

Elder James E. Faust

Witnesses to Book of Mormon

Some time ago I held in my hand my mother's copy of her favorite book. It was a timeworn copy of the Book of Mormon. Almost every page was marked; in spite of tender handling, some of the leaves were dog-eared, and the cover was worn thin. No one had to tell her that one can get closer to God by reading the Book of Mormon than by any other book. She was already there. She had read it, studied it, prayed over it, and taught from it. As a young man I held her book in my hands and tried to see, through her eyes, the great truths of the Book of Mormon to which she so readily testified and which she so greatly loved.

As a young boy in the Cottonwood Ward, I was greatly impressed when I listened to James H. Moyle tell in sacrament meeting of his having heard both Martin Harris and David Whitmer, two of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, affirm their testimony concerning that book. They, along with Oliver Cowdery, had testified in connection with the original publication of the Book of Mormon "that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we . . . bear record that these things are true" ("The Testimony of Three Witnesses," Book of Mormon).

When James H. Moyle visited David Whitmer, Whitmer was an old man; he was out of the Church and was living in a log cabin in Richmond, Missouri. Of this visit to David Whitmer, James H. Moyle stated in this very building on March 22, 1908:

"I went to his humble home, . . . and I told him . . . as a young man starting out in life I wanted to know from him . . . what he knew about the Book of Mormon, and what about the testimony he had published to

the world concerning it. He told me in all the solemnity of his advanced years, that the testimony he had given to the world, and which was published in the Book of Mormon, was true, every word of it, and that he had never deviated nor departed in any particular from that testimony, and that nothing in the world could separate him from the sacred message that was delivered to him. I still wondered if it was not possible that he could have been deceived, . . . so I induced him to relate to me, under such cross-examination as I was able to interpose, every detail of what took place. He described minutely the spot in the woods, the large log that separated him from the angel, and that he saw the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, that he handled them, and that he did hear the voice of God declare that the plates were correctly translated. I asked him if there was any possibility for him to have been deceived, and that it was all a mistake, but he said, 'No' " (quoted in Gordon B. Hinckley, *James Henry Moyle* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1951], pp. 366-67).

The keystone of our religion

However, the Book of Mormon did not yield its profound message to me as an unearned legacy. I question whether one can acquire an understanding of this great book except through singleness of mind and strong purpose of heart. We must ask not only if it is true, but also do it in the name of Jesus Christ. Said Moroni, "Ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 10:4).

Joseph Smith, who translated the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon came, had this to say: "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" (*History of the Church*, 4:461).

The dictionary says that a keystone is "the uppermost and last set stone of an arch which completes it and locks its members together." A secondary definition is "the fundamental element, as of science or doctrine" (*Funk and Wagnalls New Practical Standard Dictionary, Britannica World Language Edition*, 2 vols., 1956, 1:735).

The Book of Mormon is a keystone because it establishes and ties together eternal principles and precepts, rounding out basic doctrines of salvation. It is the crowning gem in the diadem of our holy scriptures.

It is a keystone for other reasons also. In the promise of Moroni previously referred to—namely, that God will manifest the truth of the Book of Mormon to every sincere inquirer having faith in Christ (see Moroni 10:4)—we have a key link in a self-locking chain.

Keystone of our individual faith

A confirming testimony of the Book of Mormon convinces that "Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God" (Title Page, Book of Mormon) and also spiritually verifies (a) the divine calling of Joseph Smith and (b) that he did see the Father and the Son. With that firmly in place, it logically follows that one can receive a verification that the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price are true companion scriptures to the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

All of this confirms the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the divine mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, led by a living prophet enjoying continuous revelation. From these basic verities can flow an understanding of other saving principles of the fulness of the gospel.

In addition, the Book of Mormon is a necessary keystone of our own individual faith. President Ezra Taft Benson affirmed, "I have noted within the Church the difference in discernment, in insight, conviction, and spirit between those who know and love the Book of Mormon and those who do not. That book is a great sifter" (*New Era*, May 1975, p. 19). An understanding of the Book of Mormon can really help lock into place an individual's faith in Jesus Christ.

What Book of Mormon is not

It is important to know what the Book of Mormon is *not*. It is not primarily a history, although much of what it contains is historical. The title page states that it is an account taken from the records of people living in the Americas before and after Christ. It was "written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation. . . . And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations."

George Q. Cannon stated that "the Book of Mormon is not a geographical primer. It was not written to teach geographical truths. What is told us of the situation of the various lands or cities . . . is usually simply an incidental remark connected with the doctrinal or historical portions of the work" (*Juvenile Instructor*, Jan. 1890, p. 18).

Confirming evidence of Jesus

What, then, is the Book of Mormon? It is confirming evidence of the birth, life, and crucifixion of Jesus and of his work as the Messiah and the Redeemer. Nephi writes about the Book of Mormon: "All ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ" (2 Nephi 33:10).

