

I feel my Savior's love  
 And know that he will bless me.  
 I offer him my heart;  
 My shepherd he will be.  
 He knows I will follow him,  
 Give all my life to him.  
 I feel my Savior's love,  
 The love he freely gives me.  
 ["I Feel My Savior's Love," *Children's  
 Songbook*, 74-75]

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

---

The choir sang "Take Time to Be Holy."

---

### President Hinckley

Elder L. Aldin Porter of the Presidency of the Seventy has spoken to us, followed by Sister Patricia P. Pinegar. The choir then sang "Take Time to Be Holy."

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve will now speak to us, following which it will be my pleasure to address you.

Following my remarks, this session will conclude with the choir singing "Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire." The benediction will then be given by Elder Merrill J. Bateman of the Seventy.

## Elder Russell M. Nelson

### Valuing the Book of Mormon

Not long after my call to serve as one of the Twelve Apostles, I was summoned to the office of the President of our Quorum, President Ezra Taft Benson. He expressed deep concern that members of the Church did not fully appreciate the value of the Book of Mormon. With emotion in his voice, he read to me from the 84th section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

"Your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—

"Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation."<sup>1</sup>

By that time, President Benson had completely captured my attention. He then concluded his admonition:

"And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon."<sup>2</sup>

I shall never forget that lesson. Since then, President Howard W. Hunter, President Gordon B. Hinckley, and many other leaders of the Church have continued to extol the Book of Mormon to people throughout the world.

### The Book of Mormon's primary purpose

I would like to add my testimony of the divinity of this book. I have read it many times. I have also read much that has been written about it. Some authors have focused upon its stories, its people, or its vignettes of history. Others have been intrigued by its language structure or its records of weapons, geography, animal life, techniques of building, or systems of weights and measures.

Interesting as these matters may be, study of the Book of Mormon is most rewarding when one focuses on its *primary* purpose—to testify of Jesus Christ. By comparison, all other issues are incidental.

### The Book of Mormon's contents

When you read the Book of Mormon, concentrate on the principal figure in the book—from its first chapter to the last—the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God.<sup>3</sup> And look for a second undergirding theme: God will keep His covenants with the remnants of the house of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

The Book of Mormon is a crucial component of that covenant.<sup>5</sup> It is holy scripture that encompasses sacred writings from the small and large plates of Nephi, the plates of Mormon, the plates of Ether, and the plates of brass, which contained “the five books of Moses, . . . a record of the Jews . . . ; and . . . prophecies of the holy prophets.”<sup>6</sup>

When Mormon abridged these records, he noted that he could not write a “hundredth part” of their proceedings.<sup>7</sup> Thus, *historical* aspects of the book assume *secondary* significance.

The Holy Bible has 66 individual books; the Book of Mormon contains 15. Its first book of Nephi—written some six centuries *before* the birth of Jesus—records that the prophet Lehi<sup>8</sup> received a vision of the tree of life.<sup>9</sup> His son Nephi prayed to know its meaning. In answer, he was given a remarkable vision. He beheld a virgin bearing a Child in her arms. He envisioned the Redeemer of the world, His earthly ministry, and His Crucifixion. He saw 12 others who would follow the Holy One. And he foresaw the ongoing opposition to the work of God and of His Apostles.<sup>10</sup>

### Book of Mormon prophets testified of Christ

Other great prophets of the Book of Mormon—in their own way and time—testified of the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Among them were the brother of Jared,<sup>11</sup> Zenock, Neum, and Zenos.<sup>12</sup> Testimonies of Jesus Christ that *pre-dated* His birth in Bethlehem were also

recorded from King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma the Elder, Alma the Younger, Amulek, the sons of Mosiah, Captain Moroni, the brothers Nephi and Lehi, and Samuel the Lamanite.<sup>13</sup> In a seemingly endless sequence of prophetic proclamations—testimonies of “all the holy prophets”<sup>14</sup> for “a great many thousand years before his coming”<sup>15</sup>—the Book of Mormon makes the solemn declaration that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

### Authors were devoted to God

Most books contained in libraries of the world were authored for contemporary readers. And they were generally written for profit, with royalties accruing from successful sales.

