



Type: Magazine Article

Conversions through the Book of Mormon

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 63, No. 11 (November 1960)

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

Page(s): 814–815, 836

Abstract: The article reprints three earlier published recollections of the profound converting effects of the Book of Mormon in the lives of three prominent early LDS personalities—Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, and Parley P. Pratt. Wilford Woodruff received his testimony in a missionary meeting held in a village schoolhouse. Willard Richards was touched by the Lord after reading the entire Book of Mormon twice in just ten days. Parley Pratt read the Book of Mormon straight through, non-stop, day and night, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he knew it was true.



CONVERSIONS THROUGH THE BOOK OF MORMON

WILFORD WOODRUFF

According to the custom of the Mormon elders then, as now, a meeting was appointed at the schoolhouse, and notices were circulated throughout the village. The story of this new experience is told by Wilford Woodruff in a simple and beautiful manner:

“Upon my arrival home my sister-in-law informed me of the meeting. I immediately turned out my horses and started for the schoolhouse without waiting for supper. On my way I prayed most sincerely that the Lord would give me his Spirit, and that if these men were the servants of God I might know it, and that my heart might be prepared to receive the divine message they had to deliver.

“When I reached the place of meeting, I found the house already packed. My brother Azmon was there before I arrived. He was equally eager to hear what these men had to say. I crowded my way through the assembly and seated myself upon one of the writing desks where I could see and hear everything that took place.

“Elder Pulsipher opened with prayer. He knelt down and asked

the Lord in the name of Jesus Christ for what he wanted. His manner of prayer and the influence which went with it impressed me greatly. The Spirit of the Lord rested upon me and bore witness that he was a servant of God. After singing, he preached to the people for an hour and a half. The Spirit of God rested mightily upon him, and he bore a strong testimony of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon and of the mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I believed all that he said. The Spirit bore witness of its truth. Elder Cheney then arose and added his testimony to the truth of the words of Elder Pulsipher.

“Liberty was then given by the elders to anyone in the congregation to arise and speak for or against what they had heard as they might choose. Almost instantly I found myself upon my feet. The Spirit of the Lord urged me to bear testimony to the truth of the message delivered by these elders. I exhorted my neighbors and friends not to oppose these men; for they were the true servants of God. They had preached to us that night the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. When I sat down, my brother Azmon arose and bore a similar testimony. He was followed by several others.”

WILLARD RICHARDS

At the age of ten years he removed with his father's family to Richmond, Mass., where he witnessed several sectarian “revivals” and offered himself to the Congregational Church at that place at the age of seventeen, having previously passed the painful ordeal of conviction and conversion, even to the belief that he had committed the unpardonable sin. But the total disregard of that church to his request for admission led him

to a more thorough investigation of the principles of religion, when he became convinced that the sects were all wrong and that God had no church on the earth, but that he would soon have a church whose creed would be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. From that time he kept himself aloof from sectarian influence, boldly declaring his belief, to all who wished to learn his views, until the summer of 1835, when, while in the practice of medicine, near Boston, the Book of Mormon, which President Brigham Young had left with his cousin Lucius Parker, at Southborough, accidentally or providentially fell in his way. This was the first he had seen or heard of the Latter-day Saints, except the scurrilous records of the public prints which amounted to nothing more than that "a boy named Joe Smith, somewhere out West, had found a Gold Bible." He opened the book, without regard to place, and totally ignorant of its design or contents, and before reading half a page, declared that, "God or the devil has had a hand in that book, for man never wrote it." He read it twice through in about ten days; and so firm was his conviction of the truth, that he immediately commenced settling his accounts, selling his medicine, and freeing himself from every incumbrance, that he might go to Kirtland, Ohio, seven hundred miles west, the nearest point he could hear of a Saint, and give the work a thorough investigation; firmly believing, that if the doctrine was true, God had some greater work for him to do than peddle pills. But no sooner did he commence a settlement, than he was smitten with the palsy, from which he suffered exceedingly, and was prevented from executing his design, until October, 1836, when he arrived at Kirtland, in company with his brother (Doctor Levi Richards, who attended him as physician), where he was most cordially and hospitably received and entertained by his cousin, Brigham Young, with whom he tarried, and gave the work an unceasing and untiring investigation, until Dec. 31, 1836, when he was baptized by Brigham Young, at Kirtland. (*LDS Biographical Encyclopedia* by Andrew Jenson, Vol. I, p. 53-54.)

