

Read the Book of Mormon

by
David Frischknecht
Managing Director LDS Curriculum Department

LDS Business College Forum
January 26, 2005

What a wonderful, peaceful refuge this is to be at the devotional at LDS Business College. I visited last week and heard Elder [Shirley] Christensen speak and enjoyed that moment so much. During the week I have thought many times, maybe some of you have too, of Elder Christensen's story about his ancestor in Cache Valley who refused to harvest his sweet peas on Sunday and gave up that cash crop in honor of the Lord's day. He said he would rather feed his sweet peas to his cows than break the Sabbath and harvest them on Sunday. I hope that those kinds of lessons linger with us—that we ponder on the things of the Spirit.

President Benson's Charge

Today I would like to talk about reading the Book of Mormon. On November 5, 1985—that is before some of you were born and some of you were quite small then—President Spencer W. Kimball died. Those who knew him as our prophet felt a great loss. For those who did not live during his ministry, it is difficult to understand the monumental progress he directed. He had received revelations from the Lord to organize the First Quorum of the Seventy, to allow all worthy males to receive the priesthood regardless of race, to print the standard works with new footnotes and study aids cross-referencing all four standard works, and he did so much more. But he had not spoken in general conference for three and a half years. He was ill. He had spoken three and a half years prior, but had only been able to speak one paragraph. So for three and a half years we did not hear the prophet's voice, and in the conference after his death we were looking forward to President Ezra Taft Benson's talk when we again could bask under the voice of a living prophet. What would he say? What would we hear from the mouth of the living prophet?

His address, titled "Cleansing the Inner Vessel," included injunctions to repent, especially from moral transgression, and proscribed the evil of pride in any of its manifestations. But what those who listened to the prophet's voice that day remember most about his first address as President of the Church was that he gave an urgent call to read the Book of Mormon. He said the Church, as in 1832 when section 84 was received, was under condemnation for taking lightly the Book of Mormon:

"Unless we read the Book of Mormon and give heed to its teachings, the Lord has stated in section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants that the whole Church is under condemnation: 'And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all' "

(D&C 84:56). The Lord continues: ‘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, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written’ (D&C 84:57).” President Benson said that “the Book of Mormon has not been, nor is it yet, the center of our personal study, family teaching, preaching, and missionary work. Of this we must repent” (*Ensign*, May 1986, 4). And that was the message from our living prophet in his first address to us.

In the next conference, in October of that same year [1986], President Benson’s opening address was titled, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion.”

Two years later in October 1988 President Benson’s talk was titled “Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon.” He commended the Church for the efforts that they had made in using the Book of Mormon more, but directed that much, much more had to be done.

These commandments from the Lord through His prophet created a great change in the Church and in the lives of Church-member families and individuals throughout the world forever more.

Many of you are the beneficiaries of this great prophetic injunction because you have grown up in families where reading the Book of Mormon was a daily occurrence—a common practice. Or your seminary teachers have encouraged you to read the scriptures daily. Before President Benson so emphatically asked the Church to read the Book of Mormon every day, reading in families and individually was not as common as it is today.

Translations of the Book of Mormon

In the years following President Benson’s injunction to flood the earth with the Book of Mormon, the translation of this book was approved and initiated in many languages. In general conference in April 1990 Elder Boyd K. Packer said this:

“From the beginning of the Church, in 1830, through 1988, the standard works had been translated into thirty-five languages, with seven other languages in process. During the last year, approval has been given and budgets established to translate and publish the standard works in fifty-one additional languages.

“Years of tedious work lie ahead, for each translation must be done as though it alone is important.

“When completed, these translations will extend the number of possible readers of the scriptures in their native tongue by an additional 2,254,000,000 people—half the world population. And other translations will follow” (“The Library of the Lord,” *Ensign*, May 1990, 36–37).

Now, that was 1990, and since that time most of those translations have been completed, published, and are in circulation now.

The coming forth of the Book of Mormon in English was accompanied by many miracles, and the translation of the Book of Mormon into other languages has also been accompanied by the gifts of the Spirit and likewise required the hand of the Lord.

