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Learning to Love the Book of Mormon - The Book of Jarom

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Source: *Learning to Love the Book of Mormon*

Last Updated: August 2013 to February 2014

Abstract: This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book's intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book.

Learning to Love the Book of Mormon

Updated August 2013 to February 2014

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Introduction

In the Church, our study and understanding of the Book of Mormon has undergone a most interesting evolution since the book's translation in 1829. As late as the early twentieth century our understanding of the book was not far advanced. Almost no serious studies of the book and its contents had been published, and the book was not heavily used in worship service discourse or in gospel instruction. There was even some skepticism about the literal divine origins of the Book within the LDS community, particularly among the more educated. By the mid 1900s, beginning with an acknowledged assumption of the book's divine origins, Sidney B. Sperry, Hugh W. Nibley, John L. Sorenson, and a few others had launched serious scholarly inquiries into the book. In the mid-1970s the rate of publications on Book of Mormon topics began to increase.

The rate of publications on the Book of Mormon particularly soared after President Ezra Taft Benson, soon after his ordination as president and prophet, called the Church to repentance in November of 1985 and at the April General Conference of the Church in 1986. The Church worked the Book of Mormon into the regular cycle of the new correlated curriculum for adults, and church leaders began using the Book of Mormon more frequently and systematically in speeches and instructional situations. Since then, the book's authenticity as an ancient scriptural record has become more firmly and generally established. Those who remain vocal doubters of the book's literal divine origins are no longer identified with the committed LDS community.

In the October General Conference in 1986, President Benson said:

We must make the Book of Mormon a center focus of our study [because] it was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . .

If they [the Book of Mormon writers] saw our day then chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, "Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?" (*Conference Report*, October 1986, 3-7).

President Benson would later write:

It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You

will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called the “words of life” (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November, 1986, 16:7).

Further:

I would like to speak about one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. The gift I am thinking of is more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel. I speak of the gift of the Book of Mormon (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft] 1988, 51).

President Benson often reiterated the prophet Joseph Smith’s statement when Joseph referred to the Book of Mormon as “the keystone of our religion” (*TPJS*, 194). A keystone, sometimes called the headstone, is the central stone in an arch. It holds all the other stones in place, and if it is removed, the arch crumbles.

Your author has developed the habit, as I read the Book of Mormon, of reading slowly and actually looking for words or phrases or concepts whose meanings are unclear. I search for ideas that are not completely compatible with the framework of knowledge I already possess. I have been surprised to learn that I seldom have to read more than two or three verses before coming upon some puzzlement, large or small. On each occasion, I am left with an unsettled perplexity, a sort of uncomfortable disequilibrium. “Why are there so many verses in this basic scriptural work,” I have wondered, “that cause me to struggle so?” Disquieting as these feelings are, I have come to recognize them as a first step in learning some valuable new insight.

Once I come upon a phrase or verse I don’t understand, I begin my search for the answer by reading and re-reading the “offending” passage, by checking cross references, by reading supplemental explanatory materials, by sometimes asking help of my learned friends, and often praying about the verse. Mercifully, I have found that my efforts are most always fruitful. I am able to re-establish my equilibrium with the verse, and, at the same time, find myself possessing a greater insight on some particular point. With some satisfaction, I then continue on in my reading, only to find the process beginning again a verse or two later. I heartily recommend this same approach to my readers, and I have attempted in this commentary to spare you some of the pain of finding your answers. I hope I have anticipated many of your perplexities as you study the Book of Mormon, yet I suspect that each of us will encounter and be obliged to overcome our own unique set of questions. There is certainly a magic in enduring in this process, for certainly as we do so, we are “treasur[ing] up . . . the words of life” (D&C 84:85).

Your author prefers to think of this work as an “enrichment commentary.” I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book’s intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book. Though it may be useful to the student who wishes to skip from one verse here to another verse there, it is intended to be read sequentially. Some concepts discussed in earlier verses in the book or even earlier verses in a particular chapter may receive more casual attention when encountered later in the text.