Nephi and his brother Jacob join with Isaiah to constitute three powerful pre-Messianic voices proclaiming the first coming of Jesus. Isaiah is quoted extensively by Nephi because he is the principal Old Testament prophet who prophesied of the coming of the Messiah.

To bring us unto Christ

The Book of Mormon establishes the truthfulness of the Bible. (See 1 Nephi 13:40.) It is evidence "to the world that the holy scriptures are true" (D&C 20:11). It foretells the establishment of the fulness of the gospel of peace and salvation. It was written to give us principles and guidelines for our eternal journey.

One of the ultimate messages of the Book of Mormon, and indeed of the Old Testament and all human history, is that mankind cannot reach perfection on its own. There is another message which comes through loud and clear from its pages. It is the often unpopular and seemingly harsh injunction—"Repent or perish." When the Book of Mormon people listened to this prophetic message, they flourished. When they forgot the message, they perished.

In Galatians Paul said, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24). The records maintained by the Book of Mormon prophets—and portions of what is now the Bible brought from the eastern continent—served, according to Abinadi, "to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him" (Mosiah 13:30). So the Book of Mormon is a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ. (See Mosiah 13:27–32.)

Translated with aid and power of God

The test for understanding this sacred book is preeminently spiritual. An obsession with secular knowledge rather than spiritual understanding will make its pages difficult to unlock.

To me it is inconceivable that Joseph Smith, without divine help, could have written this complex and profound book. There is no way that Joseph Smith, an unlearned young frontiersman, could have fabricated the great truths it contains, generated its great spiritual power, or falsified the testimony of Christ that it contains. The book itself testifies that it is the holy word of God.

New evidence of the divinity of the Book of Mormon has just come to light. The recently discovered letter of Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph's mother, dated January 23, 1829, to her sister-in-law, Mary Pierce, is additional confirmation of the Book of Mormon. This letter was written a year before the Book of Mormon was published. It contains an accurate statement of some of the happenings of the times and the contents of the book and other historical information.

With the aid of modern computer science, a topical guide has been placed in the King James Version of the Bible, containing doctrinal cross-references to the other scriptures. From these references we find countless confirming evidences that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon with the aid and power of God. On almost every one of its 531 pages are numerous references that tie in doctrinally to the King James Bible. In comparison, many statements that seem fragmented in the Bible are more complete in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.

Confirmation by the Holy Spirit

References to teachings also taught in the Old Testament and the New Testament are so numerous and overwhelming throughout the Book of Mormon that one can come to a definitive conclusion by logic that a human intellect could not have conceived of them all. But more important than logic is the confirmation by the Holy Spirit that the story of the Book of Mormon is true.

All scriptures are one in that they testify of Jesus. Jacob, a Book of Mormon prophet, reminds us that "none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ" (Jacob 7:11). Speaking of the scriptures, the Psalmist said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).

The Book of Mormon will encourage only righteousness. Why, then, has hostility been engendered against the book? In part, no doubt, it may have come because the origin of the book was from golden plates delivered to Joseph Smith by an angel. These were seen and handled by selected witnesses, but not put on public display. Perhaps it is also because it is claimed primarily to be the work of ancient prophets here on the American continent.

Testimony as special witness

The great worth of the Book of Mormon was declared by the Savior himself. He said in 3 Nephi, "This is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me" (3 Nephi 11:32).

The Redeemer further declared in the Book of Mormon, "Behold I have given unto you my gospel" (3 Nephi 27:13). As a special witness, I testify that Jesus is the Christ and that Nephi's and Isaiah's prophecies of His coming have in fact been fulfilled. Like Nephi, "We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ" (2 Nephi 25:26).

I testify that the Savior will come again, and that at his second coming some will say, "What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet?" He will

show the wounds in His hands, wrists, and feet, and they will ask when and where he received these wounds. He will answer: "I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God" (D&C 45:51-52).

I testify through the sure conviction that springs from the witness of the Spirit that it is possible to know things that have been revealed with greater certainty than by actually seeing them. We can have a more absolute knowledge than eyes can perceive or ears can hear. God himself has put his approval on the Book of Mormon, having said, "As your Lord and your God liveth it is true" (D&C 17:6).

I can now see more clearly through the eyes of my own understanding what my mother could see in her precious old worn-out copy of the Book of Mormon. I pray that we may live in such a way as to merit and gain a testimony of and abide by the great truths of the Book of Mormon. I testify that the keystone of our religion is solidly in place, bearing the weight of truth as it moves through all the earth, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder James E. Faust, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

The Choir and congregation will now join in singing "High on the Mountain Top," following which we shall hear from Elder L. Tom Perry, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

The Choir and congregation sang "High on the Mountain Top."

Elder L. Tom Perry

One of the special opportunities we have as General Authorities is to visit the stakes of Zion. Thirty to forty times each year we find ourselves stay-

ing in the home of a different stake president. We have the privilege of being guests in the greatest homes you will find in all the world.