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The Book of Mormon, Why?

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Abstract: This article relates the important role of the Book of Mormon as a witness not only for Christ but also for the Bible. The Book of Mormon's value in helping to understand the book of Isaiah is unlimited.

The Book of Mormon, Why

The year 1961 saw tremendous emphasis placed upon the Book of Mormon, with the Melchizedek Priesthood course of study being centered on this sacred scripture. The objective was for everyone in the various quorums to read it. In continuation of this emphasis the 1962 course of study is a topical study of the Book of Mormon. The Church board of education also announced that certain courses on the Book of Mormon are now required for graduation from both the seminary and the institute of religion and are the first courses to be taken on both levels of learning.

Why this emphasis? It is because of the importance of the Book of Mormon in the theology of the Church. Joseph Smith stated, “. . . I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”

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(DHC IV, 461.)

The Book of Mormon contains two things as declared by the Lord to Joseph Smith: “. . . a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also”; (D & C 20:9.) The record of the fallen people is only incidental to that of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To teach only the history of the people is neglecting the major importance of the book. Moroni, when engraving the title page, stated the purpose of the book was to convince “Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations.” Nephi was also shown by an angel that this record was to come forth among the Gentiles to “. . . make known

to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.” (1 Nephi 13:40.) Thus it is evident that emphasis in teaching the Book of Mormon should be on Jesus Christ and the fulness of his gospel, not just a course in early American history.

The Lord also revealed to Joseph Smith that the book “. . . was given by inspiration, and is confirmed to others by the ministering of angels, and is declared unto the world by them—” (D&C 20:10.) These others who gave their confirmation proclaimed that the voice of God declared unto them that the work was translated by “the gift and power of God” and, therefore, knew it to be true. (See Testimony of the Three Witnesses in the Book of Mormon preface.)

The Lord also declared to Joseph Smith that one of the purposes of the Book of Mormon is to prove “to the world that the holy scriptures are true.” (D&C 20:11.) Further, the angel that showed Nephi the vision of these records as they would be had in this day also declared that they would be used “. . . unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.” And that they “. . . shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them;” (1 Nephi 13:39-40.) Likewise, long before this time, Joseph who was sold into Egypt received a promise of the Lord that a choice seer would be raised up to bring forth the words of his seed unto later generations of the seed of his loins for the purpose of “convincing them of my word [the Bible] which shall already have gone forth among them.” (See 2 Nephi 3:3-11.)

Thus, it is to be noted that not only is the Book of Mormon a second witness for Christ but also a second witness for the Bible. In a day when Bible criticism is questioning the authenticity and authorship of the various teachings and writings of the Bible, the Church has the Book of Mormon as a measuring



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stick. Latter-day Saints, particularly teachers, need to be familiar with the work of the Bible critics but, first of all, they should see what the Book of Mormon has to say concerning the criticism. As a case in point, who was the author of the book of Revelation? A vast number of scholars today are of the opinion that an elder named John wrote the book and not John the Apostle. Says one: "A Christian prophet by the name of John once found himself stranded on a lonely, barren island called Patmos, in the Aegean Sea. According to later tradition, he had been banished as a political prisoner. In the book called Revelation, which he wrote during his stay on Patmos, . . ."¹

What does the Book of Mormon say concerning it? During Nephi's visions on the high mountain he was shown that the Apostle John was the actual author of the book. (See 1 Nephi 14:19-25.)

The authorship of the book of Isaiah has been questioned as well as that of the five books of Moses. Nephi, Jacob, Abinadi, and the Savior himself quote freely from Isaiah without equivocation. (See 1 Nephi 20, 21; 2 Nephi 12-24; Mosiah 14; 3 Nephi 20, 22.) Nephi says his father Lehi found that the brass plates contained the five books of Moses, and Nephi read many things unto his brethren from them. On the same occasion he refers to a prophecy in the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy which indicates he was referring to the book of Moses as the five books of Moses. In both instances the Book of Mormon supports their authorship.

