

The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

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The historical facts and the special witnesses of the Book of Mormon testify that its coming forth was indeed miraculous.

While meeting with the elders of the Church on one occasion, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared: “Take away the Book of Mormon, and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none.”¹ My dear brothers and sisters, following the First Vision, the miraculous coming forth of the Book of Mormon is the second fundamental milestone of the unfolding Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this dispensation. The Book of Mormon testifies of God’s love for His children, of the Lord Jesus Christ’s selfless and divine atoning sacrifice, and of His crowning ministry among the Nephites soon after His Resurrection.² It also testifies that the remnant of the house of Israel is to become one through His latter-day work and that they are not cast off forever.³

As we study the coming forth of this holy book of scripture in these latter days, we come to realize that the entire undertaking was miraculous—from the Prophet Joseph receiving the gold plates from a holy angel to its translation “by the gift and power of God,”⁴ its preservation, and its publication by the hand of the Lord.

The coming forth of the Book of Mormon began long before Joseph Smith received the gold plates from the hands of the angel Moroni. Prophets of old prophesied about this sacred book’s advent in our day.⁵ Isaiah spoke of a sealed book, that when it would appear people would be contending over God’s word. This circumstance would provide the context wherein God could perform His “marvellous work and a wonder,” causing “the wisdom of their wise men [to] perish, and the understanding of their prudent men [to] be hid,” while the meek would “increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.”⁶ Ezekiel spoke about the stick of Judah (the Bible) and the stick of Ephraim (the Book of Mormon) being brought together as one. Both Ezekiel (in the Old Testament) and Lehi (in the Book of Mormon) indicate that they shall “grow together” to confound false doctrine, establish peace, and bring us to a knowledge of the covenants.⁷

In the evening of September 21, 1823, three and a half years after experiencing the First Vision, Joseph was visited three times by the angel Moroni, the last prophet of the Nephites in ancient America, as a result of his sincere prayers. During their visits that lasted through the night, Moroni told Joseph that God had a marvelous work for him to accomplish—the translation and publication to the world of the inspired words of ancient prophets of the American continent.⁸ The next day, Joseph went to the place, not far from his home, where the plates were buried by

Moroni at the end of his life, centuries earlier. There Joseph saw Moroni again, who instructed him to prepare himself to receive the plates in the future.

Over the next four years, on September 22 of each year, Joseph received additional instructions from Moroni regarding the knowledge about how the Lord's kingdom should be governed in the latter days. Joseph's preparation also included visits from the angels of God, thus unfolding the majesty and glory of the events that would take place in this dispensation.⁹

His marriage to Emma Hale in 1827 was part of that preparation. She played an important role in helping the Prophet throughout his life and ministry. In fact, in September 1827, Emma accompanied Joseph to the hill where the plates were hidden, and she waited for him as the angel Moroni delivered the record into Joseph's hands. Joseph received the promise that the plates would be preserved if he would devote all his efforts to keep them safe until they should be returned into the hands of Moroni.¹⁰

My dear fellow companions in the gospel, many of today's discoveries from ancient times occur during an archaeological excavation or even by accident during a construction project. Joseph Smith, however, was directed to the plates by an angel. That outcome by itself was a miracle.

The translation process of the Book of Mormon was also a miracle. This sacred ancient record was not "translated" in the traditional way that scholars would translate ancient texts by learning an ancient language. We ought to look at the process more like a "revelation" with the aid of physical instruments provided by the Lord, as opposed to a "translation" by one with knowledge of languages. Joseph Smith declared that through God's power he "translated the Book of Mormon from [hieroglyphs], the knowledge of which was lost to the world, in which wonderful event [he] stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries, with a new revelation."¹¹ The Lord's help in the translation of the plates—or revelation, so to speak—is also evident when considering the miraculously short time Joseph Smith took to translate them.¹²

Joseph's scribes testified of the power of God that was manifested while working on the translation of the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery once said: "These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated ... 'The Book of Mormon.'"¹³

Historical sources reveal that from the moment Joseph obtained the plates in 1827, attempts were made to steal them from him. He noted that "the most strenuous exertions were used to get [the plates] from [him]" and that "every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose."¹⁴ Eventually Joseph and Emma were forced to move from Manchester, New York, to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to find a safe place to proceed with the work of translation, away from mobs and individuals who wanted to steal the plates.¹⁵ As one historian notes:

“Thus ended the first difficult phase of Joseph’s guardianship over the plates. ... Yet the record was safe, and in his struggles to preserve them Joseph no doubt had learned much about the ways of God and man that would serve him well in the time to come.”¹⁶

While translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph learned that the Lord would choose witnesses to see the plates.¹⁷ This is part of what the Lord Himself established when He said, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”¹⁸ Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, who were some of Joseph’s initial companions in the establishment of God’s marvelous work in this dispensation, were the first witnesses called to bear a special testimony of the Book of Mormon to the world. They testified that an angel, who came from the presence of the Lord, showed them the ancient record and that they saw the characters engraved in the plates. They also testified that they heard the voice of God from heaven declaring that the ancient record was translated by the gift and power of God. Then they were commanded to testify of it to the entire world.¹⁹

The Lord miraculously called another eight witnesses to see the gold plates for themselves and to be special witnesses of the truth and divinity of the Book of Mormon to the world. They testified that they saw and carefully examined the plates and their engraved characters. Even amid the adversities, persecutions, all kinds of difficulties, and even some of them later faltering in their faith, these eleven chosen Book of Mormon witnesses never denied their testimonies that they had seen the plates. Joseph Smith was not alone anymore with the knowledge of Moroni’s visits and the gold plates.

Lucy Mack Smith recorded that her son arrived home overcome with joy after the witnesses were shown the plates. Joseph explained to his parents, “I feel as if I was relieved of a burden which was almost too heavy for me to bear, and it rejoices my soul, that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.”²⁰

Joseph Smith faced much opposition in printing the Book of Mormon as its translation came to an end. He was able to convince a printer named Egbert B. Grandin in Palmyra, New York, to print it only after Martin Harris, in an act of great faith and sacrifice, mortgaged his farm as collateral for the printing costs. Due in part to the continuing opposition after the publication of the Book of Mormon, Martin Harris faithfully sold 151 acres (0.6 km²) of his farm to pay off the publication costs. Through a revelation given to Joseph Smith, the Lord instructed Martin Harris to not covet his property and pay the printing cost for the book that “contains the truth and the word of God.”²¹ In March 1830 the first 5,000 copies of the Book of Mormon were published, and today more than 180 million copies have been printed in over a hundred languages.

The historical facts and the special witnesses of the Book of Mormon testify that its coming forth was indeed miraculous. Nevertheless, the power of this book is not based only in its magnificent history but on its powerful, unparalleled message that has changed countless lives—including mine!

I read the entire Book of Mormon for the first time when I was a young seminary student. As recommended by my teachers, I started reading it beginning with its introduction pages. The promise contained in the first pages of the Book of Mormon still echoes in my mind: “Ponder in [your] hearts ... , and then ... ask God [in faith] ... in the name of Christ if the book is true. Those who pursue this course ... will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost.”²²

With that promise in mind, earnestly seeking to know more about the truth of it, and in a spirit of prayer, I studied the Book of Mormon, little by little, as I completed the weekly assigned seminary lessons. I remember, like it was yesterday, that a warm feeling gradually began swelling in my soul and filling my heart, enlightening my understanding, and becoming more and more delightful, as described by Alma in his preaching the word of God to his people.²⁴ That feeling eventually turned into knowledge that took root in my heart and became the foundation of my testimony of the significant events and teachings found in this sacred book.

Through these and other priceless personal experiences, the Book of Mormon indeed became the keystone that sustains my faith in Jesus Christ and my testimony of the doctrine of His gospel. It became one of the pillars that testifies to me of Christ’s divine atoning sacrifice. It became a shield throughout my life against the adversary’s attempts to weaken my faith and instill disbelief in my mind and gives me courage to boldly declare my testimony of the Savior to the world.

My dear friends, my testimony of the Book of Mormon came line upon line²³ as a miracle to my heart. To this day, this testimony continues to grow as I continuously search, with a sincere heart, to more fully understand the word of God as contained in this extraordinary book of scripture.

To all who hear my voice today, I invite you to be part of the marvelous coming forth of the Book of Mormon in your own life. I promise you that as you prayerfully and consistently study its words, you can partake of its promises and rich blessings in your life. I reaffirm once more the promise that echoes through its pages: that if you “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 mercifully “will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.”²⁵ I can assure you that He will give you the answer in a very personal way, as He has done for me and many others around the world. Your experience will be as glorious and sacred for you as Joseph Smith’s experiences were for him, as well as for the first witnesses and for all who have sought to receive a witness of the integrity and trustworthiness of this sacred book.

I bear my witness that the Book of Mormon is indeed the word of God. I testify that this sacred record “puts forth the doctrines of the gospel, outlines the plan of salvation, and tells men what they must do to gain peace in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come.”²⁶ I testify that the Book of Mormon is God’s instrument to bring about the gathering of Israel in our day and to help people come to know His Son, Jesus Christ. I testify that God lives and loves us and His

Son, Jesus Christ, is the Savior of the world, the chief cornerstone of our religion. I say these things in the sacred name of our Redeemer, our Master, and our Lord, even Jesus Christ, amen.