Not so with the Book of Mormon. It was written *anciently for our day*. It reveals the endless Lordship of Jesus Christ in accounts of two ancient American dispensations,<sup>16</sup> preserved for the benefit of us who live in this dispensation of the fulness of times. Certainly no royalties came to its authors. In fact, they paid dearly for their privilege of participation. What motivated them? Their devotion to God! The book's four major writers—Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni<sup>17</sup>—were all eyewitnesses of the Lord, as was its martyred translator, the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Their writings centered upon the Lord, His mission, and His ministry. Jacob, for example, repeatedly referred to the Atonement and Resurrection of Christ. “Beloved brethren,” wrote Jacob, “be reconciled unto [God] through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection . . . and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God. . . .

“And now, . . . why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him,” and a “knowledge of a resurrection and the world to come?”<sup>18</sup>

Jacob's advice is priceless and timeless.

### Contains the fulness of the gospel

The Savior declared that the Book of Mormon contains "the fulness of [His] everlasting gospel."<sup>19</sup> How did He define the *gospel*? The resurrected Lord taught, "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."<sup>20</sup>

Then He amplified that one-sentence definition: "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."<sup>21</sup>

This unique mortal mission of the Lord—the *gospel* as He defined it—we know as the Atonement. The *fulness* of the gospel, therefore, connotes a fuller comprehension of the Atonement.<sup>22</sup> This we do not obtain from the Bible alone. The word *atonement*, in any of its forms, is mentioned only once in the King James Version of the New Testament.<sup>23</sup> In the Book of Mormon, it appears 39 times!<sup>24</sup> The Book of Mormon also contains more references to the Resurrection than does the Bible.<sup>25</sup>

The Savior referred to the Book of Mormon as His "new covenant" with the house of Israel.<sup>26</sup> It is a tangible sign of Christ's culminating covenant with mankind.<sup>27</sup> The divine teachings of this book, as a third testament, clarify doctrine and unify the Old Testament with the New Testament. Scriptural covenants,<sup>28</sup> testaments,<sup>29</sup> and witnesses<sup>30</sup> since the beginning of time relate to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the central act of all human history.

The Book of Mormon is the most important religious text to be revealed from God to man "since the writings of the New Testament were compiled nearly two millennia ago."<sup>31</sup> Joseph Smith de-

clared the Book of Mormon to be "the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion."<sup>32</sup> It is the only book that the Lord Himself has testified to be true.<sup>33</sup>

### The Lord's ministry in the Americas

The crowning event of this sacred record is the personal ministry of the resurrected Lord to people of ancient America. To them He made this revelatory announcement:

"Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. . . .

. . . The scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled. . . .

"I am the light and the life of the world. . . .

. . . Whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost. . . .

. . . I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin.

"Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. . . . I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me . . . , and be saved."<sup>34</sup>

After that supernal introduction, the Master reinforced His identity by allowing the multitudes to thrust their hands into His side and feel the prints of the nails in His hands and in His feet. Then they knew that the very God of Israel stood in their presence—He who had been slain for the sins of the world.<sup>35</sup>

He instructed the people. He taught them to pray, to repent, to be baptized, to partake of the sacrament, to know of His doctrine, to understand the importance of sacred ordinances and covenants, and to endure to the end.<sup>36</sup>

### Translation of the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon is a gift from God to all humankind, and He has “commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance.”<sup>37</sup> He invites all “to come unto him and partake of his goodness,” and He denies “none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female.”<sup>38</sup>

This appeal to all people must involve many languages and the work of skilled translators. The King James Version of the Bible, for example, was produced by 50 English scholars who accomplished their work in seven years, translating at the rate of *one* page per day.<sup>39</sup> Expert translators today do well if they can also translate scripture at the rate of one page per day.

