

Gospel Doctrine Lesson 1: “The Keystone of Our Religion”

LESSON GOAL: To help us understand how the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion and how abiding by its precepts helps us draw nearer to God.

1. The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion. (Our witness of Christ, doctrine, testimony—Benson)

Jeffrey R. Holland: “Joseph Smith once said that **the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion**. Why is the Book of Mormon the keystone of our religion? What is the Book of Mormon? Whatever else it is, **it is revelation**. In fact, **it is a revelation about revelation**. It is the basic document by which we would begin to testify to the world, with a copy in our hands, that **the heavens are opened and that God lives and that He speaks and that Jesus is the Christ. That is a basic message of salvation**. And the process by which that message comes is revelation. And Joseph Smith taught that that is the characteristic of this Church, a characteristic by which it will always be known and recognized.” (BYU Devotional, 26 September 1976)

A BRIEF EXPLANATION ABOUT THE BOOK OF MORMON

1) What portions of the Book of Mormon did Mormon write? Mormon abridged the large plates of Nephi from the Book of Mosiah to his own history in the Book of Mormon. Therefore, he is responsible for pages 143 – 481, representing a total of 338 pages out of 531, or just over 3/5 of the Book of Mormon.

2) What portions were abridged and which were not?

Small Plates of Nephi	1 Nephi 2 Nephi Jacob Enos Jarom Omni	These six books represent unabridged records made on the small plates of Nephi by the prophets whose names are listed.
	Words of Mormon	This book represents Mormon's insert, signifying the transition between the unabridged small plates and his abridgement of the large plates of Nephi. (See Words of Mormon 1:3-5)
Plates of Mormon	Mosiah Alma Helaman 3 Nephi 4 Nephi Mormon (Ch. 1-7)	These six books represent Mormon's abridgement of the large plates of Nephi and his own unabridged record.
	Mormon (Ch. 8-9) Ether Moroni	This portion represents Moroni's work to finish the record. The Book of Ether is abridged by him. (See Mormon 8:1)

2. Many witnesses have testified of the Book of Mormon.

Emma Smith, shortly before her death, questioned by her son:

Q: Are you sure that he had the plates at the time you were writing for him?

A: The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen tablecloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.

Q: Could not father have dictated the Book of Mormon to you or Oliver Cowdry after having first written it, or having first read it out of some book?

A: Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictate a book like the Book of Mormon. And, though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired and was present during the translation of the plates, . . . it is marvelous to me, “a marvelous work and a wonder,” as much so as to anyone else.” (“Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *The Saints' Herald* 26 (Oct. 1879): 289-90)

There were at least three women who were also witnesses of the plates themselves or other ancient objects found at the hill Cumorah: Joseph showed **his mother** the breastplate and the Urim and Thummim, as mentioned in her original history, (Smith, Joseph Smith, 111; 1853 ed., 101, 107) **Emma Smith**, the prophet's wife, felt the pliable leaves through a cloth (Saints' Herald, 26:289-90); and **Mary Whitmer** was shown the plates as a reward for her willing service in having Joseph, Emma, and Oliver stay at the Whitmer home during the last few weeks of the translation (Jenson, 621)

Bruce R. McConkie: "Whenever the Lord has established a dispensation by revealing his gospel and by conferring priesthood and keys upon men, he has acted in accordance with **the law of witnesses** which he himself ordained. This law is: **'In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.'** (2 Cor. 13:1; Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:15-16; John 8:12-29.) **Never does one man stand alone** in establishing a new dispensation of revealed truth, or in carrying the burden of such a message and warning to the world. In every dispensation, from Adam to the present, two or more witnesses have always joined their testimonies, thus leaving their hearts without excuse in the day of judgment should the testimony be rejected" (*Mormon Doctrine*, 436).

3. The Book of Mormon was written for our day.

Each of the major writers of the Book of Mormon testified that he wrote for future generations.

Nephi: "The Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, **and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation**" (2 Ne. 25:21).

His brother **Jacob:** "For [Nephi] said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and **hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation**" (Jacob 1:3).

Enos: "Wherefore, I knowing that the Lord God was able to preserve our records, I cried unto him continually, for he had said unto me: Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it. And I had faith, and **I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records**; and he covenanted with me that he would **bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time.**" (Enos 1:15-16)

Jarom: "And as these plates are small, and as these things are written **for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites**, wherefore, it must needs be that I write a little; but I shall not write the things of my prophesying, nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written? **For have not they revealed the plan of salvation?** I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me. (Jarom 1:2)

Mormon: "Yea, **I speak unto you, ye remnant of the house of Israel**" (Mormon 7:1)

Moroni: "Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you. **Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not.** But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing" (Mormon 8:34-35).

4. The Book of Mormon can bring us nearer to God.

President Ezra T. Benson: "If they saw our day and chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? **We should constantly ask ourselves, "Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?"** (CR, October 1986, 6).

These are some of the lessons President Benson mentioned that we can learn from the Book of Mormon:

- a pattern for preparing for the Second Coming and learning of Christ
- why some were destroyed in the terrible judgments that preceded Christ's coming
- what brought others to stand at the temple and thrust their hands into the wounds of His hands and feet.
- how disciples of Christ live in times of war
- see the evils of secret combinations portrayed in graphic and chilling reality.
- find lessons for dealing with persecution and apostasy
- how to do missionary work
- the dangers of materialism and setting our hearts on the things of the world

President Henry B. Eyring: "The Book of Mormon is the most powerful written testimony we have that Jesus is the Christ. What did Nephi say was the basis for receiving the Holy Ghost? Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. **Will reading the Book of Mormon now and then ensure faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?** You wouldn't count on it if you read Nephi carefully. He said this "is the gift. . .to all those **who diligently seek him.**" **Diligently surely means regularly.** And it surely means **pondering and praying.** And the praying will surely include the **fervent pleading to know the truth.** Anything less would hardly be diligent. And anything less will not be enough for you and me."

President Ezra T. Benson: "There is a **power in the book** which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a **serious study** of the book. You will find **greater power to resist temptation.** You will find the power to **avoid deception.** You will find the **power to stay on the strait and narrow path.** The scriptures are called "the words of life" (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to **hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance.**" (CR, October 1986, 6)

5. Conclusion

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. In what specific ways has this year's study of the Book of Mormon helped me come unto Christ?
2. Is there really power in this book to change a life? Has it changed mine? How?
3. Even though I know I have imperfections, do I have a sense that I am becoming more filled with light?
4. Do I sense that the Book of Mormon is teaching me how to grow? change? increase in stature?
5. As I read these chapters, how do I feel?
6. Do they invite and entice me to love God, and do good?
7. As I read, do I "remember how merciful the Lord hath been, and ponder it in my heart" and ask God if it is true?
8. Have I gained a testimony that the Book of Mormon is the word of God?
9. What have I learned and felt as I have pondered the messages of the Book of Mormon?
10. In what specific ways has this year's study of the Book of Mormon helped me come unto Christ?

Neal A. Maxwell: The Book of Mormon will be with us 'as long as the earth shall stand.' **We need all that time to explore it, for the book is like a vast mansion** with gardens, towers, courtyards, and wings. There are rooms yet to be entered, with flaming fireplaces waiting to warm us. The rooms glimpsed so far contain further furnishings and rich detail yet to be savored, but decor dating from Eden is evident. There are panels inlaid with incredible insights, particularly insights about the great question (whether the word be in the Son of God). Yet we as **Church members sometimes behave like hurried tourists, scarcely venturing beyond the entry hall.**" (*Not My Will, but Thine*, 33)

Gordon B. Hinckley: "I would like to urge every man and woman . . . and every boy and girl who is old enough to read to **again read the Book of Mormon during this coming year.** This was written for the convincing of the Jew and the Gentile that Jesus is the Christ. There is nothing we could do of greater importance than to have fortified in our individual lives an **unshakable conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the living Son of the living God. That is the purpose of the coming forth of this remarkable and wonderful book.**" (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley, "Book of Mormon"*)

Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top: "President Benson has referred many times to the **sin of omission** of which many Latter-day Saints are guilty. In D&C 84:54-55, the Lord has declared, "And 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."

Vanity implies lightness, emptiness, lack of substance. The vanity and unbelief consisted of the Saints' trifling with, slighting, treating lightly that which they had received, of **not** holding up before the world the banner or ensign of the Restoration. "And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, **even the Book of Mormon** and the former commandments which I have given them" (D&C 84:56-57).

"Then, **what is the condemnation? It is a loss of spiritual power, a loss of blessings, a loss of perspective about eternal possibilities.** . . . Because we have not immersed and washed ourselves in those living waters which flow from the Book of Mormon, we have not enjoyed the faith like the ancients, which strengthens resolve and provides courage and peace in a time of unrest. . . . President Benson warned, "**Our homes are not as strong unless we are using [the Book of Mormon] to bring our children to Christ. Our families may be corrupted by worldly trends and teachings unless we know how to use the book to expose and combat the falsehoods [in society]**" (*A Witness and a Warning*, 6).

"President Benson also taught, "It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that too. But there is something more. **There is a power in the book, which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book.** You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called 'the words of life' and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. **When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance.** (*A Witness and a Warning*, 10, 21-22). . . . It is not just a book which helps us feel good; it is a heavenly document, which has been given to help us—all those living on earth in the last days—to **BE good.** . . . **Our challenge, therefore, is not just to read and study the Book of Mormon; we must accept and apply its doctrines and philosophy—we must live it.**

"**The Book of Mormon is a gift of God, which we are expected to receive, understand, and experience.** We feel a deep sense of kinship with its writers, particularly **Mormon and Moroni.** We know that they are as concerned now with what is done with their book, if not more so than when they etched their messages onto the gold plates some sixteen centuries ago, We know, by the whisperings of the Holy Ghost to the soul, that **the Almighty expects the Latter-day Saints to read and teach from the Book of Mormon and to devote significant time to the consideration and application of the doctrines and principles it contains.**

"God grant that we might be wise in the day of our probation. **God grant us strength in our sacred care and keeping of this timely and timeless volume. Then, having done all in this regard, we shall rest our souls everlastingly with those who paid such a high price to preserve and bring it forth**" (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Volume 4, 376-77, 380, 382-83, 389-90*).