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Church History, Lesson 2 — The Book of Mormon Revealed

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Abstract: As part of a Church history series, this lesson quotes much of Joseph Smith—History concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

*Theology*

Church History

Lesson 2—The Book of Mormon Revealed

For Tuesday, November 7, 1944

Objective: To show that in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established" (Doc. and Cov. 6:28).

THE power of God which Joseph Smith learned to know as a result of his prayer in the Sacred Grove was now a living reality to him. As with all great moments in life, so it was with this. The young Prophet spoke but little of it, except to those whose sympathy and understanding he felt might be relied upon. Thus it was to his mother and family he first confided his experience with God. Then, as one would expect, he turned to the leader of the faith in which he had been interested.

"Some few days after I had this vision," he wrote, "I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement (See Lesson One); and, conversing with him on the subject of religion, I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil. . . ." (Joseph Smith 2:21).

Such an attitude by a professed minister of religion certainly would have left an honest and impressionable boy wondering. For had his vision been as the preacher said—from the power of evil—then the least Joseph might expect from a man of God was sympathetic understanding. He and others like him "ought to have been my friends," he wrote, "and to have treated me kindly, and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me" (Joseph Smith 2:28). But such was not the case nor could it be.

The Lord had said they (the man-made creeds) had a form of godliness but they denied the power thereof. Joseph, then, for himself must be convinced of the truth of this statement since he, at first, would be required to stand alone in the knowledge of that power. If, as he soon saw, the great majority of professed believers in religion would not be his friends, then, in learning this truth, he would of ne-

cessity be drawn closer in friendship to God.

Three years passed following that wonderful morning in the Sacred Grove; and, during these years, Joseph learned to know firsthand how truly God had described the religions of men. He found it was not necessary to tell his story of the vision again and again, even though he might have chosen to do so. Others told it for him. He merely had "to affirm" its truth. After his experience with the Methodist preacher wherein he "took occasion to give him an account of the vision," he wrote, "I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all sects—all united to persecute me" (Joseph Smith 2:22).

It must then have become evident to the young Prophet, that if God was to show him the way to life eternal—and that way was to be for all men who would believe—then other means than a personal testimony of his vision would be necessary. With faith strengthened under persecution, Joseph pursued his work about his father's farm until the twenty-first of September, 1823. On that night, after he had retired to his bed, he was desirous to know his standing before the Lord. In

prayer he sought His Maker, confident of obtaining a divine manifestation, having had one before.

"While I was thus in the act of calling upon God," he wrote, "I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor. He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist; so, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open, so that I could see into his bosom. Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him I was afraid; but the fear soon left me. He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people. He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of

this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants; Also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted “seers” in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book” (Joseph Smith 2:30-35).

Here was a real and earthly evidence of the power of God to doubting men—another record containing the fullness of the everlasting Gospel as delivered by the Savior to the inhabitants of ancient America! Moroni not only told of the record, but gave evidence of the divine source of its safekeeping by citing prophecies in the Bible which spoke of its coming forth. He said, however, that a period of time would have to pass before this book from the earth—a proof of God’s power—could be given through Joseph to the world.

After this communication, the heavenly messenger disappeared, but only to return again, twice more during the same night, with the same message word for word, until Joseph heard the cock crow, and observed that day was approaching.

Shortly after this he arose, and went about his farm work. His father, observing that all was not well with his son, told him to return home. Upon attempting to cross a fence near the house, Joseph sank to the ground and lost consciousness. A voice called him. It was that of Moroni. Again Joseph heard the

identical message of the night before at the conclusion of which, this time, he was told to go and tell his father of the vision and the commandments which he had received. This the boy did, and found sweet joy in the way his parent accepted his account of the same, saying, “Go and do as commanded by the messenger.”

Immediately after, therefore, Joseph went directly to the hill in which he had been told the plates were deposited. Having seen this hill four times in vision, he had no difficulty finding it. There, on its western slope, “not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size” he saw the plates. With them was the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate. He made an attempt to remove them, when again Moroni appeared and forbade him, saying that not “until four years from that time” could he expect to receive them. Further he said, wrote Joseph, “that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates” (Joseph Smith 2:53).

Four years did pass from that day on the 22nd of September, 1823, during which time Joseph worked on the farm, and, later, to help the family finances which through a misfortune had become depleted, he hired out to a Mr. Josiah Stool. This gentleman set him to the task of working his silver mine which was located in Harmony, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. It was here Joseph met Emma Hale who later, January 18, 1827, became his wife.