In contrast, Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon at the rate of about 10 pages per day, completing the task in about 85 days!<sup>40</sup> (Many of us feel good if we can read the book in that time.)

Such a pace is even more remarkable considering the circumstances under which the Prophet labored. In that same period, while enduring constant distractions and incessant hostility, Joseph Smith moved more than 100 miles from Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, New York.<sup>41</sup> He applied for a copyright.<sup>42</sup> He received revelations comprising 12 sections of the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>43</sup> Heavenly beings restored the holy priesthood. Yet he completed the translation in less than three months.

The First Presidency provided opportunity for the Twelve Apostles to see portions of the original manuscript and the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon. Words cannot describe the deep emotions we felt as we examined these precious documents and observed that marks of editing were remarkably rare.

### Personal testimony and blessings

Each individual who prayerfully studies the Book of Mormon can also receive a testimony of its divinity.<sup>44</sup> In addition, this book can help with personal problems in a very real way. Do you want to get rid of a bad habit? Do you want to improve relationships in your family? Do you want to increase your spiritual capacity? Read the Book of Mormon! It will bring you closer to the Lord and His loving power.<sup>45</sup> He who fed a multitude with five loaves and two fishes<sup>46</sup>—He who helped the blind to see and the lame to walk<sup>47</sup>—can also bless you! He has promised that those who live by the precepts of this book “shall receive a crown of eternal life.”<sup>48</sup>

The Book of Mormon is true! I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 84:54–55.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 84:57.
3. The Book of Mormon has been organized into 6,607 verses, of which 3,925 refer to Jesus Christ, employing more than 100 titles. Thus, some form of Christ’s name is used on an average of one reference for every 1.7 verses (see Susan Easton Black, *Finding Christ through the Book of Mormon* [1987], 16–18).
4. See 3 Nephi 16:11–12; 29:3; Mormon 5:20; 8:21; 9:37.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:57–58.
6. 1 Nephi 5:11–13; see also “A Brief Explanation about the Book of Mormon.”
7. Words of Mormon 1:5. This explanation was repeated five more times (see Jacob 3:13; Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 5:8; 26:6; Ether 15:33). Jacob, who received the plates from his brother Nephi, provided additional insight, noting that he “should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people,”

but that he was to touch upon sacred or great things “as much as it were possible, for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of our people” (Jacob 1:2, 4).