We know that the translation work of Joseph Smith was foretold by ancient prophets. For example, both Isaiah and Nephi prophesied that an educated man would desire to translate the ancient record but that his motives would not be correct. He would desire to do it for the glory of the world and to get gain—financial gain. When confronted with the fact that the book was sealed, he would say that he could not read the book if it were sealed. (See 2 Nephi 27:15-18.) This prophecy was literally fulfilled when Martin Harris showed a sample of the characters from the golden plates to Professor Charles Anthon, and he said he didn't believe in angels and that he could not "read a sealed book" (Joseph Smith—History 1:64).

The Lord chose Joseph Smith, a humble boy, unlearned by the world's standards, to translate the record, emphasizing that Joseph "must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building His kingdom" (Joseph Smith—History 1:46). So those are the two motivations for which Joseph could work.

Similarly today when the General Authorities authorize translation work to begin in a new language, it is almost inevitable that someone steps forward to translate, but for the wrong reasons of getting money or getting glory among his fellowmen. Just as inevitably, it seems that the Lord raises up people, humble and in tune, to accomplish the translation work for the right reasons, with an eye single to the glory of God. (See Mormon 8:15.)

Such was the case with John and Betty Bringhurst. John served a mission many years ago in Guatemala. In addition to learning Spanish, he was assigned to learn Kekchi. That is a Mayan language spoken by hundreds of thousands of people in the remote highlands of Guatemala. The Lord gifted John with an unusual ability in the Kekchi language. After his mission he met Betty, and just two or three days after their wedding they went to Guatemala, where John began working with native speakers of the Kekchi language to translate *Selections from the Book of Mormon*. That is about one third of the book. In those times that is what they would start with first, the *Selections from the Book of Mormon*. They found a place to live in the small village of San Pedro Carcha, which is outside of Coban, which is a long way from Guatemala City and a long way from comforts and conveniences. In addition to the bugs and the dust and other inconveniences that you can imagine, just a few weeks into the project Betty began suffering the symptoms of morning sickness. So there they were in their first weeks of marriage in San Pedro Carcha day after day, hour by hour, week after week, translating the Book of Mormon.

By the time August came, when they returned to school, the translation was finished. It had been reviewed and was ready to enter the publication process. By December of that year, the book was ready to print. They had finished that work faster than anyone else had ever done it. And they had done it without a single cent of remuneration.

John insisted that he not be compensated monetarily. They did the work with an eye single to the glory of God and, as Moroni said anciently, for the “welfare of the ancient and long dispersed covenant people of the Lord” (Mormon 8:15). The Bringhamsts’ sacrifices helped lay a foundation for the Church among the Kekchi people. Kekchi Church members now number more than 10,000. There is one stake and several districts, with another stake pending soon. Many families have been to the temple. Many sons have been on missions.

Back to Joseph Smith’s time. Emma Smith was one of the people who served as scribe for Joseph Smith. Many years after the death of the Prophet, her son, Joseph III, asked if his father might have written the manuscript beforehand or memorized what he dictated. Emma said no. Joseph, at that time of his life, “could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon.” Furthermore, “he had neither manuscript nor book to read from. If he had had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me,” she said.

Then she went on, “I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired, for, when acting as his scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when he returned after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; [and this is interesting] and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible” (as cited by Richard L. Bushman *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 96).

Now consider the testimony of a more recent translator, a sister who translates Tagalog in the Philippines. She says:

“I can no longer count how many times I have been moved to tears upon translating the accounts of people both past and present. There was even a time that I felt I wasn’t actually translating their account but they were dictating to me plainly in my language what transpired before them.

“Truly, the Lord takes every opportunity to teach His children. When He was on the earth, He taught them in the streets, in the mountains, in the marketplace, under a tree, or even in the middle of the sea. In my case, He teaches me in that little corner of my room, on a makeshift table, at dawn, with a pen in hand and a pile of translation materials.

