



Type: Magazine Article

Book of Mormon a Great Converter

Author(s): Alma Sonne

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 56, No. 6 (June 1953)

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

Page(s): 424–425

Abstract: This article is a brief summary of the missionary journey of Samuel Smith and his usage of the Book of Mormon, which resulted in the conversion of Rev. John P. Greene and others.

I do not believe you have a testimony of the truth if you question the accuracy of the translation of the Book of Mormon.

I do not believe you have the facts or are being honest with yourself if you question the Manifesto as it appears in the Doctrine and Covenants.

I do not believe we should try to establish our personal fads as Church doctrine. I do not believe my eternal salvation will be affected in any way if I eat white bread or white sugar. I do not believe the doctrines of the Church are in any way involved in whether my whole wheat is stone-ground or steel-cut.

I do not believe we can be good Christians, regardless of the denomination, if we refuse to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross. I do not believe anyone can be a good Christian, regardless of denomination, if he questions the reality of the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his crucifixion.

I do not believe we can be good Christians of any denomination and reject the Old Testament. I do not believe we can be good Christians of any denomination and reject the epistles of the New Testament.

I do not believe we can be good Latter-day Saints, or that we are loyal to this Church, if we accept alleged revelations of men and women who claim to have received them for the membership of the Church when we know that the Lord designates the President of the Church as the only one on earth to whom he will reveal his mind for the Church at large.

I do not believe that we can be good Latter-day Saints or good Christians of any denomination and accept the teachings of some that death was a mistake, that it can be avoided, and that we can achieve immortality without passing through death, just by following the teachings of some false prophet.

I do not believe that we can ignore the teachings of the Savior when he said,

... there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been.

For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. (3 Nephi 11:28-29.)

On the other hand, I do believe most positively that if we bring false teachings into our classes or sermons we do our people a great disservice, for we confuse their minds, we make them doubt the truth when it is given to them, and we "soften them up" for the attacks of apostate teachers who come among them.

I do believe positively that whenever we teach any speculative notion or try to unravel any mystery, or advance any

doctrine not accepted by the Church, we contribute to the spiritual delinquency of those whom we influence.

I do believe that whenever we by our acts or our teachings reflect discredit upon the Church or its doctrines, we contribute to the spiritual delinquency of those about us.

I do believe that God will hold us accountable for every act and word by which we contribute to the spiritual delinquency of other people.

I do believe that the President of the Church is in very deed the mouthpiece of God on earth, the prophet, seer, and revelator of the Lord, and that he and he alone has the right and power to give to the Church any new doctrines or new interpretations of existing doctrines.

I do believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Eternal God, Creator of heaven and earth, that he died on the cross and was resurrected the third day, literally and physically.

I do believe positively that as we all die, even so, through the power of Jesus the resurrected Christ, we, too, will literally and physically be resurrected.

I do believe that the revealed doc-

trines and teachings of the Christ will save us without any additions by unauthorized persons.

I do believe that the Lord has given to the Latter-day Saints a fair amount of intelligence. I do believe that he expects us to use that intelligence in studying his revealed word and following his prophets here on earth, so that we will not be tossed about by every wind of doctrine.

I do believe that he expects our teachers and preachers to use the common sense he has given them to teach the simple truth which saves, rather than the speculations and theories of men, which only confuse the mind and lead some of our people right out of the Church.

I do believe that by proper teaching of the revealed truth we can convert ourselves and our children and all others who are willing to listen to us.

I do believe that people are converted to the truth only by the truth and not through the teaching of half-truths and untruths.

I do believe that only in loyally teaching and living the true principles of the gospel can we fulfil the responsibility which God has given us, and this is my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Alma Sonne

BOOK OF MORMON A GREAT CONVERTER

by Alma Sonne

ASSISTANT TO THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE

MY BRETHREN AND SISTERS, I hope all the teachers in the Church will have available to them, the splendid discourse delivered by Elder Mark E. Petersen. I believe the spirit of the anti-Christ is rampant in the world and is asserting itself as never before. That places upon the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a great responsibility because it is our mission to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified.

In this great conference of the Church at this season we are celebrating two great events, as I see it. The Easter time, commemorating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the 6th day of April, 1830. I have before me the statement made by Joseph Smith, the Prophet, relative to that first organization meeting, where six humble men met together and initiated the great

movement which is going forward so rapidly today. The Prophet writes:

Having opened the meeting by solemn prayer to Our Heavenly Father, we proceeded, according to previous commandment, to call on our brethren to know whether they accepted us as their teachers in the things of the Kingdom of God, and whether they were satisfied that we should proceed and be organized as a Church according to said commandment which we had received. To these several propositions they consented by a unanimous vote. I then laid my hands upon Oliver Cowdery, and ordained him an Elder of the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," after which, he ordained me also to the office of an Elder of said Church. We then took bread, blessed it, and brake it with them; also wine, blessed it, and drank it with them. We then laid our hands on each individual member of the Church present, that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and be confirmed members of the Church of Christ. The Holy Ghost was poured out upon us

THE IMPROVEMENT ERA

to a very great degree—some prophesied, whilst we all praised the Lord, and rejoiced exceedingly. (D.H.C. 1:77-78.)

I need not tell you, my brethren and sisters, that the Church, commenced with such a humble beginning, grew and prospered. The organization was completed with Apostles, prophets, high priests, seventies, elders, priests, teachers, deacons, patriarchs, and bishops. It was the only Church on the earth thus organized, even though these callings in the priesthood existed in the Primitive Church.