8. Lchi, father of Nephi and Jacob, was also an eyewitness of the Lord (see 2 Nephi 1:15).
9. See 1 Nephi 8:10–35.
10. See 1 Nephi 11:14–36.
11. See Ether 3:14.
12. See 1 Nephi 19:10.
13. Many others could be listed, such as Enos, Jarom, Amaron, Amaleki, and more.
14. Jacob 4:4.
15. Helaman 8:18.
16. Jaredite and Lehite.
17. Because Isaiah is quoted so extensively, he deserves mention as one of the major contributors to the Book of Mormon. A useful footnote to 2 Nephi 12:2 in the current English edition of the LDS scriptures indicates that some 433 verses of Isaiah—roughly a third of the entire book—are quoted in the Book of Mormon. In the English language edition, more than half (about 233 verses) differ in some detail from their biblical counterpart, “while about 200 verses have the same wording as KJV.” One scholar of Isaiah documents that no less than 391 of the verses refer to the attributes, appearance, majesty, and mission of Jesus Christ (see Monte S. Nyman, “Great Are the Words of Isaiah” [1980], 7, 283–87).  
Elder Jeffrey R. Holland (*Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* [1997], 78–94) has classified the teachings of Isaiah as recorded in the Book of Mormon into five topical categories:  
(1) Christ’s Birth and Mortal Ministry (see 1 Nephi 11:13, 15, 18, 20; 2 Nephi 17:14–15; Alma 7:10).  
(2) Christ Visits the Spirits in Prison (see 1 Nephi 21:6–9).  
(3) Christ Shows Kindness to and Preserves Zion in the Last Days (see 1 Nephi 21:13–16; 2 Nephi 7:1–2; 3 Nephi 22:8—quoting from Isaiah 54:8).  
(4) The Millennial Christ (see 2 Nephi 12:2–5; 21:1–12; 30:9).  
(5) The Crucifixion and Atonement (see Mosiah 14:1–12).
18. Jacob 4:11–12.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 27:5; see also Doctrine and Covenants 20:9; Joseph Smith—History 1:34.
20. 3 Nephi 27:13. The full text of His sermon also includes *ordinances* and *covenants* as integral aspects of the gospel.
21. 3 Nephi 27:14.
22. Not all divine doctrines are included in the Book of Mormon. Temple work as we know it today has been revealed as part of the restoration of all things and is taught in the Doctrine and Covenants and in later revelations to living prophets.
23. See Romans 5:11.
24. *Atonement*: 28 times; *atone*, *atoning*, or *atoned*: 8 times; plus *atoneth*: 3 times; equals 39 times. Within several verses, *atonement* appears more than once (see 2 Nephi 9:7; Alma 34:9; 42:23).
25. The word *resurrection* appears 41 times in the King James Version of the Bible; it appears 81 times in the Book of Mormon (see also *Christ and the New Covenant*, 238).
26. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:57.
27. See 3 Nephi 21:1; 29:chapter heading.
28. *Covenant* comes from the Latin *convenire*, which means “to come with” or “to agree.”
29. *Testament* comes from the Latin *testis*, which means “witness.” *Testament* is also related to the Latin roots *tres* and *stare*, which mean “three” and “to stand.”
30. *Witness* comes from the Old English *wit*, which means “knowledge.” A witness is defined as one who has special knowledge.
31. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 9–10.
32. *History of the Church*, 4:461.
33. See Doctrine and Covenants 17:6.

34. 3 Nephi 9:15–16, 18, 20–22.
35. See 3 Nephi 11:14.
36. See 3 Nephi 15:9.
37. 2 Nephi 26:27.
38. 2 Nephi 26:33.
39. See *Christ and the New Covenant*, 349.
40. From 7 April to 30 June 1829. After subtracting time spent for other contemporary tasks, working time available was closer to 55 days. The present edition of the Book of Mormon contains 531 pages. Assuming 55 days for the work of translation, the rate is calculated as 9.7 present-day pages per day.
41. See John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, “Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. [1992], 1:211.
42. See “A Chronology of Church History,” Appendix 2, in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1652, date of 11 June 1829.
43. Sections 6–9 and 11–18.
44. See Moroni 10:4–5.
45. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that “a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its [the Book of Mormon’s] precepts, than by any other book” (*History of the Church*, 4:461).
46. See Matthew 14:19–20; Mark 6:41–42; Luke 9:16–17.
47. See Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:21–22.
48. Doctrine and Covenants 20:14.

## President Gordon B. Hinckley

### The Savior’s place in a new millennium

What an exciting and wonderful thing it is to step across the threshold of the centuries. This will be our experience before long. Even more exciting is our opportunity to bridge the millennium that is drawing to a close and greet a new thousand years. I am overwhelmed with a grand and solemn sense of history as I contemplate this period.

It is only two millennia since the Savior walked the earth. It is a wonderful acknowledgment of His place in history that the calendar now in use throughout most of the world places His birth as the meridian of time. All that went before is reckoned back from that date. All that has happened since is measured forward from that date.

Every time anyone uses a date, he knowingly or unknowingly acknowledges the coming to earth of the Son of God. His birth, as it has been popularly determined, marks the center point of the

ages, the meridian of time recognized throughout the earth. As we use these dates we pay no attention to it. But if we pause to think, we must recognize that He is the one sublime figure in all the history of the world on which our measurement of time is based.

### Prophecies of the Savior’s birth

In the centuries before He came to earth there was prophecy of His coming. Isaiah declared, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

King Benjamin, more than a century before the Savior’s birth, said this to his people:

“For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and