“I know this is the Lord’s work, that Satan is against it. Satan knows I need the Spirit to translate, so he would always attempt to take it away from me. Sometimes it takes a long time to get the Spirit back, yet the Lord is merciful. He knows the desire of my heart”

(*Translation Department Yearbook 2000*, internal document of the Translation Department for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

This sister's mention of the need to work under the influence of the Spirit reminds us of the experience Joseph Smith had as recounted by David Whitmer. He said sometimes Joseph "found he was spiritually blind and could not translate. He told us that his mind dwelt too much on earthly things, and various causes would make him incapable of proceeding with the translation.

"One morning when [Joseph Smith] was getting ready to continue the translation, something went wrong about the house and he was put out about it. Something that Emma, his wife, had done. Oliver and I went upstairs and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went downstairs, out into the orchard, and made supplication to the Lord; [he] was gone about an hour—came back to the house, and asked Emma's forgiveness and then came upstairs where we were and then the translation went on all right" (B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:131, cited by L. Tom Perry, *Ensign*, May 1977, 60).

For the Book of Mormon to be translated correctly by Joseph Smith into English, and by others into other languages, the gifts of the Spirit must be operative.

The basic process for the translator today is to read the passage in English and understand what it says and then think in the language that he or she is translating into, "How should I say this in my language?" And then write it down. So there is this process: read it, understand it, transfer in my mind into the language, and then write it down. The experience of most translators, especially translators who are working with the Book of Mormon—when the Spirit is guiding them—is that the process is so fluid that it can happen almost as fast as they can write or type. It is not uncommon for the translators of the scriptures to have these experiences at least sometime during their scripture translation. This process of reading, understanding, transferring, and typing, when guided by the Spirit, enables them to go just as quickly as they can type or write. And it is not uncommon to find that those portions that are done quickly are the ones that are the least corrected afterwards when the reviewers go through them.

Other miracles attended the translation of the Book of Mormon when it was translated into English. The Joseph Knight family and the Peter Whitmer family were most generous in the assistance they rendered.

Sometime in the latter part of May [1829] Oliver Cowdery wrote to David Whitmer, asking if they [Joseph and Oliver] could go to Fayette to the Whitmer home to continue the translation process. The Whitmers were interested enough in the project that they said OK.

It was an awkward moment when that request came because it was in the spring and they were in the middle of plowing, but the Whitmers recount that they had extra help with

those tasks. David told of what seemed to him miraculous help in completing the work. Plowing that should have taken two days was accomplished in one, for example (Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 102).

Many years later David Whitmer explained to some Church leaders another event:

He was traveling now with Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith from Harmony back to Fayette so they could do the translation, when they had this experience. “A very pleasant, nice-looking old man suddenly appeared by the side of our wagon and saluted us with, ‘good morning, it is very warm,’ at the same time wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation, and, by a sign from Joseph, I invited him to ride if he was going our way. But he said very pleasantly, ‘No, I am going to Cumorah.’ This name was something new to me; I did not know what Cumorah meant. We all gazed at him and at each other, and as I looked around enquiringly of Joseph, the old man instantly disappeared, so that I did not see him again...It was the messenger who had the plates, who had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony” (“The Three Witnesses,” *The Historical Record* 5 (Jan. 1886), 209, as cited by Robert J. Woodford, “Book of Mormon Personalities Known by Joseph Smith,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1978, 14).

Now, Mary Whitmer and Peter Whitmer, the parents of the Whitmer family, had seven children, when Oliver and Joseph arrived in early June 1829. Three were married and living close by; three boys—Peter, Jr, age 19, David, 24, and John, 26—and 14 year-old Elizabeth Ann were still living at home.

So picture this: I don’t know how many have been to the Whitmer home in Fayette. It has been reconstructed. It’s a little place. So there are six members of the Whitmer family, who are not children. They are big people who are already living there, and then others are coming to move in to take over part of the little house to do the translation work.

“Mary Whitmer, Peter Sr.’s wife, experienced her own miracle, according to her son David. The Prophet Joseph and Oliver Cowdery arrived first, then Emma. The severe alteration of household patterns burdened Mary with more work, but David told Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith later of a special confirmation that she received. Mary, on her way to milk the cows, met a special messenger, who said: ‘You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you are tried because of the increase of your toil; it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened’.”

