

tening ears and understanding hearts to counsel together and to hear those who have been called of God with a responsibility for the work in this dispensation. We are united with a common bond of faith and testimony. Jesus Christ stands at the head of the Church of which we are members. The Church bears his name. It is his Church. We are honored to be a part of it.

We have a prophet appointed by him, and we express gratitude for this our leader. Although he is old in years, and his body weakened, we look to him with love and appreciation.

### Organization of Christ's Church

Some people, most of them not members of the Church, worry because the President of the Church is an elderly man. I want to assure you that under the organization put in place by the Lord himself, there is no need to worry. The President has two counselors. So long as either of them is able to function, there will be an active First Presidency with full powers of decision in all matters affecting the Church.

Associated with the Presidency is the Council of the Twelve Apostles. At times in the history of the Church, when there was no First Presidency, the Council of the Twelve governed its affairs. As a matter of fact, these were some of the most difficult and demanding times in the history of the Church, notably, when our people left Nauvoo, crossed Iowa, established Winter Quarters on the Missouri, and then made their historic odyssey to this valley in 1847. It was not until Brigham Young returned to Winter Quarters that he was

sustained as the President of the Church.

### Priesthood of God and strength of the Church

The Lord will not allow his work to suffer. He will not allow it to be led astray. He has made that clear. There is much of flexibility and resiliency in this inspired organization. It can accommodate almost any imaginable set of circumstances. It is moving forward in a remarkable and wonderful way. The priesthood of God is upon the earth, and the strength of the Church lies in the power that comes therefrom and in the personal faith and testimony which reside in the hearts of its members.

We welcome you to this great world conference. We pray that the Lord will inspire all who speak, all who sing, all who offer prayers, and in a particular way all who participate as members in the many congregations who are joined together this day. May we all be edified thereby, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Hinckley

The choir will now sing "Come, All Ye Saints Who Dwell on Earth." We shall then be pleased to hear from President Ezra Taft Benson, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

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The choir sang "Come, All Ye Saints Who Dwell on Earth."

President Ezra Taft Benson spoke without further announcement.

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## President Ezra Taft Benson

### Neglect of Book of Mormon

My beloved brethren and sisters, for some years now I have been deeply

concerned that we are not using the Book of Mormon as God intends.

As I participated in the Mexico City Temple dedication, I received the distinct impression that God is not

pleased with our neglect of the Book of Mormon.

In the eighty-fourth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord decreed that the whole Church was under condemnation, even all the children of Zion, because of the way they treated the Book of Mormon. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent," said the Lord, "and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon" (D&C 84:57).

Zion cannot fully arise and put on her beautiful garments if she is under this condemnation. (See D&C 82:14.)

This prompts five critical questions to which each of us must respond: Is the Book of Mormon the word of God? For whom was it meant? How important is this volume of scripture? What is its major purpose? How are we to use it?

### Is it the word of God?

First, is the Book of Mormon the word of God? Yes. God has so testified. (See D&C 20:8–10.) So have its writers (see 2 Nephi 33:10; Moroni 7:35), so has its translator (see Articles of Faith 1:8), so have its witnesses, and so do all those who have read it and received a personal revelation from God as to its truthfulness.

### For whom was it meant?

Second, for whom was the Book of Mormon meant? Moroni, the book's last writer, speaking to us said, "Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing" (Mormon 8:35). God inspired Mormon, its chief compiler, to put into the book what we would need in our day.

### How important is it?

Third, how important is the Book of Mormon? Joseph Smith called it "the keystone of our religion" (*History of the Church*, 4:461).

"Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations," he said, "and where is our religion? We have none" (*History of the Church*, 2:52).

"This generation," said the Lord to Joseph Smith, the translator, "shall have my word through you" (D&C 5:10). And so it has.

"And those who receive [the Book of Mormon] in faith," the Lord states, "and work righteousness, shall receive a crown of eternal life;

"But those who harden their hearts in unbelief, and reject it, it shall turn to their own condemnation" (D&C 20:14–15).

### What is purpose of Book of Mormon?

Fourth, what is the major purpose of the Book of Mormon? To bring men to Christ and to be reconciled to him, and then to join his church—in that order. (See 2 Nephi 25:23; D&C 20:11–14, 35–37.)

The title page of the Book of Mormon states the book is for "the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God."

The Lord further instructed that the Book of Mormon proves that "God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old" (D&C 20:11).

The Book of Mormon being true, then God did inspire his prophet Joseph Smith to translate it and did call him to do the holy work of restoring His church, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

### How are we to use it?

Finally, how are we to use the book?

