

2016 Seminar for New Mission Presidents

The Book of Mormon: A Miraculous Miracle

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I would like to invite my wife, Wendy, to stand a moment while we express our heartfelt congratulations on your high and holy callings. We honor you, we love you, and we pray for you every day. Thank you, Wendy.

I would like to offer a message that may be of real worth to you and your missionaries. Therefore, I have chosen to speak to you about the Book of Mormon. You know that is the subject of chapter 5 of *Preach My Gospel*. Teach it well to your missionaries. For my message today, I have chosen the title “The Book of Mormon: A Miraculous Miracle.”

The Book of Mormon is truly unique. To illustrate, I quote from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and his wife, Pat. She reported that many years ago while Jeff was working on his PhD at Yale University, he got to know one of the senior reference librarians who provided him valuable help in researching his dissertation.

One day, Jeff said, “Ilene, I need to know how many books we have in either the Sterling Memorial or Beinecke Rare Book Libraries that claim to have been delivered by an angel.”

The librarian gave him a peculiar look and said, “I don’t know of any *books* that have been delivered by angels.”

Brother Holland replied, “Well, just run a check for me, would you? It may take a little doing, but I really would like to know. It would help me with some religious writing I am doing.” (In recounting this experience, Sister Holland noted that Yale University at that time had the fourth-largest library in the nation, with nearly 9 million volumes in its collection.)

Ultimately, Ilene fulfilled this request. She reported to Brother Holland, “I have a book for you. I found one book which, it is claimed, was delivered by an angel.” She held up a paperback copy of the Book of Mormon. “I’m told you can get them for a dollar.

“My word,” she continued. “An angel’s book for a dollar. You would think angels would charge more, but then again, where would they spend it?”¹

An angel did deliver a written text to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The angel Moroni told Joseph that “there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of [the American] continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants;

“Also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted ‘seers’ in

ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.”²

The Book of Mormon is part of a remarkable prophecy recorded by Isaiah, who said, speaking for the Lord: “I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder.”³

The words *marvellous* and *wonder* were both translated from Hebrew terms meaning “extraordinary,” “difficult to understand,” or, as we would say, “miraculous.”⁴ Thus, the phrase “a marvellous work and a wonder” could also be translated as “a miraculous miracle.” The Book of Mormon is indeed “a miraculous miracle.” So are the Restoration of the gospel and the priesthood and the mandate of missionary work to gather scattered Israel in these latter days.

The translation of the Book of Mormon was part of that miracle. A video clip gives insights that I would like to share with you now.

With Oliver Cowdery as principal scribe, Joseph began translating on Tuesday, April 7, 1829.⁵ The task was completed about 85 days later. Of course, not all of their time was spent working on the translation. Time was taken to receive the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods, receive and record 12 revelations that are now sections of the Doctrine and Covenants,⁶ move from one state to another, apply for a copyright, and begin making arrangements for the publication of the Book of Mormon. Conservatively estimated, 65 or fewer working days would have been left for the work of translation. The 1830 edition contained 588 pages.⁷ Thus, Joseph *translated* at the rate of about *nine pages per day!* Consider this when you schedule your own reading of the Book of Mormon.

Oliver Cowdery testified a few years later: “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 history or record called ‘The Book of Mormon.’”⁸

How the translation was accomplished is not fully known because the Prophet deliberately said little about that sacred task. Yet we do have a few precious insights. God prepared sacred objects to assist Joseph with the translation. Interpreters were buried with the golden plates. Joseph used the interpreters, and other seer stones that the Lord provided, in the translation process. Such instruments were used by prophets throughout scriptural history to translate texts and receive divine communications.⁹

David Whitmer wrote: “Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus, the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.”¹⁰ That was from David Whitmer.

An affidavit of his sister, Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery, is also relevant. She was 14 years old when Joseph and Oliver moved to the Whitmers’ home in Fayette to finish the translation. Later she wrote: “Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. He would place the director in his hat, and then place his face in his hat, so as to exclude the light, and then [read the words] as they appeared before him.”¹¹

Emma Smith, who acted as an earlier scribe for Joseph, gave this account: “When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of

it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out, and while I was writing them, if I made a mistake in spelling, he would stop me and correct my spelling, although it was impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time. Even the word *Sarah* he could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him.

“When he stopped for any purpose at any time he would, when he commenced again, begin where he left off without any hesitation.”¹²

On another occasion, Emma recalled: “Joseph Smith . . . could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon. And, though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, . . . it is marvelous to me, ‘a marvel and a wonder.’”¹³

Of course, the value of the Book of Mormon lies not in the miracle of its translation, miraculous as it was. The great worth of the Book of Mormon is that it is another testament of Jesus Christ. Its four major authors—Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni—were all eyewitnesses of the Lord, as was Joseph, the inspired translator of that book.

The Book of Mormon is the great clarifier of doctrine. It refutes many myths. At the same time, it affirms truths previously obscured and reveals many glorious facts of the doctrine of Christ that were lost or previously unknown.

Let us mention a few myths the book refutes.

The Book of Mormon refutes the concept of **predestination**. It refutes the idea of the **creation ex nihilo**—“out of nothing.” It refutes the false notion of **original sin**. It refutes the adequacy of individual goodness alone without **exalting ordinances**. It refutes the practice of **infant baptism**. It refutes methods of baptism other than that of **immersion by one bearing proper authority**. It refutes the notion **that revelation from God ended with the Bible**.

There are some things the Book of Mormon is not. **It is not a textbook of history**, although some history is found within its pages. **It is not a treatise on ancient American agriculture or politics**. It is **not a record of all former people of the Western Hemisphere, but only of particular groups**.

Resoundingly, the Book of Mormon **affirms the existence of a living and loving Father in Heaven**. It affirms **the nature of our Heavenly Father’s plan of salvation**, happiness, and mercy. It declares, as **another testament, the generation and divinity of Jesus the Christ**. It teaches of His mission and His ministry. The Book of Mormon stands as a **global beacon of eternal truth**. The Lord said: “The **testimony of two nations** is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another. . . . And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.”¹⁴

The Book of Mormon affirms the supreme status of **man’s moral agency** and sets forth **eternal standards of accountability** and responsibility for our choices. It affirms the **reality and inevitability of our impending judgment**, which will be done with a perfect blending of the justice and mercy of God.¹⁵

The Book of Mormon affirms that **the people on the Western Hemisphere were among the “other sheep”** to whom Jesus had earlier referred.¹⁶ And it affirms the **existence of other societies to whom Jesus would minister**—those we know as the lost tribes of Israel.

It affirms the **reality of premortal life**. It reaffirms the **sanctity and the necessity of the sacrament**, as taught in the Bible. It reveals **the state of the soul between death and resurrection**. It reveals the **endless nature of the priesthood of God** and the **foreordination of choice spirits** called and prepared from the foundation of the world for leadership in these latter days. From the Book of Mormon we know that **each of you has been reserved, foreordained, and foredetermined** to come forth at

this particular time to accomplish the mighty work you have been called to do.

The Book of Mormon reveals **what the term *gospel* truly means**. The Lord declared, “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.”¹⁷

The Book of Mormon reveals the important **interrelationships between the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement**. One cannot fully comprehend the Atonement without first understanding the Fall; and the Fall of Adam cannot be fully understood without first understanding the Creation. These three great **doctrinal pillars** sustain each other in God’s eternal plan.

The Book of Mormon reveals that **Joseph, the son of Jacob who was once sold into Egypt, foresaw the Prophet Joseph Smith and his day and noted that there would be many similarities in their lives**.¹⁸ Centuries later, the Prophet Joseph stated, **“I feel like Joseph in Egypt.”**¹⁹

The Book of Mormon reveals that the inheritance of **Joseph, son of Israel, was not forgotten when land was distributed to the tribes of Israel, as promised in the Abrahamic covenant. Joseph’s inheritance was to be a land choice above all others**.²⁰ **It was choice not because of beauty or wealth of natural resources, but choice because it was chosen to be the repository of sacred writings on golden plates from which the Book of Mormon would one day come. It was choice because it would eventually host the world headquarters of the restored Church of Jesus Christ in the latter days. And it was choice because it is a land of liberty for those who worship the Lord and keep His commandments**.²¹

The Book of Mormon reveals that Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary, is literally the Son of God. No book of scripture bears more solemnly the weighty burden of that testimony than does the Book of Mormon. Its pages contain nearly 4,000 references to the Christ, using more than 100 different titles for Him. His holy

name is mentioned on the average of once every 2.8 verses. No wonder this book has been designated “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.”

The Book of Mormon teaches of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. While the word *atone* in any of its forms appears in the King James translation of the New Testament only once,²² in the Book of Mormon *atone* in any of its forms appears 39 times.²³ And if chapter headings were included, the grand total would be 55 times! No wonder this book contains the *fulness* of the gospel. It explains the Atonement of Jesus Christ!