Concerning the literal extent to which the scriptures should be interpreted, it should be kept in mind that God said the Book of Mormon record was translated correctly. If the Book of Mormon gives an account of a biblical incident, it is a reassurance that it actually occurred. For instance, the miracles which were performed by Moses as he led the children of Israel out of Egypt are today explained away by various means. Nephi, in chastising his brothers for complaining against him when he was about to build a ship, recounts the travels of the children of Israel

and mentions many of the miracles which were performed. (See 1 Nephi 17:23-32.) Again the Book of Mormon comes to the rescue of the holy scriptures in proving they are true.

Another purpose of the Book of Mormon, as declared to Joseph Smith, is that it shows to the world that ". . . God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old;

"Thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever. . . ." (D&C 20:11-12.) Through the translation of the Book of Mormon, such a testimony is before the world.

Doctrinally, the Book of Mormon supports the Bible also. The 20th section of the Doctrine and Covenants outlines some of the teachings of the Nephite scripture which the "special witnesses" heard "the glorious Majesty on high" declare to be true:

1. There is a God infinite and eternal. Verse 17.
2. He created man after his own image. Verse 18.
3. Man transgressed his commandments and became fallen man. Verses 19-20.
4. God gave his Only Begotten Son to overcome the fall. Verses 21-24.
5. Through baptism and enduring in faith to the end, man has had an opportunity even from the beginning of being saved.

Much could be given to support each of these doctrines from the Book of Mormon, but space does not permit it. Suffice it to say that many of these basic tenets have disappeared or are disappearing from the various churches of the world. The Book of Mormon, however, avers them to be true without providing the least medium for equivocation. As Elder Harold B. Lee pointed out during the 1960 summer school at Brigham Young University to the seminary and institute personnel, the Book of Mormon, along with the Doctrine and Covenants, should be the measuring stick for all teaching in the Church.

In studying and teaching the Book of Mormon, there is one more concept we should always keep in mind. Nephi said, ". . . I did liken all scripture unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning." (1 Nephi 19:23.) He (Continued on page 538)

¹Howard Clark Kee and Franklin W. Young, (Prentice-Hall, Inc.: Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1957) p. 335.

A Tear for a Memory

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tender ages, quite impressed by all this rigamarole to get us to the theatre, we walked quietly down the carpeted aisle and took our places very sedately on the fancy red plush theatre seats. We were used to nothing more luxurious than hard wooden benches at our town's public show house, and our experience with "live" drama had been purely local hometown performances of such masterpieces as *The Old Oaken Bucket* and *Three Live Ghosts*, written for and played by people whose love of performing far outweighed their talent.

At the Salt Lake Theatre, then, we were surprised and delighted with the musical comedy *No, No, Nanette!* It was gay and bright and, though I have now no idea of the names of the actors and actresses in its road company, I can still see the filmy chiffon, feather-bedecked costumes of the singing, dancing girls and can still hear the music "Tea for Two and Two for Tea!"

Of course, Mama was a bit disappointed that we weren't seeing Maude Adams in *Peter Pan*, a role, Mama said, that Miss Adams had made famous and vice versa. Mama wiped the tears away as we all sat in the old Salt Lake Theatre and watched a modern musical comedy, the last performance she would see in the Salt Lake Theatre.

This theatre had been completed

by a culture-loving people in 1862, less than fifteen years after they had traveled across a wilderness to establish a community. Though the pioneers were still faced with the necessity of providing the rudiments of life, food, clothing, and shelter—they were giving plays and performing and planning on building a theatre.

Thus, the Salt Lake Theatre came into being, even before the railroad came. Brigham Young, who had brought the Mormon people through the wilderness and dark days of poverty into a new land, led them also in their cultural endeavors, and was instrumental in having the theatre built. A look at the early programs for the theatre reads like a list of Who's Who from the first prominent settlers of Utah as many of the notables put on make-up and stood back of kerosene footlights to play the roles called for in the old dramas.

After the railroads were built and travel became easier, many of the greats of the nineteenth century theatrical world came to Utah to perform in the Salt Lake Theatre. Edwin Booth, John McCullough, and Fanny Cathcart were among those to thrill and be thrilled by performances in the theatre.

This playhouse became more than a building. To those who loved it, it was endowed with a personality—a personality that could not be destroyed.

Practical-minded individuals pointed out that it would not be logical to renovate a nearly seventy-

year-old building, that the theatre was actually unsafe. And so, in the late 1920's, the building came down.

Many years later, the Daughters of Utah Pioneers built a handsome building at the north end of Main Street in Salt Lake City, in a spot that seems to look down on the city. Architecture for this memorial building is reminiscent of the old Salt Lake Theatre.

And now, there is, indeed, a Pioneer Memorial Theater on the University of Utah campus in Salt Lake City. It has huge colonnades in the front and will contain innovations to make theater-going as pleasurable in the 1960's as it was in the 1860's—nearly!

It is anticipated that this fine new building will attract many of the greats of the twentieth century theatrical world who will enjoy performing in the beautifully modern structure.

When the building is completed, I shall line up my children. There will be no pink georgette gowns for the girls, no blue serge knee britches for the boy. But we shall go to the theater.

As we travel in our modern station wagon to the theater, I shall tell my children my story of the Salt Lake Theatre. I'm reasonably certain we won't see *No, No, Nanette*. There will be a tear roll down my cheeks, though—a tear because Dad courted Mama in the old Salt Lake Theatre, a tear because I never saw Maude Adams in *Peter Pan*—a tear for a memory!

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cautioned his brethren to do likewise with Isaiah because his words "were written unto all of the house of Israel. (*Ibid.*, 19:24.) Jacob quoted Isaiah and said to "likened them [his teachings] unto you and unto all men." (2 Nephi 11:8.) The young

people of the Church who are being taught the eternal truths of the Book of Mormon are of the house of Israel, and where those who teach fail to make proper application to the lives of their students they are failing in a significant duty. The Book of Mormon is full of "built in objectives" which can be made very applicable to the lives of high school, college, or Melchizedek Priesthood

quorum students—or to anyone.

For instance, Nephi states that he will show ". . . that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance." (1 Nephi 1:20.) He then proceeds for the next eight chapters to show how it was so in the journey of this family to the promised land. He later

states: "For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round." (*Ibid.*, 10:19.) In the next four chapters, Nephi proceeds to show how the mysteries of God were unfolded to him. After he relates the journeyings from the Valley of Lemuel to the Land Bountiful, he again reiterates his belief: "And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; . . ." (*Ibid.*, 17:3)—a belief he showed earlier when he and his brothers were attempting to obtain the brass plates. It would be well for Latter-day Saints to apply this principle in their lives as well as quote it every week in MIA. The Book of Mormon has several such built-in objectives around which lessons may be built. These objectives can be realized in the lives of students today as well as they were in Nephi's time.

Why the Book of Mormon? It is "a record of a fallen people," yes, but it also contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ; it is a second witness to the divinity of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world; it is a second witness to the holy scriptures; and it provides the proper interpretation of them. It is also an affirmation of God's dealings with mankind in our present generation and, thus, emphasizes God's sameness yesterday, today, and forever. It is an affirmation of his points of doctrine as contained in the Bible. Lastly, and perhaps the most important, it is full of lessons of life which can be applied today for profit and learning.

"Therefore, having so great witnesses, by them shall the world be judged, even as many as shall hereafter come to a knowledge of this work.

"And those who receive it in faith, and work righteousness, shall receive a crown of eternal life;

"But those who harden their hearts in unbelief, and reject it, it shall turn to their own condemnation—" (D&C 20:13-15.)

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