We must first read it and gain a testimony for ourselves. Men may deceive each other, but God does not deceive men. Therefore, the Book of Mormon sets forth the best test for determining its truthfulness—namely, read it and then ask God if it is true.

Moroni, in the book's final chapter, issued that divine challenge to every reader in these words:

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would 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).

This, then, is the supreme assurance for the honest in heart—to know by personal revelation from God that the Book of Mormon is true. Millions have put it to that test and know, and increasing millions will yet know.

### Feast from the book

Now the spirit, as well as the body, is in need of constant nourishment. Yesterday's meal is not enough to sustain today's needs. So also an infrequent reading of "the most correct of any book on earth," as Joseph Smith called it, is not enough. (See *History of the Church*, 4:461.)

Not all truths are of equal value, nor are all scriptures of the same worth. What better way to nourish the spirit than to frequently feast from the book which the Prophet Joseph said would get a man "nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book"? (*History of the Church*, 4:461).

President Marion G. Romney understood this. Years ago he started a daily procedure, which he recommended to us, of reading the Book of Mormon each morning for thirty minutes. "I know that it kept me in harmony," he said, "so far as I did keep in harmony, with the Spirit of the Lord." Then he added, "It will hold us as close to the Spirit of the Lord as anything I know" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1949, pp. 36, 41).

### Teaches vital truths

The Book of Mormon is to be "a standard unto my people, which are of

the house of Israel," said the Lord (2 Nephi 29:2). It is a standard we should heed and follow.

In the twentieth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord devotes several verses to summarizing the vital truths which the Book of Mormon teaches. (See D&C 20:17–36.) It speaks of God, the creation of man, the Fall, the Atonement, the ascension of Christ into heaven, prophets, faith, repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost, endurance, prayer, justification and sanctification through grace, and loving and serving God.

We must know these essential truths. Aaron and Ammon and their brethren in the Book of Mormon taught these same kinds of truths to the Lamanite people (see Alma 18:22–39), who were "in the darkest abyss" (Alma 26:3). After accepting these eternal truths, the Book of Mormon states, those converted Lamanites never did fall away. (See Alma 23:6.)

If our children and grandchildren are taught and heed these same truths, will they fall away? We best instruct them in the Book of Mormon at our dinner table, by our firesides, at their bedsides, and in our letters and phone calls—in all of our goings and comings.

Some spiritually alert parents hold early-morning devotionals with their families in their homes. They have a hymn, prayer, and then read and discuss the Book of Mormon.

"The elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in . . . the Book of Mormon," says the Lord in the forty-second section of the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 42:12).

### A tool of conversion

The Book of Mormon is for both member and nonmember. Combined with the Spirit of the Lord, the Book of Mormon is the greatest single tool which God has given us to convert the world. If we are to have the harvest of souls that President Kimball envisions,

then we must use the instrument which God has designed for that task—the Book of Mormon.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated, “Men can get nearer to the Lord, can have more of the spirit of conversion and conformity in their hearts, can have stronger testimonies, and can gain a better understanding of the doctrines of salvation through the Book of Mormon than they can through the Bible. . . . There will be more people saved in the kingdom of God—ten thousand times over—because of the Book of Mormon than there will be because of the Bible” (address at Book of Mormon Symposium, Brigham Young University, 18 Aug. 1978).

### The record of Joseph

The Christian world has the Bible—and so do we. The Bible speaks of a people, the Jews; their land, the Holy Land; their prophets; and the birth and ministry of Jesus Christ.

But was there only one tribe of Israel? What of Joseph, the birthright son, who saved all of Israel’s family from famine? What of Joseph, whose sons Israel blessed and said, “Let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac”? (Genesis 48:16). What of Joseph, whom Israel blessed and promised that he would be “a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall”? (Genesis 49:22). Where is the record of Joseph?

We testify to the world that we have the record of Joseph—even the Book of Mormon. Like Judah, Joseph had a people—the Nephites and Lamanites. Like Judah, Joseph had a land—the Americas. Like Judah, Joseph had prophets, and his descendants also had a visitation from Jesus Christ, even the resurrected Lord.

“Know ye not,” the Lord says in the Book of Mormon, “that there are more nations than one? . . .

“Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that

I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another?”

“ . . . And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another” (2 Nephi 29:7–9).

### A new witness for Christ

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 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.

I testify that the Book of Mormon is the word of God; and therefore Jesus is the Christ, Joseph Smith is a prophet, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, with its authorized servants to perform the ordinances of salvation today, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir sang “Go Forth with Faith” without announcement.

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### President Hinckley

President Ezra Taft Benson has just addressed us, followed by the choir singing “Go Forth with Faith.”

We shall now be pleased to hear Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve.