

President Ezra Taft Benson

The Book of Mormon is changing Church members' lives

My dear brothers and sisters, as we commence another great general conference of the Church, my heart is full of love and gratitude to the Latter-day Saints throughout the world.

During the past six months I have been deeply touched by the response of members of the Church who have heeded counsel to read and reread the word of the Lord as set forth in the Book of Mormon. This has resulted in increased spirituality and is helping to cleanse the inner vessel.

Adults, youth, and children have borne powerful testimonies as to how the Book of Mormon has changed their lives. My life, too, continues to be changed by this sacred volume of scripture.

Parallel histories

Recently I have been reading again the marvelous account in the Book of Mormon of the visit of the resurrected Savior to the American continent. As Easter approaches, I have been deeply impressed with the beauty and power of this scriptural account in 3 Nephi, and with its great value for our time and our generation.

The record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior's visit reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior's second coming. The Nephite civilization had reached great heights. They were prosperous and industrious. They had built many cities with great highways connecting them. They engaged in shipping and trade. They built temples and palaces.

But, as so often happens, the people rejected the Lord. Pride became commonplace. Dishonesty and immorality were widespread. Secret combinations flourished because, as Helaman tells us, the Gadianton robbers "had seduced the more part of the righteous until they had come down to believe in

their works and partake of their spoils" (Helaman 6:38). "The people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning" (3 Nephi 6:12). And "Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world," even as today (v. 15).

Mormon noted that the Nephites "did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them" (v. 18).

There were but few righteous among them (see v. 14). Nephi led the Church with great power and performed many miracles, yet "there were but few who were converted unto the Lord" (3 Nephi 7:21). The people as a whole rejected the Lord. They stoned the prophets and persecuted those who sought to follow Christ.

Christ's coming to the Americas preceded by terrible destruction

And then the God of nature intervened, even Jesus Christ. A storm began such as had never before been known in all the land. Lightning flashed and thunder shook the earth. Violent winds carried people away, never to be seen again.

"Many great and notable cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain" (3 Nephi 8:14).

"The whole face of the land was changed" (v. 12).

For three hours the forces of nature raged. Finally when the thunder, lightning, storm, tempest, and quaking had ceased, a thick darkness settled over the land. For three days no light could be seen, no candle could be lit. The vapor of darkness was so thick that it could be felt, "and there was great

mourning and howling and weeping among all the people. . . .

“ . . . They were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out” (vs. 23, 25).

Then a voice began to speak—a voice from the heavens that was heard throughout the entire land.

The voice spoke of the terrible destruction and announced that this was a direct result of the wickedness and the abominations among the people.

Imagine the feelings of the people when the voice asked, “Will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?” (3 Nephi 9:13).

Then the voice identified itself: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God” (v. 15). It was the voice of the very person who had been mocked and ridiculed and rejected by the wicked! It was the voice of Him whom the prophets proclaimed and for whom they were stoned and killed! It was the voice of the Master!

He declared that by Him redemption came, that in Him the law of Moses was fulfilled, and that they were to offer a sacrifice unto Him of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

Resurrected Christ appears to the multitude

When the darkness had dispersed, a great multitude gathered around the temple in the land of Bountiful. Twenty-five hundred men, women, and children had come together. As they were conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death, they once again heard the voice.

Mormon tells us that “it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul,

and did cause their hearts to burn” (3 Nephi 11:3). The first time and the second time the voice spoke, the people heard it but could not understand it.

The record then states that “again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it. . . .

“And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:

“Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him” (vs. 5–7).

How few people in all the history of the world have heard the actual voice of God the Father speaking to them. As the people looked heavenward, “they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them” (v. 8).

A glorious, resurrected being, a member of the Godhead, the Creator of innumerable worlds, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, stood before their very eyes!

“And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

“Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

“And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (vs. 9–11).

The multitude worships Christ and feels his wounds

The whole multitude fell to the earth. Jesus commanded them to rise and come forth unto Him. He invited them to thrust their hands into his side and feel the prints of the nails in His hands and feet. One by one each of the twenty-five hundred present went forth.

Indeed they "did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come" (v. 15).

When the last one had stood face to face with the Savior and had come to know with an absolute surety of the reality of His resurrection, "they did cry out with one accord:

"Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him" (vs. 16–17).

Christ bestows authority and teaches the people

He called the faithful prophet Nephi and others and commissioned them with power and authority to baptize in His name.

The Savior taught the people: "Ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 38).

He gave them the glorious sermon which we today call the Sermon on the Mount.