This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. Some may have reservations about the basic concept of this book. I am aware of Peter’s warning: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21). I have endeavored in this project not to add or detract from the scripture, but only clarify. Some will say that such a comprehensive commentary is not possible without placing a “private interpretation” on some verses. I have earnestly attempted to avoid assigning any purely individual or private interpretations to the scriptural verses. Your author is a student of the Book of Mormon and in no wise an expert. To create this volume I have prayerfully studied and utilized the thoughts and explanations of many authors and scholars whose explanations of the Book of Mormon verses might be generally considered to be “authoritative” and “scholarly.” I have collected materials from general authorities and from individuals with undeniable scholarly credentials who openly profess a spiritual witness of the book. When I have borrowed their ideas only, and have rephrased them for my purposes, no reference will be cited. When I have quoted another author’s wording, acknowledgment is provided. Indeed, I have begun and completed this project as a student who is simply trying to make it possible for myself and for others to understand the book’s sometimes difficult verses. I acknowledge the fact, however, that my private biases have not been completely eliminated.

I am also sensitive to the need to avoid proof-texting in a work such as this. That is, I have tried very hard to let the scriptures speak for themselves. An author guilty of proof-texting presupposes the doctrine and then seeks support from the scriptures. I have attempted to consider each verse in its historical and sequential context.

I have tried to include timely and necessary background information to make the book’s words, phrases, and verses really come alive. I have tried to avoid rhetoric and concentrate on the meat. It is not my purpose to preach about the principles contained in the book, rather my goal is to improve understanding. This work presupposes, in its reader, an “average” understanding of the Book of Mormon. I have tried to eliminate those commentary materials which would likely be redundant and unnecessary for my

so-called average reader. It is my intent to explain, clarify, and enrich your study and understanding of the book.

The work includes a variety of “supplemental articles” to which reference is made appropriately in the text. Among these supplemental articles is a purely historical telling of the Book of Mormon story entitled, *A Narrative Summary of the Book of Mormon*. From this “historical” summary, doctrinal materials have been omitted, but all characters, events, and places are included. It is hope that this historical account may be useful to the student who wishes to quickly “brush up” on the historical narrative.

A few “housekeeping” notes about this work are pertinent. The text of the Book of Mormon is included in bold with a blue color to clearly distinguish it from the commentary. All commentary is colored black. The paragraphs of commentary material are often preceded by a quoted phrase, also of blue color, without any punctuation except for quotation marks. These are phrases taken directly from the verse of text immediately above the commentary paragraph. The commentary then follows these quoted phrases. Sometimes the verse commentary for a group of verses will precede, rather than follow, the actual text rendering of the verses. This is done if it felt that a word of explanation before reading a passage would be helpful. Most block quotes appear in red print and are not double-indented. Finally, in this current updated version of this commentary (2014) page numbers have been eliminated, as they are considered unnecessary.

In reading the Book of Mormon, often we tend to regard some of the materials contained therein as non-essential. We wonder, “Why was the report of this battle or that incident included in the book?” As we study the book, we will assume that there is no “filler” material in the Book of Mormon. Every item in the book was placed there for a reason and purpose. In making his abridgment of the sacred records of the Book of Mormon people, Mormon wrote, “I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people” (Words of Mormon 1:5). Hence, we must assume that all items in the book have been included following thoughtful and inspired consideration.

There is a miracle in the scriptures. If a person reads the scriptures regularly, he or she will invariably have his or her life touched by them eventually. “Whosoever believeth on my words,” the Lord said in reference to the Book of Mormon, “them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (D&C 5:16). Isaiah prophesied that the Book of Mormon would bring a spiritually blind generation to an understanding of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 27:35; Isaiah 29:24). It has been suggested by those experienced in gospel study that no individual who studies the scriptures daily will be remiss in keeping the commandments.

Our scriptures advise us of several other books of scripture yet to come forth. One day, “all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been . . . and which ever will be” (2 Nephi 27:11). Perhaps, though, we will never be privileged to receive additional scriptures until we learn to appreciate fully those we already have.

Consider the following testimony of The Book of Mormon by President Ezra Taft Benson:

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ.

The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

We do not have to prove that the Book of Mormon is true. The Book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ” (*Conference Report*, October 1984, 7; *Ensign* November 1984, 8).

I am deeply committed to the book as an authentic ancient scripture. The Spirit has born witness to my soul on numerous occasions as I have studied and pondered its verses. I know with all my heart that the book was written by ancient prophets who intended for their writings to come forth to the world and be translated in our day by Joseph Smith, Jr., through the “gift and power of God.”

