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## Book of Mormon Studies

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**Abstract:** This is a series of articles intended for Relief Society course study. It discusses the importance of the Book of Mormon, its coming forth (i.e., the translation, the witnesses, the publication, Joseph Smith), brief overview of its contents, and explains the text from 1 Nephi 1 through Alma 58. Each article features several questions that are helpful in synthesizing and applying the Book of Mormon to daily life.

Reports are necessary, but at best they are incomplete. More important than figures to be remembered by members and missionaries is this: The work of the Lord is progressing; there are still many people in these lands who are waiting for the gospel message, and regardless of high or low figures on report blanks, if time, talents and opportunities have been used to best advantage, if the labour has been diligent in fact, then the offering will be acceptable to the Lord.—RICHARD L. EVANS.

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### “SEASON'S GREETINGS”

THE TIME OF YEAR has just passed when all Christendom wishes one another “The Season's Greetings.” For a space of days, mayhap a week at most, all people who profess any degree of adherence to Christian faith hold in their hearts only good feeling and well-wishes for their fellows.

Alas! the “Season”, so-called, is so very, very brief! Why may not the period of time when the Christ Spirit fills the hearts of men be extended into months until each is willing the whole year round to see only the good that is in his brother?

Those who understand and who live the Gospel taught by the Saviour of mankind may and do possess an all-year lease of His Spirit, which fills them with love and charity for all their fellowmen.

May not this be the test of an actual adherence to Christian faith: How long is my Season of Good-will? Is it a week, a month, or does it last from year's beginning to year's end?—LEAH D. WIDTSOE.

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### BOOK OF MORMON STUDIES\*

*A Test of the Genuineness of the Engravings:* The first man who gave material assistance to the Prophet in the difficult task of translation, as we have noted, was Martin Harris. He not only advanced money as it was needed, but gave of his time in the necessary work of writing down the translation as it fell from the Prophet's lips. Martin was a generous man, but of doubting disposition. His wife was unconvinced of the genuineness of the record and repeatedly begged her husband to bring home some of the work so that she and their friends could see what he was doing. Through her persistent fault-finding, and her insistent demand that she be shown the records, she caused her husband, and the Prophet as well, much annoyance.

“Martin's faith was not very strong, and he desired to make a

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\*Lesson 4 of the Relief Society Course of Study—for use on the second lesson night in February.

test of the truthfulness of the record which Joseph had found. The Prophet had copied some of the characters from the plates on sheets of paper, some of them accompanied by the translation. Harris asked that he might take these, and his request was granted. Proceeding to New York City, Martin Harris showed these writings to a learned linguist, Professor Charles Anthon, asking his opinion of them.\* Martin's description of the visit follows :

I went to the city of New York, and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Professor Charles Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic; and he said they were true characters. He gave me a certificate, certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had been translated was also correct. I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him.

He then said to me: "Let me see that certificate." I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying, that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him, he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied: "I cannot read a sealed book." I left him and went to Dr. Mitchell, who sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said respecting both the characters and translation.†

This testimony seems to have convinced Martin Harris, for as a result he offered his services to the Prophet to assist him in any way possible.

*Scribes in the Translation:* "The work of translation proceeded rather slowly, Martin Harris acting as scribe and writing from the Prophet's dictation. It is impracticable here to enter into all the details of this labour. During the progress of the work Martin brought very deep trouble upon both himself and Joseph by allowing the first one hundred and sixteen pages of manuscript to be lost. It fell into the hands of enemies of the work, thus necessitating the translating of a corresponding portion of the 'smaller plates' as a substitute for the lost manuscript. As a result of Martin's carelessness the instruments of translation were taken away for a time, and it seemed that Joseph would lose his calling. By his sincere repentance he regained the favour of God, although his error cost him great sorrow and much additional labour.

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\*Deseret Sunday School Union Leaflets, December 1890.

†*History of the Church*, Vol. I., page 20.



Martin Harris, however, was never permitted to be his scribe again. His place was filled temporarily by Emma, the wife of Joseph, but she was so bowed down with sorrow for the death of her babe that she could render but little assistance.\*

There were other times when the Prophet's friends could not assist him; at these times his wife acted as scribe. Thus was womanhood honoured in this striking example of woman proving herself a real help meet for her husband.

The Prophet's joy upon being allowed again to possess and use the Holy Interpreters is told in his own words :

After the angel left me I continued my supplications to God, without cessation, and on the twenty-second of September, I had the joy and satisfaction of again receiving the Urim and Thummim, with which I have again commenced translating, and Emma writes for me, but the angel said that the Lord would send me a scribe, and I trust his promise will be verified. The angel seemed pleased with me when he gave me back the Urim and Thummim, and he told me that the Lord loved me, for my faithfulness and humility.†

The promised scribe spoken of came to him from an unexpected source. "It was at this time that Oliver Cowdery, a young school teacher who had received a testimony of the divinity of Joseph's mission, came and offered to act as a scribe. This offer was most willingly accepted, and the work of translation was resumed April 7th, 1829."‡

The translation was done with great difficulty. Mobs continued to hound and persecute the young men and at times the work had to be suspended while they were forced to move from place to place. Only the power of God protected the sacred record from evil and designing men, and made possible the completion of the translation. The powers of evil from that day have been arrayed against the Book of Mormon and its message, but as needed, these evil designs have been frustrated.

*The Translation is Finished:* Oliver continued to act as scribe until the work was completed. For a time they remained in the home of Mr. Hale, the Prophet's father-in-law, who proved himself a valiant friend in time of need. But in a miraculous manner it was made known unto Joseph that wicked men sought his life and that he should remove the plates to the home of David Whitmer and continue the work there. In an equally miraculous manner the Whitmers were convinced that they should give shelter to the young men and offered them the hospitality of their home.

"The young men and Emma Smith were treated with the utmost kindness, not only by the Whitmer family, but also by the

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\*Deseret Sunday School Union Leaflets, December 1890.

†*History of the Prophet Joseph*, by Lucy Smith, pp. 125-6.

‡Deseret Sunday School Union Leaflets, December 1890.

neighbours. Here they found many who, instead of opposing them, were eager to listen to their testimonies of the truth. When, in writing, Oliver's hand became weary, David, or John, or Peter Whitmer, Jr., or Emma would take the pen. Thus the translation went on till the work was ready for the press."\*

Oliver Cowdery was commissioned by the Prophet to make a complete copy of the entire manuscript, which he did and of which he later said :

I wrote with my own pen the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages), as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummin, or, as it is called by that book, "Holy Interpreters."†

#### QUESTIONS

1. Read the following scripture: Daniel 12: 4-9; Revelation 5: 1-9; II Nephi, Chapter 27.
2. Describe the manner of fulfilment of the above scripture.
3. What type of man would you judge Martin Harris to be? How did he assist the Prophet at this time?
4. How did Martin Harris cause the Prophet sorrow and great difficulty?
5. Of the two women mentioned in the lesson which one set the example all women should follow? How did she set this example? Whose example should be shunned by all women? Why?
6. What evidence have you that this translation was made by the gift and power of God?

\**One Hundred Years of Mormonism*, p. 66.

†*New Witnesses for God*, Vol. II., B. H. Roberts, Chapter 7.

#### DEATH

TOMBLING—Sister Mary H. Tombling of North Elmham, Norwich District, passed away on January 14th at the age of ninety-two. Sister Tombling had been a faithful member of the Church since her baptism in 1909.

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