

# The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like without It?

## October 2017 General Conference

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In a most miraculous and singular way, the Book of Mormon teaches us of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

In 1986, I was invited to give a special lecture at a university in Accra, Ghana. There I met a number of dignitaries, including an African tribal king. As we visited prior to the lecture, the king spoke to me only through his linguist, who then translated for me. I responded to the linguist, and the linguist then translated my responses to the king.

After my lecture, the king made his way directly to me, but this time without his linguist. To my surprise, he spoke in perfect English—the Queen’s English, I might add!

The king seemed puzzled. “Just who are you?” he asked.

I replied, “I am an ordained Apostle of Jesus Christ.”

The king asked, “What can you teach me about Jesus Christ?”

I responded with a question: “May I ask what you already know about Him?”

The king’s response revealed he was a serious student of the Bible and one who loved the Lord.

I then asked if he knew about the ministry of Jesus Christ to the people of ancient America.

As I expected, he did not.

I explained that after the Savior’s Crucifixion and Resurrection, He came to the people of ancient America, where He taught His gospel. He organized His Church and asked His disciples to keep a record of His ministry among them.

“That record,” I continued, “is what we know as the Book of Mormon. It is another testament of Jesus Christ. It is a companion scripture to the Holy Bible.”

At this point, the king became *very* interested. I turned to the mission president accompanying me and asked if he had an extra copy of the Book of Mormon with him. He pulled one from his briefcase.

I opened it to 3 Nephi chapter 11, and together the king and I read the Savior's sermon to the Nephites. I then presented the copy of the Book of Mormon to him. His response lodged in my mind and heart forever: "You could have given me diamonds or rubies, but nothing is more precious to me than this additional knowledge about the Lord Jesus Christ."

After experiencing the power of the Savior's words in 3 Nephi, the king proclaimed, "If I am converted and join the Church, I will bring my whole tribe with me."

"Oh, King," I said, "it doesn't work that way. Conversion is an individual matter. The Savior ministered to the Nephites one by one. Each individual receives a witness and testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup>

My brothers and sisters, how precious *is* the Book of Mormon to you? If you were offered diamonds or rubies *or* the Book of Mormon, which would you choose? Honestly, which *is* of greater worth to you?

Remember in the Sunday morning session of the April 2017 general conference, President Thomas S. Monson pleaded with "each of us to prayerfully study and ponder the Book of Mormon each day."<sup>2</sup> Many have responded to our prophet's plea.

Let me say that neither I nor eight-year-old Riley knew anyone was taking our pictures. Notice that Riley is reading his Book of Mormon with the help of an "I Am a Child of God" bookmark.

Something powerful happens when a child of God seeks to know more about Him and His Beloved Son. Nowhere are those truths taught more clearly and powerfully than in the Book of Mormon.

Since President Monson's challenge six months ago, I have tried to follow his counsel. Among other things, I've made lists of what the Book of Mormon *is*, what it *affirms*, what it *refutes*, what it *fulfills*, what it *clarifies*, and what it *reveals*. Looking at the Book of Mormon through these lenses has been an insightful and inspiring exercise! I recommend it to each of you.

During these six months, I have invited various groups—including my Brethren in the Quorum of the Twelve, missionaries in Chile, and mission presidents and their wives gathered in Argentina—to consider three related questions that I urge you to think about today:

First, what would your life be like *without* the Book of Mormon? Second, what would you *not know*? And third, what would you *not have*?

Enthusiastic answers from these groups came straight from their hearts. Here are just a few of their comments:

"Without the Book of Mormon, I would be confused about the conflicting teachings and opinions about so *many* things. I would be just like I was before I found the

Church, when I was searching for knowledge, faith, and hope.”

Another said: “I would not know about the role the Holy Ghost can play in my life.”

Another: “I would not clearly understand my purpose here on earth!”

Another respondent said: “I would not know that there is continuing progress after this life. Because of the Book of Mormon, I know that there really is life after death. That is the ultimate goal for which we are working.”

This last comment made me reflect on my life decades ago as a young surgical resident. One of the sobering responsibilities a surgeon bears, on occasion, is to inform the family when a loved one passes away. In one hospital where I worked, a special room was built with padded walls where family members could receive such news. There, some people manifested their grief by banging their heads against those padded walls. How I longed to teach those individuals that death, though difficult for surviving loved ones, is a necessary part of our immortal existence. Death allows us to progress to the next world.<sup>3</sup>

Another respondent to my question said: “I did not have a life until I read the Book of Mormon. Even though I had prayed and gone to my church all my life, the Book of Mormon helped me to really communicate with Heavenly Father for the first time.”

Another said: “Without the Book of Mormon, I wouldn’t understand that the Savior not only suffered for my sins, but He can heal my pains and sorrows.”<sup>4</sup>

And yet another: “I would not know that we have prophets to lead us.”

Immersing ourselves regularly in the truths of the Book of Mormon can be a life-changing experience. One of our missionary granddaughters, Sister Olivia Nelson, promised an investigator that if he would read the Book of Mormon daily, his test scores on his university exams would improve. He did, and they did.