Michael J. Preece

The Book of Jarom

Jarom was the son of Enos. It is likely that the small plates of Nephi were delivered to Jarom by his father Enos in about 420 BC (see Enos 1:25-26).

Jarom Chapter 1

1 Now behold, I, Jarom, write a few words according to the commandment of my father, Enos, that our genealogy may be kept.

verse 1 “I, Jarom, write a few words according to the commandment of my father, Enos” We begin to learn something of Jarom. It is apparent that he was a man of few words. Certainly he was not given to much writing. We will learn that Jarom had in his possession the small plates of Nephi for almost sixty years, and these fifteen verses are all we have to show for those years.

For commentary on the Hebrew derivation of his name, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“that our genealogy may be kept” Beginning with Jarom, the authors of the small plates seem to regard their purpose as mainly genealogical. It is interesting that this purpose was never mentioned by Nephi or Jacob and may be a purpose which arose by default. Most of these authors did not regard themselves as qualified to speak as God’s mouthpiece, and were more comfortable with simply keeping a genealogy.

Since the time of Adam there has existed among believers the tradition of keeping a journal, referred to in scripture as a “book of remembrance” (Moses 6:4-6, 46; Malachi 3:16-17; 3 Nephi 24:16). Jarom implies here that the same tradition existed in his family line as well.

2 And as these plates are small, and as these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites, wherefore, it must needs be that I write a little; but I shall not write the things of my prophesying, nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written? For have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me.

verse 2 “as these plates are small” Jarom is simply commenting that there is but little room left to write on the small plates of Nephi. Keep in mind that the words “large” and “small,” when used in the Book of Mormon text to modify “plates,” do not refer to the size of each single plate in the set. Rather they refer to the number of plates in the set and hence to the space available for written material. Today we would speak of a book that has few pages as a “short” book. A book with many pages is a “long” book. Thus the set of large plates of Nephi will eventually be a long book, and the set of small plates of Nephi is now, and will continue to be, a short book.

“these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites” It is clear that one of the major purposes the Lord had in mind for the Book of Mormon was to testify to the apostate remnant of the Lamanites in the latter days (see Enos 1:16-17, D&C 3:19-20).

“it must needs be that I write a little” Jarom writes this phrase with the spirit of not wanting to shirk his duty to his errant brethren the Lamanites.

Jarom then says in effect, “But I won’t write much. Anyway it would be difficult for me to add to what has already been written by my ancestors Nephi, Jacob, and Enos.”

“plan of salvation” We have previously discussed this interesting term in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6. For the reader’s convenience I will reproduce that discussion here. Man has always had a deep need to discern some design, purpose, pattern, or plan regarding his existence. This has been referred to as man’s “architectonic” need. That our God is a God of order and has a well defined plan for the redemption of his children is clear from other references in the Book of Mormon. The “plan of salvation” is also mentioned in the Book of Mormon in Alma 24:14 and Alma 42:5. This plan is referred to by several other names in the Book of Mormon including: “the way of deliverance of our God” (2 Nephi 9:11), “the plan of our God” (2 Nephi 9:13), the “eternal plan of deliverance” (2 Nephi 11:5), “the great plan of redemption” (Jacob 6:8), “the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25), the “plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), the “plan of mercy” (Alma 42:15), and the “merciful plan of the great Creator” (2 Nephi 9:6). It is interesting to note that nowhere in the Bible is it even mentioned that God has a plan for the salvation of his children. We know, however, that Old and New Testament authors knew about the plan of salvation. We read, for example, in the books of Abraham and Moses in the Pearl of Great Price about the pre-earth life and the Grand Council that we attended there. In these books, these concepts are mentioned but briefly. Evidently they were assumed to be common knowledge among those for whom these books were originally written. Peter’s reference to Christ’s visit to the spirit world also illustrates this point. He obviously did not intend to give a discourse on the subject. Rather, his reference to spirit prison was only used in making another point (1 Peter 3:19).