PARLEY P. PRATT Arriving at Rochester, I informed my wife that, notwithstanding our passage being paid through the whole distance, yet I must leave the boat and her to pursue her passage to our friends; while I would stop awhile in this region. Why, I did not know; but so it was plainly manifest by the Spirit to me. I said to her, "We part for a season; go and visit our friends in our native place; I will come soon, but how soon I know not; for I have a work to do in this region of country, and what it is, or how long it will take to perform it, I know not; but I will come when it is performed."

My wife would have objected to this; but she had seen the hand of God so plainly manifest in his dealings with me many times, that she dare not oppose the things manifest to me by his Spirit.

She, therefore, consented; and I accompanied her as far as Newark, a small town upwards of one hundred miles from Buffalo, and then took leave of her, and of the boat.

It was early in the morning, just at the dawn of day; I walked ten miles into the country, and stopped to breakfast with a Mr. Wells. I proposed to preach in the evening. Mr. Wells readily accompanied me through the neighborhood to visit the people and circulate the appointment.

We visited an old Baptist deacon by the name of Hamlin. After hearing of our appointment for the evening, he began to tell of a book, a strange book, a *very strange book!* in his possession, which had been just published. This book, he said, purported to have been originally written on plates either of gold or brass, by a branch of the tribes of Israel; and to have been discovered and translated by a young man near Palmyra, in the state of New York, by the aid of visions, or the ministry of angels. I inquired of him how or where the book was to be obtained. He promised me the perusal of it, at his house the next day, if I would call. I felt a strange interest in the book. I preached that evening to a small audience, who appeared to be interested in the truths which I endeavored to unfold to them in a clear and lucid manner from the scriptures. Next morning I called at his house, where, for the first time, my eyes beheld the "Book of Mormon"—that book of books—that record which reveals the antiquities of the "New World" back to the remotest ages, and which unfolds the destiny of its people and the world for all time to come;—that book which contains the fulness of the gospel of a crucified and risen Redeemer;—that book which reveals a lost remnant of Joseph, and which was the principal means, in the hands of God, of directing the entire course of my future life.

I opened it with eagerness and read its title page. I then read the testimony of several witnesses in relation to the manner of its being found and translated. After this I commenced its contents by course. I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep.

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I like to bring this whole concept into my mind and think about it, because then I know with my own brain and body that the Book of Mormon is a divine witness for Christ, that it came to us in the way that the Prophet Joseph said it came. Out of my own experience my testimony has grown, and this is as it should be.

Perhaps as you reread the Book of Mormon you will have an added appreciation for it. Perhaps my testimony will reinforce your own.

Conversions through the Book of Mormon

(Continued from page 815)

As I read, the Spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true, as plainly and manifestly as a man comprehends and knows that he exists. My joy was now full, as it were, and I rejoiced sufficiently more than to pay me for all the sorrows, sacrifices, and toils of my life. I soon determined to see the young man who had been the instrument of its discovery and translation. (*Life and Travels of Parley P. Pratt*, p. 36-37.)

SACRAMENT MEETING

BY HELEN KIMBALL ORGILL

Chapel doors are open wide,
Organ tones are softly pealing,
Voices entering subside,
Thoughts of reverence revealing;

Words from leaders, hymns of praise,
Youthful priests are kneeling, praying,
Blessings on the Sacrament—
God, our Father's word obeying.

Thoughts of him the crucified,
Jesus and his love imbuing,
Hearts with hope and faith and trust,
Sacred covenants renewing;

Sermons follow to inspire,
Words of truth, all edifying,
Food for thought in days to come—
Humble spirits fortifying.

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