My dear brothers and sisters, I testify that the Book of Mormon is truly the word of God. It contains the answers to life’s most compelling questions. It teaches the doctrine of Christ.<sup>5</sup> It expands and clarifies many of the “plain and precious”<sup>6</sup> truths that were lost through centuries of time and numerous translations of the Bible.

The Book of Mormon provides the fullest and most authoritative understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ to be found anywhere. It teaches what it really means to be born again. From the Book of Mormon we learn about the gathering of scattered Israel. We know why we are here on earth. These and other truths are more powerfully and persuasively taught in the Book of Mormon than in any other book. The full power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is contained in the Book of Mormon. Period.

The Book of Mormon both illuminates the teachings of the Master and exposes the tactics of the adversary.<sup>7</sup> The Book of Mormon teaches true doctrine to dispel false religious traditions—such as the erroneous practice of performing infant baptisms.<sup>8</sup>

The Book of Mormon gives purpose to life by urging us to ponder the potential of eternal life and “never-ending happiness.”<sup>9</sup> The Book of Mormon shatters the false beliefs that happiness can be found in wickedness<sup>10</sup> and that individual goodness is all that is required to return to the presence of God.<sup>11</sup> It abolishes forever the false concepts that revelation ended with the Bible and that the heavens are sealed today.

When I think of the Book of Mormon, I think of the word *power*. The truths of the Book of Mormon have the *power* to heal, comfort, restore, succor, strengthen, console, and cheer our souls.

My dear brothers and sisters, I promise that as you prayerfully study the Book of Mormon *every day*, you will make better decisions—*every day*. I promise that as you ponder what you study, the windows of heaven will open, and you will receive answers to your own questions and direction for your own life. I promise that as you daily immerse yourself in the Book of Mormon, you can be immunized against the evils of the day, even the gripping plague of pornography and other mind-numbing addictions.

Whenever I hear anyone, including myself, say, “I know the Book of Mormon is true,” I want to exclaim, “That’s nice, but it is not enough!” We need to feel, deep in “the inmost part” of our hearts,<sup>12</sup> that the Book of Mormon *is* unequivocally the word of God. We must feel it so deeply that we would never want to live even one day without it. I might paraphrase President Brigham Young in saying, “I wish I had the voice of seven thunders to wake up the people”<sup>13</sup> to the truth and power of the Book of Mormon.

We need to be like this young missionary serving in Europe who felt so deeply about the truth of the Book of Mormon that he literally ran with a copy of this sacred record to the man in a park he and his companion had just found.

I testify that Joseph Smith was and is *the* prophet of this last dispensation. It was he who, through the gift and power of God, translated this holy book. This is *the* book that will help to prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord.

I testify that Jesus Christ is the literal and living Son of our living God. He is our Savior, our Redeemer, our great Exemplar, and our Advocate with the Father. He was the promised Messiah, the mortal Messiah, and will be the millennial Messiah. I testify with my whole soul that in a most miraculous and singular way, the Book of Mormon teaches us of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

I know that President Thomas S. Monson is the prophet of God on the earth today. I love him and sustain him with all of my heart. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## President Nelson’s Book of Mormon Lists

### **The Book of Mormon *is*:**

- Another testament of Jesus Christ. Its major writers—Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, Moroni—and its translator, Joseph Smith, were *all* eyewitnesses of the Lord.
- A record of His ministry to people who lived in ancient America.
- True, as attested by the Lord Himself.

**The Book of Mormon *affirms*:**

- The individual identity of Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ.
- The necessity of the Fall of Adam and the wisdom of Eve, that men might have joy.

**The Book of Mormon *refutes* notions that:**

- Revelation ended with the Bible.
- Infants need to be baptized.
- Happiness can be found in wickedness.
- Individual goodness is adequate for exaltation (ordinances and covenants are needed).
- The Fall of Adam tainted mankind with “original sin.”

**The Book of Mormon *fulfills biblical prophecies* that:**

- “Other sheep” shall hear His voice.
- God will do “a marvelous work and a wonder,” speaking “out of the dust.”
- The “stick of Judah” and the “stick of Joseph” will become one.
- Scattered Israel will be gathered “in the latter days” and how that will be done.
- The land of inheritance for the lineage of Joseph is the Western Hemisphere.

**The Book of Mormon *clarifies* understanding about:**

- Our premortal existence.
- Death. It is a necessary component of God’s great plan of happiness.
- Postmortal existence, which begins in paradise.
- How the resurrection of the body, reunited with its spirit, becomes an immortal soul.

- How our judgment by the Lord will be according to our deeds and the desires of our hearts.
- How ordinances are properly performed: for example, baptism, sacrament, conferring the Holy Ghost.
- The Atonement of Jesus Christ.
- The Resurrection.
- The important role of angels.
- The eternal nature of priesthood.
- How human behavior is influenced more by the power of the word than the power of the sword.

**The Book of Mormon *reveals information previously unknown:***

- Baptisms were performed before Jesus Christ was born.
- Temples were built and used by people in ancient America.
- Joseph, 11th son of Israel, foresaw the prophetic role of Joseph Smith.
- Nephi (in 600–592 BC) foresaw the discovery and colonizing of America.
- Plain and precious parts of the Bible have been lost.
- The Light of Christ is given to each person.
- The importance of individual agency and the need for opposition in all things.
- Warnings about “secret combinations.”

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