I observed that in the account given of this meeting, three important procedures were introduced: first, the principle of common consent that no man can preside in the Church without the consent of the membership; second, the introduction of the sacrament of the Lord's supper which was very appropriate because the first principle of the restored gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and third, the ordinance of laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost when a person is confirmed a member of the Church, or, when he is ordained, or set apart, for any responsibility in the Church.

The Church, organized in this manner, has from its very beginning felt a strong urge—an impelling motive, to preach the gospel in all the world, and to build up God's kingdom upon the earth.

Not long ago, in Gordon B. Hinckley's book, *What of the Mormons?*, I read the dramatic account of Samuel H. Smith's missionary journey in the region near his home. It was probably the first missionary undertaking in this dispensation. Samuel was nineteen years old and a brother of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He carried with him copies of the Book of Mormon in a knapsack thrown over his shoulders. After walking twenty-five miles the first day he was refused lodging by the innkeeper. Continuing his journey the next day he called on Reverend John P. Greene, a Methodist minister. Reverend Greene accepted a book but refused to buy it. During his absence while visiting his circuit, however, his wife read the book, and like many others, was deeply impressed. Mrs. Greene urged her husband to read the book. This he did, and as a result both joined the Church.

Samuel H. Smith returned from his mission, somewhat discouraged, feeling that he had failed. But, unknown to him, the book had fallen into the hands of Brigham Young. He read it and began to investigate Mormonism. He did so for two years, and then he, too, joined the Church. Samuel H. Smith's mission had not been a failure. The book distributed by him and others, also fell into the hands of Dr. Willard Richards of Boston, Massachusetts, who, when he had read the first page, remarked; "Either God or the devil wrote that book." When he finished the book, he concluded it had come from God, and he, also, joined the Church.

Later, the volume was read by Parley P. Pratt, a minister in the Campbellite Church. He was similarly impressed

and joined the Church to become one of its outstanding missionaries. I read his testimony: "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 knows and comprehends that he exists. My joy was now full, as it were, and I rejoiced sufficiently to more than pay me for all the sorrows, sacrifices, and toils of my life."

Parley P. Pratt took the book to his brother, Orson Pratt, then a young man nineteen years of age. He, like the others, read the book and became a convert and a great power in the Church.

One of the mission presidents stated yesterday that twenty-five percent of the converts in his mission were brought into the Church through reading the Book of Mormon. Surely, it is a powerful book. It is a great converter. It should be read and studied by all Latter-day Saints, for it will strengthen their faith and give them courage and hope to go forward in the great work of the Lord.

The Church from its very beginning in this dispensation has put forth every effort, it seems to me, to tell the world about the restoration of the gospel and the mission of Joseph Smith, the Prophet. This impression came to me with great force as I read an epistle to the members of the Church under date of April 7, 1851. This was less than four years after the pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley. The epistle was signed by Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, and was addressed to the "Saints scattered throughout the earth."

I learned from that epistle that all of the Twelve Apostles were then

abroad except Wilford Woodruff and Ezra T. Benson. Their president, Orson Hyde, was in Kanessville, Iowa; Parley P. Pratt was on his way to Chile, his mission was to all the lands bordering the Pacific Ocean; Orson Pratt was somewhere in the States on his way to the valley to become associated with the University of Deseret; John Taylor was in Boulogne, France, "preaching, publishing, and translating"; Lorenzo Snow was in Italy, visiting the Italian states; Erastus Snow was in Copenhagen, Denmark, where he was translating the Book of Mormon; Franklin D. Richards was presiding over the British Mission with headquarters in Liverpool, England; Amasa Lyman and Charles C. Rich were on their way to the Cajon Pass; and George A. Smith was presiding in Iron County. All of them were preaching the gospel "to every nation, kindred, tongue and people." What better evidence could they give of their sincerity and integrity? The best leadership of the Church was surely needed here in the valley, where the foundations of a great commonwealth were being laid; cities, towns, and villages were being laid out and settled; churches and schools were being erected; and roads and bridges were under construction. But the paramount obligation resting upon the Church then as now was to preach the gospel and to proclaim the divine mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In this tremendous responsibility the leaders of the Church have been diligent and determined. May we be given the faith and the understanding to continue in this great enterprise and thus discharge the solemn obligation resting upon all of us, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



S. Dilworth Young

Need of Missionaries

by S. Dilworth Young

OF THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY

BY THE Spirit of the Holy Ghost, about whom my fellow council member spoke so movingly this morning, I can bridge the nineteen hundred odd years between our day and the time of our beloved Lord. By that Spirit I can go with him as he walked the hills of Judea; I can follow him to the cross; I can hear the discussion at Emmaus and can enjoy the perfect love for him which his disciples felt after his resurrection. That event we celebrate today. While the distance in time through the years has been long, it seems but a short

time because of this Spirit. I am grateful to have a testimony which speaks to my heart that he was indeed resurrected. Because of that resurrection, I may have hope, hope for eternal life.

So also may I enjoy the feeling and knowledge of how my brethren felt when they heard that on that immortal day 133 years ago, a new prophet was in the earth, and that he indeed had seen his Redeemer and had been told that through him, he being faithful, would come the restoration of the ever-

(Continued on following page)