To me, the power of the Book of Mormon is most evident in the mighty change that comes into the lives of those who read it “with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ.”²⁴ Many converts forsake much that they once held dear in order to abide by the precepts of that book. I know that your testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon has brought you to this calling. That conviction will sustain you throughout your challenging days as missionaries of the Lord.

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion. It is the prophesied sign that “the Lord has commenced to gather Israel and fulfill His covenants.”²⁵ It is the instrument by which the promised gathering of Israel will be accomplished.

A few suggestions on how to use it may be helpful. Remember that the Spirit of the Lord and the Book of Mormon are your most powerful resources in conversion.

Encourage investigators to read it from the very beginning, including the title page, the introduction, the testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses, and the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

If investigators aren’t good readers, read aloud with them. Invite member fellowshippers to come to the investigators’ homes and read with them. Make the book relevant to investigators by first learning their

questions of the soul and then sharing verses that answer these questions.

As you teach, use personal examples of how it has blessed your life, and then encourage your missionaries to do the same. Use new digital tools. The Book of Mormon app for smartphones has audio that allows people to listen as they read. It is available in multiple languages.

Study chapter 5 in *Preach My Gospel*. It contains a wealth of suggestions on how to use the Book of Mormon. Pay special attention to the end of chapter 5: “Ideas for Study and Application.”

The Book of Mormon is the only book of which I am aware that the Lord Jesus Christ has personally testified to be true. In the form of an oath, the Lord said—referring to the Prophet Joseph Smith’s work—“He has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true.”²⁶

Solemnly, I add my witness. The Book of Mormon is true! It is irrefutable! It will be your most effective instrument in bringing souls unto Jesus the Christ. I leave my love and blessing with each of you, along with my fervent prayer for your safety and success on your mission, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Jeffrey R. and Patricia Holland, “Unless You’re a Mormon” (Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 9, 1986), 5–6, speeches.byu.edu. It should be acknowledged that authors of other books may have had angelic inspiration, but no metallic plates or revealed texts were provided as occurred with the Book of Mormon.
2. Joseph Smith—History 1:34–35.
3. Isaiah 29:14.
4. In Isaiah’s prophecy that the Lord’s name one day should be called “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God,” and so on (see Isaiah 9:6), the word *wonderful* is similar in meaning to *wonder* in Isaiah 29:14. Both come from the Hebrew *pele*.
5. From April to June 1828, Joseph had translated 116 pages that Martin Harris later lost. For a season, Joseph’s ability to translate was suspended (see D&C 10:1–2). The process of translation was resumed on Tuesday, April 7, 1829.
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 6–12; 14–18.
- 7.

8. See John W. Welch, “How Long Did It Take Joseph Smith to Translate the Book of Mormon?” *Ensign*, Jan. 1988, 46–47. It is estimated that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon numbered 607 pages, primarily written in Oliver Cowdery’s hand.
9. Joseph Smith—History 1:71, note.
10. See address delivered by President Russell M. Nelson at the dedication of the Priesthood Restoration Site in northeastern Pennsylvania, Sept. 19, 2015 (available at mormonnewsroom.org/article/priesthood-restoration-site-dedication-transcript). For information on seer stones used in the translation of the Book of Mormon, see Richard E. Turley Jr., Robin S. Jensen, and Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Joseph the Seer,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2015, 48–55.
11. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (1887), 12.
12. Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery, in John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (2005), 165.
13. Emma Smith, in Edmund C. Briggs, “A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856,” *Journal of History*, vol. 9, no. 4 (Oct. 1916), 454.
14. Emma Smith, in “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, Oct. 1, 1879, 290.
14. 2 Nephi 29:8.
15. See Alma 12:15. The Book of Mormon reveals that the keeper of the gate at the Judgment will be Jesus, the Holy One of Israel. There each one of us will stand before Him to be judged prior to the time of our resurrection (see 2 Nephi 9:41–46).
16. See John 10:16; see also 3 Nephi 15:17, 21.
17. 3 Nephi 27:13.
18. See 2 Nephi 3:6–21.
19. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. (2002), 449; spelling standardized.
20. See Ether 13:2, 8.
21. See 1 Nephi 2:20.
22. See Romans 5:11.
23. Atonement: 28; atone: 5; atoning: 3; atoneth: 3.
24. Moroni 10:4.
25. 3 Nephi 29, chapter heading.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 17:6.

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/1993/07/a-treasured-testament?lang=eng>

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