The young Prophet kept faith-

fully his appointment with the heavenly messenger every 22nd of September. Finally, almost eight months to the day after his marriage, he went to the hill for the last time and received the plates from the hands of Moroni.

The word that Joseph Smith had in his possession some golden plates spread rapidly. If men were not willing to believe this young Prophet's story of the power of God revealed in his first vision, they were certainly not slow rushing to disprove the earthly evidence that some power had produced—evidence which fanned anew more bitter and severe persecution for this once obscure youth from the rolling farm lands of upstate New York. But, try as they would, men of evil designs could not and did not stop the bringing forth of this American witness for Christ—the Book of Mormon.

Within this Book of Mormon is recorded the fullness of the Gospel once again for the world—the Savior's Gospel with its sweet and precious truths to enlighten the mind and quicken the heart of all who hunger after righteousness.

During the translation of the ancient record from which the Book of Mormon was produced, Joseph found new friends whom God raised up to aid him in the work. Friends who, with him, were to bring again to earth the true Church of God with all its power and right to act in the name of Deity. The Book of Mormon thus became a second witness for the Christ, the first being the Bible. The Lord has said that in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

Suggestions for Active Reading And Discussion

With the help of the suggested readings given below, have the class carry on the discussion as follows: first, answer the question; second, read the assigned part of the Doctrine and Covenants to discover wherein we must "give heed unto His word" which has been written especially for our life in this day.

1. Read aloud the Second Section of the Doctrine and Covenants which is a part of the message which Moroni delivered to the Prophet on the night of September 21, 1823; and note well the great sweep of things to be accomplished. Have the class explain: (1) the significance of "reveal the Priesthood"; (2) "dreadful day of the Lord"; (3) "plant in the hearts"; (4) "whole earth would be utterly wasted." (The teacher will find historical enrichment for this discussion following Section 2 in the Doc. and Cov. Commentary.)

2. The story of the power of God, as felt by one of those who came to the aid of Joseph Smith in his translating of the Book of Mormon, can nowhere be read more directly than in Sections 3 and 5 of the Doc. and Cov. Here is the story of Martin Harris who later became one of the three witnesses to see the angel and view the records. (The teacher should study the notes of these Sections found in the Doc. and Cov. Commentary, and come prepared to relate or have related by a class member, the part Martin Harris played in helping the Prophet. See also Joseph Smith 2:59-65. With this as a background have Sections 3 and 5 read in class.

Wherein could one apply the value of the lesson, taught here to Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, to his own life? Cite verses you best remember.

The next question may be used if needed for further class activity or it may be assigned for home study.

Just how is the coming forth of the Book of Mormon "a marvelous work?" Can you list five or more startling facts concerning its discovery, its story, its in-

fluence, its translator, its power? Read Section 4 of the Doc. and Cov. and especially the notes on this Section found in the Doc. and Cov. Commentary.

Note: See the article "The Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon" by Preston Nibley, in this issue of the Magazine, p. 431.

Visiting Teachers' Messages

Sources of Strength—The Beatitudes

Lesson 2—Blessed Are They That Mourn

For Tuesday, November 7, 1944

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

Objective: To point out that even though one may be called upon to mourn, his sorrow may be appeased, and he may find comfort and solace through the spirit of the Lord.

NEVER were more soulful words spoken than these. No one who grows to maturity remains untouched by sorrow—escapes mourning. People mourn for righteous reasons; some because of mistakes which they have made. This is the godly sorrow, spoken of in the Scriptures, that worketh repentance. It is the sorrow that brings reformation. All who mourn because of their weaknesses and who have a sincere desire to overcome them, are in the pathway to repentance; and true repentance brings to every soul "that peace that passeth understanding." Repentance is one of the most glorious and comforting principles revealed from heaven.

Another source of righteous mourning is through the loss or misfortune of loved ones. The Master taught that mourning should be lifted above bitterness, and crushing

grief. It comes to all; and if it is borne with faith and submission, it elevates, ennobles, and sanctifies the soul.

To mourn with others, to share their sorrows, to sympathize with them in their misfortunes, to help them, is to render a service that is satisfying and comforting. The Scriptures tell us it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.

This is true, because when one goes into the presence of the departed, he searches his soul for the meaning of life and death; he sees things in the light of eternity; and thus he is able to equate the true value of experiences, to know what is permanent and satisfying, and what is only fleeting and transitory.

This is a day of mourning the world over. There are many who are mourning the loss of loved ones.