And then He said:

"I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time.

"Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again" (3 Nephi 17:2–3).

As the Master announced His departure, "he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them" (v. 5).

Christ heals the sick, prays, and blesses the children

Moved with tender compassion, the resurrected Lord commanded them

to bring their sick, their handicapped, their diseased.

"And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him" (v. 9).

The Savior then called for the little children. He commanded the multitude to kneel as He prayed to the Father.

Mormon tells us that "no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things" as were spoken in that prayer (v. 17). Then, weeping with joy, Jesus took the little children to Him one by one and blessed them. Finally, turning to the multitude, He said, "Behold your little ones" (v. 23).

As they lifted their eyes, "they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them" (v. 24).

Read and apply the powerful testimony of Christ in 3 Nephi

There is not time to speak of all the remarkable events of that glorious day and the days that followed. But it is clear that 3 Nephi contains some of the most moving and powerful passages in all scripture. It testifies of Jesus Christ, His prophets, and the doctrines of salvation. At this Easter time, what a blessing it would be if every family would read together 3 Nephi, discuss its sacred contents, and then determine how they can liken it unto themselves and apply its teachings in their lives.

Christ instructs his disciples

Third Nephi is a book that should be read and read again. Its testimony of

the resurrected Christ in America is given in purity and beauty. As the Savior prepared to leave his disciples, he said unto them:

"Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

"And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. . . .

"And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. . . .

"And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

"Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel" (3 Nephi 27: 13–14, 16, 19–21).

Christ has revealed himself again in our day

The mission of the resurrected Christ did not end with His appearance to those in the Holy Land or even to those in ancient America, for the continuing miracle is that He has revealed Himself again to men in our day.

In section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants the Prophet Joseph Smith records the marvelous vision which he

and Sidney Rigdon had. The Prophet declared:

"And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

"For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

"That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God" (vs. 22–24).

"All shall rise from the dead"

Now what does all of this mean to us? It means that as Christ lives today with a resurrected body, so shall we. It means that life is a probation, to be followed by death, resurrection, and judgment.

In the Book of Mormon, the keystone of our religion, we read: "Death comes upon mankind; . . . nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead" (Alma 12:24).

All shall rise from the dead. "The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame; . . . and we shall be brought to stand before God, . . . and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, . . . to be judged according to [our] works, whether they be good or whether they be evil" (Alma 11:43–44).

Be like Christ

In light of our mortal probation, our future resurrection, and our final judgment, we need to remember the question which the resurrected Lord posed to His disciples as recorded in 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon.

He asked them, "Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be?" And He answered, "Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).

He is our Exemplar, our Redeemer, our Lord.

Testimony of Christ

I testify that 3 Nephi is a true account of the resurrected Christ's visit to ancient America and contains His teachings in their pristine truth.

I testify that Jesus is the Christ and that He stands at the head of His church today, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I testify that He will come again in power and great glory and that He will leave nothing undone for our eternal welfare.

May we daily be the manner of men He is and thus be prepared to meet and dwell with Him, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "Awake and Arise" without announcement.

President Monson

We appreciate the beautiful message about sharing the restored gospel as sung by the Mormon Youth Chorus in the hymn "Awake and Arise." Prior to the singing we were blessed to hear the opening address of our beloved prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson.

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now speak to us.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

At this pulpit today, I am truly honored to follow the President of the Church, President Ezra Taft Benson. I sustain him as a living prophet of God. He was ordained an Apostle in 1943, before I entered medical school. Now he is the senior Apostle on earth, and I am privileged to add my gratitude for a prophet and for his message of instruction and inspiration.

He has taught us of the ministry of the resurrected Lord to the inhabitants of ancient America. This precious knowledge recorded in the Book of Mormon is of transcendent importance to all people. Truly, the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ!

Evidences of life after life are carefully documented

As President Benson spoke, my thoughts momentarily flashed back some years ago to a conversation I had

with a book publisher. He was interested in the topic of possible continuation of life after what we know as death. The publisher asked if I could contribute stories from patients who had come close enough to death to experience the other side and yet had survived to share those accounts. Sensing public interest in that subject, he would entitle the book *Life after Life*.

When I considered that request, I remembered many such incidents which had been whispered in confidence to me over the years. But those seemed too sacred to share in a worldly way, especially to the benefit of a commercial venture. Besides, what would be the validity of isolated stories of life after life without supporting testimonies of witnesses?

To me, much more logical and convincing would be a study of well-documented and carefully witnessed evidences of life after life.