3 Behold, it is expedient that much should be done among this people, because of the hardness of their hearts, and the deafness of their ears, and the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks; nevertheless, God is exceedingly merciful unto them, and has not as yet swept them off from the face of the land.

verse 3 Jarom provides us a description of “this people.” Who are they? He likely is referring to his own people, the Nephites. This description was probably written shortly after Jarom received the small plates of Nephi from his father Enos in about 420 BC. It is interesting to contrast his description of the Nephites in this verse with that in

verse 5, written some twenty years later. Apparently significant spiritual improvement had taken place. Keep in mind that this spiritual improvement is not likely due to the efforts of Jarom. The progeny of Jacob, by this time, were outside of the circle of prophets and priesthood leaders among the people.

Spiritual blindness, or insensitivity to the Spirit of God, is referred to in the Book of Mormon using several different phrases. Jarom uses several of them in this verse: “hardness of their hearts,” “deafness of their ears,” “blindness of their minds,” and “stiffness of their necks.” Others include “blind the eyes,” “stiffnecked,” “despise the words of plainness,” and “looking beyond the mark.” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“God . . . has not as yet swept them off from the face of the land” Jarom’s use of the conjunction “as yet” suggests that he may have had a revealed premonition of the eventual annihilation of the Nephite people.

4 And there are many among us who have many revelations, for they are not stiffnecked. And as many as are not stiffnecked and have faith, have communion with the Holy Spirit, which maketh manifest unto the children of men, according to their faith.

verse 4 Jarom is still referring to his own people, the Nephites, and he assures us that there are righteous people and prophets among his people, though they do not come from the line of Jacob.

This is an important verse which explains a vital principle. Simply stated, the faithful do not only have the right to receive inspiration, rather they will receive revelations or “communion with the Holy Spirit.” Without this communion a person cannot know of the divinity of Jesus Christ or of the truth of his gospel.

5 And now, behold, two hundred years had passed away, and the people of Nephi had waxed strong in the land. They observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord. And they profaned not; neither did they blaspheme. And the laws of the land were exceedingly strict.

verse 5 “two hundred years had passed away” This phrase is based on the time Lehi and his family departed Jerusalem. There will eventually be three separate Nephite methods of chronological reckoning. See the commentary for 3 Nephi 1:1.

It seems likely that Jarom’s writings were entered onto the small plates of Nephi in three installments. The first includes verses 1 through 4 and was probably engraved shortly after Jarom received the small plates of Nephi from his father Enos. The second begins here in verse 5 and extends through verse 12. This entry was made some twenty years after Jarom was given possession of the plates. The final brief entry includes verses 13 through 15 and was made thirty-eight years later or some fifty-eight years after Jarom became custodian of the plates.

“They observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord.” Obviously the spiritual state of the Nephites has improved since Jarom’s first entry (verses 1-4) onto the small plates of Nephi.

On Sinai the Lord gave to Moses the commandment, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Many have erroneously assumed that the law of Sabbath day observance originated with the law of Moses. Keeping the seventh day holy is actually a vital principle of the fulness of gospel (Genesis 2:2-3; D&C 59:9-14).

“they profaned not; neither did they blaspheme” To profane is to violate anything sacred or treat it with abuse, irreverence, or contempt; to show disrespect for sacred things. Similarly, to blaspheme is to speak disrespectfully of sacred things.

6 And they were scattered upon much of the face of the land, and the Lamanites also. And they were exceedingly more numerous than were they of the Nephites; and they loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts.

verse 6 It is noteworthy that the Lamanites, at this point in history, were “exceedingly more numerous” than the Nephites. Why is it that after some 175 years of separation of the two groups, the Lamanites, who were living generally less civilized lives than the Nephites, would far outnumber the Nephites? One would expect the opposite. After all, the Nephites had buildings, good agricultural tools, and adequate weapons for defense. One possible explanation is that Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, after Nephi’s departure from the land of their first inheritance, joined ranks and intermarried with the indigenous peoples in the area (see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths*). This might also explain a natural acquisition of the mark of the dark skin that became a sign of the Lamanites’ apostasy. The fact that the dark skin was the result of intermarriage may well explain why skin color was so important to the Nephites. Like their Israelite ancestors, the Nephites preferred to maintain tribal purity by avoiding marriage outside their culture.

7 And it came to pass that they came many times against us, the Nephites, to battle. But our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord; wherefore, we withstood the Lamanites and swept them away out of our lands, and began to fortify our cities, or whatsoever place of our inheritance.

verse 7 **“Our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord”** Obviously there was a noble tradition of kings and other leaders established among the Nephites. When Jarom uses the term “leaders” here, does he refer to the secular leaders or the religious leaders of his people? It is likely that he is referring to the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ that had been established among them. It is also apparent that Jarom himself was not one of the major secular or religious leaders,

since he is speaking of them in the third person. A careful reading of the next verse suggests he may have been a soldier or artisan.

“or whatsoever place of our inheritance” Apparently some of the people of Nephi did not live in the cities.

8 And we multiplied exceedingly, and spread upon the face of the land, and became exceedingly rich in gold, and in silver, and in precious things, and in fine workmanship of wood, in buildings, and in machinery, and also in iron and copper, and brass and steel, making all manner of tools of every kind to till the ground, and weapons of war—yea, the sharp pointed arrow, and the quiver, and the dart, and the javelin, and all preparations for war.

verse 8 In times past, critics of the Book of Mormon have enjoyed pointing out that archaeologists have felt that metals were not used in Mesoamerica until AD 900. Now we know that metals were used in Mesoamerica in Book of Mormon times (“A Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica,” John L. Sorenson, *Katunob* 9 [March 1976]:1-18).

9 And thus being prepared to meet the Lamanites, they did not prosper against us. But the word of the Lord was verified, which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land.

verse 9 “the word of the Lord was verified, which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land” This classic Book of Mormon doctrine was first spoken by father Lehi (2 Nephi 1:20) and will be reiterated yet again (Omni 1:6).

10 And it came to pass that the prophets of the Lord did threaten the people of Nephi, according to the word of God, that if they did not keep the commandments, but should fall into transgression, they should be destroyed from off the face of the land.

verse 10 Again, we find the same pattern commented upon in Enos 1:22. When the Lord contemplates the destruction of a people, he sends “many prophets,” or, in this verse, “prophets” among the people to make certain they are abundantly warned. We are left with no information whatever as to the identity of these prophets. Wouldn’t it be fascinating to read the account of this period of time from the large plates of Nephi, the book of Lehi?

11 Wherefore, the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; persuading them to look forward

unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. And after this manner did they teach them.

verse 11 “prophets, and the priests, and the teachers” Here is a listing of the offices in the church of that day. There is no evidence that they had the Aaronic priesthood. Thus, we may assume that these are offices in the Melchizedek priesthood.

“believe in him to come as though he already was” This is a poignant phrase. Though the advent of Christ was yet hundreds of years away, the prophets and other religious leaders were urging the people to believe in Jesus Christ as though he had already come. It is sobering to remind ourselves that today, we have the advantage of believing in Jesus Christ at a time when we have access to scriptural records that he did indeed come!

12 And it came to pass that by so doing they kept them from being destroyed upon the face of the land; for they did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up unto repentance.

verse 12 “prick their hearts with the word” This terminology suggests that the people were frightened by the “threats” of the prophets, priests, and teachers, and dared not disobey the law of Moses. Perhaps having one’s heart “pricked” by the Spirit is a lesser stage of conversion. Later on, more complete conversion may occur as one’s heart is “touched” or “moved.”

13 And it came to pass that two hundred and thirty and eight years had passed away after the manner of wars, and contentions, and dissensions, for the space of much of the time.

verse 13 As pointed out previously, Jarom probably received the small plates of Nephi about 420 BC or one hundred and seventy-nine years after Lehi’s family left Jerusalem. Thus it would seem that Jarom’s “ministry” extended about fifty-nine or so years.

14 And I, Jarom, do not write more, for the plates are small. But behold, my brethren, ye can go to the other plates of Nephi; for behold, upon them the records of our wars are engraven, according to the writings of the kings, or those which they caused to be written.

verse 14 “for the plates are small” There is not much room left on these small plates of Nephi.

“the other plates of Nephi” These are the large plates of Nephi which are held in the possession of the secular leader or king of the land.

15 And I deliver these plates into the hands of my son Omni, that they may be kept according to the commandments of my fathers.

verse 15 This transfer of plates from father to son probably occurred in about 361 BC.