite society just before the birth of Jesus. Even when "great signs" were given in fulfillment of earlier utterances, the skeptics rationalized the impressive prophetic performance by saying, "Some things they may have guessed right, among so many." They "reasoned" impertinently with regard to the promised coming of Christ, "Why will he not show himself unto us as well as to them who shall be at Jerusalem?" Tying their faith to geography, these Nephite skeptics complained about being asked to believe "in some great and marvelous thing which should come

to pass, but not among us, but in a land which is far distant, a land which we know not." (See Helaman 16.)

Many of us today do the equivalent kind of "demanding" of God as a condition of our belief, requiring that He pass certain tests and meet certain criteria. But back to the main point of this discussion: When some events are unique, as was the birth of Christ, experience cannot possibly prepare us; neither can reason; and only the inspiration of God and faith can save us.

Two-Way Communication

Since we count so much—in the Church and in our families—on two-way communication, the case study of the exchange of epistles between Moroni and Pahoran is clearly worth the few minutes it takes to read or reread Alma, chapters 60-62.

In a time of war and turbulence Moroni felt that his political leader, Pahoran, was letting him down; that Pahoran and his associates in the government were guilty of "exceeding great neglect," that they were carrying on the affairs of government as if they were "in a state of thoughtless stupor." Moroni exhorted the leaders to be "up and doing." Not having

all the facts, Moroni had reached erroneous conclusions. The government had been driven from its headquarters and had been confronted with real insurrection. Pahoran needed help, not threats and misunderstandings; yet he replied to Moroni without rancor and with restraint. Once two-way communication was established, Moroni understood the situation and came to rescue Pahoran.

How often good people, in a common cause, misunderstand because there is not genuine, two-way communication! It is so easy to believe the worst of others and to stereotype them. Yet membership in the kingdom demands of us that we be discerning; and we can discern not only by inspiration but also through the flow of data—feelings and facts.

Note to Sunday School Teachers

Teachers may wish to ask two or three class members to cite concepts or observations from the Book of Mormon which they have found insightful. These responses should be brief, as a way of witnessing the variety and utility of the book and demonstrating its relevance for the regular reader, who is not planning on long, scholarly perusal.

Teachers may also wish to consider asking class members for validating examples in today's world of the concepts developed above: being fair to oneself; adding constantly to one's storehouse of spiritual experiences; balancing reason, experience, and inspiration as ways of learning; and maintaining two-way communication.

Library File Reference: BOOK OF MORMON—TESTIMONIES.

THE DESERET SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION

<i>Advisers to the General Board:</i>	RICHARD L. EVANS GORDON B. HINCKLEY THOMAS S. MONSON
<i>General Superintendent:</i>	DAVID LAWRENCE MCKAY
<i>First Asst. Gen. Supt.:</i>	LYNN S. RICHARDS
<i>Second Asst. Gen. Supt.:</i>	ROYDEN G. DERRICK
<i>General Treasurer:</i>	PAUL B. TANNER
<i>General Secretary:</i>	JAY W. MITTON

THE INSTRUCTOR STAFF

<i>Editor:</i>	PRES. JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH
<i>Associate Editors:</i>	DAVID LAWRENCE MCKAY LORIN F. WHEELWRIGHT
<i>Business Manager:</i>	JAY W. MITTON
<i>Managing Editor:</i>	BURL SHEPHARD
<i>Production Editor:</i>	GOLDIE B. DESPAIN
<i>Manuscript Editor:</i>	ANITA JENSEN
<i>Research Editor:</i>	KAY LAMBSON
<i>Art Director:</i>	SHERMAN T. MARTIN
<i>Subscriber Relations Department:</i>	MARIE F. FELT LANETA TAYLOR
<i>Instructor Secretary:</i>	JOYCE E. JOSEPH
<i>Consultant:</i>	A. WILLIAM LUND

Executive Committee: LORIN F. WHEELWRIGHT, CHAIRMAN; HENRY EYRING, SAMUEL L. HOLMES, WAYNE F. RICHARDS, G. ROBERT RUFF, ETHNA R. REID, JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH, JR., DONNA D. SORENSEN.

Instructor Use and Circulation Committee: J. VERNON SHARP, CHAIRMAN; CALVIN C. COOK, JAY W. MITTON, O. PRESTON ROBINSON, G. ROBERT RUFF, DONNA D. SORENSEN.

MEMBERS OF DESERET SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION GENERAL BOARD & THE INSTRUCTOR COMMITTEE:

David Lawrence McKay, Lynn S. Richards, Royden G. Derrick, Jay W. Mitton, Paul B. Tanner, Claribel W. Aldous, Ruel A. Allred, J. Hugh Baird, Catherine Bowles, John S. Boyden, Herald L. Carlston, Calvin C. Cook, Henry Eyring, Elmer J. Hartvigsen, Thomas J. Parmley, Willis S. Peterson, Warren E. Pugh, Wayne F. Richards, G. Robert Ruff, Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., Donna D. Sorensen, Lorin F. Wheelwright, Frank S. Wise, Ralph Woodward, Victor B. Cline, Ethna R. Reid, Samuel L. Holmes, Frank W. Gay, Carol C. Smith, Kathryn B. Vernon, LaThair H. Curtis, D. Evan Davis, Carolyn Newman, Rex D. Pinegar, Eldon H. Puckett, Barbara J. Vance, Dean H. Bradshaw, J. Vernon Sharp, Lynn Stoddard, Gerald G. Allen, Gary Quinn Jorgensen, O. Preston Robinson, Rex Alvon Wadham, Thomas Max Fortie, Allen D. Young, Blaine N. Lee, John Longhurst, Wayne Bender Lynn, Arthur R. Watkins, Arthur Jackson, Alice Rae Clark, Janet Kirton, Harley Adamson, William Foxley, Helen Gibbons.

Published by the Deseret Sunday School Union of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the first of every month at Salt Lake City, Utah. Entered at Salt Lake City Post Office as second class matter acceptable for mailing at special rate of postage provided in Section 1103, Act of October 3, 1917, authorized on July 8, 1928. Copyright 1970 by the Deseret Sunday School Union. All rights reserved.

Thirty to forty-five days notice required for change of address. When ordering a change, please include address slip from a recent issue of the magazine. Address changes cannot be made unless the old address as well as the new one is included. Also, report the new postal ZIP Code number.

Mail subscriptions to *The Instructor*, 79 South State Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84111. Subscription price is \$4.00 per year, paid in advance. Single issues, 40 cents each.

Bound volumes sell for \$7.25 when all magazines are furnished by *The Instructor*. When subscriber supplies his own issues, binding charge is \$4.25. Please add 45c to cover cost of mailing bound volume. (Billing has been discontinued. A check must accompany the order.)