



Type: Magazine Article

---

## An Appreciation of the Book of Mormon

Author(s): Leland H. Monson

Source: *Relief Society Magazine*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (June 1952), pp. 364–366

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

---

**Abstract:** A lessening of belief in “the divine Christ” began in the seventeenth century. By Joseph Smith’s day “higher criticism” of the Bible, like a snake coiled, was squeezing the life blood out of Christianity. The Book of Mormon came forth to reaffirm the divinity of Christ. In 1946, the New York Times Book Review listed the Book of Mormon thirty-eighth on the list of books that have most influenced America.

---

# An Appreciation of The Book of Mormon

Elder Leland H. Monson

[Address Delivered at the Annual General Relief Society Conference, October 3, 1951]

WE live in a day when the concept of a divine Christ has been weakened in the minds and hearts of men and women. The utterances of Dr. Percy Stickney Grant show the strength of this movement:

Christ was a wonderful man, a beautiful character. But to say a man born upon this earth, created by the power of God, had in himself the power of God is superstition. Very few clergymen who have been educated in the larger universities accept the idea that Jesus had the power of God . . . . I cannot believe in the miraculous origin of Christ. He never said he was of divine origin, and I do not believe he was divinely conceived (*Chicago Tribune*, January 19, 1923).

This lessening of a belief in the divine Christ started to gather momentum in the seventeenth century deistic movement of England and Continental Europe. These deists robbed much of Christianity of its belief in sacred ordinances and of the concept of a divine Christ. In their minds Jesus was a great moral teacher, but he was not divine. The movement threatened to engulf Christianity, but, fortunately, great religious leaders of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries stemmed the tide.

Then, in the nineteenth century, a movement known as higher criticism of the Bible, snake-like, coiled itself around the Protestant churches and squeezed the lifeblood of Chris-

tianity from them. All too many Protestant ministers refused to give obeisance to the concept of a divine Christ. Like the seventeenth century deists, they taught that Christ was a great moral teacher, but that he was not divine. The poet Robert Browning, in an effort to invalidate the claims that Christ was not divine, gave to Christians one of their most potent weapons. "This great moral teacher," Browning wrote, "proclaimed that he was divine, and a great moral teacher cannot lie."

Resulting from this decline of belief in a divine Christ, I feel that Christianity has lost much of its grip over the minds and hearts of men. The Gargantuan power that Protestant Christianity once held to make the Sermon on the Mount come to life in the deeds of men and women has been attenuated. Morality with the concept of a divine Christ can ascend to the very heights of God himself; morality without this belief remains forever on the plane of weak and puny man.

The failure of religious leaders in our day to activate the truths of religion in the lives of their adherents was aptly given by a learned American radio commentator who recently said, in substance:

We have learned to speak into a microphone and have our words heard across a continent, but we have not learned how to speak from our hearts to our neighbors. We have learned how to wing ourselves

into the stratosphere, but we have not learned to approach heaven by activating the Sermon on the Mount in our lives. We have learned how to transform rock into fabrics of beauty, but we have not learned how to refine our base desires and appetites. We have learned how to live more comfortably, how to lengthen our span of life, but not how to live better.

Only an unalterable faith in the divine mission of Jesus Christ will make it possible for us to change this condition, to write every syllable of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount into deeds.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century at a time when it was most needed, The Book of Mormon came forth out of the dust to reaffirm and to re-establish in the hearts and minds of men the concept of a divine Christ, and there has followed in the wake of those who have truly accepted its message a transfiguration of the gospel into their lives. Just as the tuning fork enables a singer to establish true tones, even so this divine concept helps us to harmonize our lives with the divine pattern. What the world needs today is the knowledge and the faith which The Book of Mormon can give, that Jesus is the veritable Son of the great God who holds this world in its orbit.

Alma, one of the greatest missionaries in the entire thousand-year period of Nephite civilization, said:

But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: . . . And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God (Alma 7:9, 10).

In fulfillment of this Book of Mormon prophecy, Christ came and visited some of the lost sheep of the House of Israel. He was introduced to the multitude gathered around the temple in the land Bountiful by God, the Eternal Father, who said:

Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased . . . hear ye him. . . . And it came to pass that he [Jesus] stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying: Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world . . . (3 Nephi 11:7, 9-11).

And the book carries its own promise, which has been fulfilled to all who have met the requirements. Moroni makes the pledge, writing:

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things (Moroni 10:4-5).

I have learned to place much value on this great record of the aboriginal inhabitants of America. I read it first as a boy, read it at a time when I had absolute faith in its divinity, a faith that was poured into my boyish heart as I knelt in the folds of my mother's dresses, and as I sat in candle and lamp-light by the old kitchen stove with my father. I have never lost that faith. I have read The Book of Mor-

mon again and again, pondering over its significant messages into the wee hours of the morning.

Wearied by intense mental effort, or by the cares and anxieties of life, I find that I can rebuild my whole mental outlook on life in an hour spent with such beautiful characters as the brother of Jared, Nephi, Benjamin, Alma, Mormon, and Moroni. To study *The Book of Mormon* is like enjoying cooling shade and refreshing water after a day spent in the parching sun.

I believe that it should be read and studied as a book, not by extracting parts here and there for examination, not piecemeal. The Relief Society course of study has been organized in such a way that it should encourage every member to read the book. *The Book of Mormon* is the text. The course will fail in its primary objective if members of the Relief Society do not read the entire book.

*The New York Times Book Review* of April 21, 1946, contained an article, "Books That Influenced America," written by David A. Randall. The article gives the list of the one hundred books which have most influenced American life and culture. *The Book of Mormon* is number thirty-eight on the list. The list was compiled by three Americans: Frederick B. Adams, Jr., Thomas W. Streeter, and Carrol A. Wilson, all business people and widely

read New Englanders. It is now not only a religious duty of our Church membership to read *The Book of Mormon*, but it is a matter of culture to become familiar with the content of a book the influence of which has been rated so highly by men not of our faith.

In teaching the *Book of Ether* as a history of an ancient civilization, we ought to remember that it is a very fragmentary and incomplete history of a people who lived upon this continent from about 2247 B.C. to about 600 B.C., a period of sixteen hundred years. Only the most important events were recorded, and these in very brief form. In the case of the long reigns of certain kings, we have only a comment that they lived wickedly, and their people suffered.

Like all history, however, some valuable lessons can be gained from the reports. It is the pattern of history behind the facts that can serve as a monitor to us in our time, and lessons should be taught accordingly.

*The Book of Ether* has some unusually worthwhile messages for our generation, concepts on governmental reform through spiritual uplift, ideas on the art of bringing peace and happiness into our individual lives. It is so uplifting, so inspirational, that it is a must on the reading list of every sincere Latter-day Saint.

---

## Faith

Ida Isaacson

I will not be hitched to the plow of ignorance  
Nor sit under the tree of despair  
As long as God will hear and answer prayer.