“He showed her the plates and, David related, she never felt to complain at her increased labors after that. John C. Whitmer, Jacob’s son, was twenty-one when his grandmother died, and heard Mary’s story first-hand on ‘several occasions.’ He gave many more details: the ‘kind, friendly tone’ of the messenger’s address; Mary’s ‘unexpressible joy and satisfaction’ on hearing the explanations; her view of the engravings as the leaves of the plates were turned one by one before her eyes. The grandson added: ‘I knew my grandmother to be a good, noble and truthful woman, and I have not the least doubt of

her statement in regard to seeing the plates being strictly true. She was a strong believer in the Book of Mormon until the day of her death” (cited by Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Whitmers: A Family That Nourished the Church,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1979, 36–37).

Unpublished miracles also occur in the translation work of the Church in today.

Roughly 25 years ago Sister Jeri Pace offered to enter translations into a computer in the evenings after her day job as a secretary at BYU. She would work alone in the quiet of the evening, typing Quichua, a language of Ecuador which she did not know, but was spoken by a people whom she had grown to love from the days of her full-time mission. One morning she quietly, but with some emotion, and quite matter of factly, related an experience she had had the night before.

As Sister Pace was typing she felt as if someone were looking over her shoulder, examining with great interest the work she was doing. The feeling was so strong that she actually turned to see who was there. Seeing no one, she continued her work. The feeling that entered her heart and lingered with her was peaceful and not startling, not unnatural, but it was that someone beyond the veil who had a personal involvement in the original text of the translation she was typing was concerned that her work be done correctly. Incidentally, we asked which part she had been typing when she had that experience, and it was the discourse of King Benjamin.

That also is not uncommon for people involved in translation work in today’s languages to feel a great interest on the part of others, on this side of the veil and on the other side of the veil, in the work that is being accomplished.

The Book of Mormon was translated into English by a prophet, seer, and revelator, by the gift and power of God. The translation of this sacred record from English into other languages is attended to by that same Spirit.

Read the Book of Mormon

During the time that I worked in the Translation Department I traveled to many places where the people did not yet have the Book of Mormon in their own language. I often thought and said out loud, “For these people, the plates may just as well still be hidden in the hill. They don’t read English; they don’t have access to the record.” How grateful we can be that “the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to [translate] His word” (Alma 29:8).

The questions I would pose today are, Where is the Book of Mormon in your life? Is it still hidden in the hill? Or have you brought it forth into your own life, into your own heart?

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

“There is no greater issue ever to confront mankind in modern times than this: Is the Book of Mormon the mind and will and voice of God to all men?” (*Millennial Messiah* (1982), 179).

One year ago in the February 2004 *Ensign*, President Hinckley, referring to the Book of Mormon, wrote, “The evidence for its truth, for its validity in a world that is prone to demand evidence, lies not in archaeology or anthropology, though these may be helpful to some. It lies not in word research or historical analysis, though these may be confirmatory. The evidence for its truth and validity lies within the covers of the book itself. The test of its truth lies in reading it. It is a book of God. Reasonable people may sincerely question its origin; but those who have read it prayerfully have come to know by a power beyond their natural senses that it is true, that it contains the word of God, that it outlines saving truths of the everlasting gospel, that it ‘came forth by the gift and power of God ... to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ (Book of Mormon title page)’ (“Four Cornerstones of Faith,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2004, 6).

In 1986 when President Benson called on the Church to make the Book of Mormon the center of our personal study, the Sunday School curriculum for that year for the whole Church was the Old Testament. The week following general conference that year, our Sunday School teacher began to set aside a little bit of time each week in class for a special segment which he titled “Book of Mormon Connections.” What else could we do? The prophet had said to make the Book of Mormon the center of our study, yet we had the Old Testament as our curriculum. So he had a segment called “Book of Mormon Connections.” The teacher, or a member of the class, would take a few minutes to draw a connection between the material we were studying in the Old Testament and a passage or event in the Book of Mormon.

Two years later President Benson said, “At present, the Book of Mormon is studied in our Sunday School and seminary classes every four years. This four-year pattern, however, must *not* be followed by Church members in their personal and family study. We need to read daily from the pages of the book that will get a man ‘nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book’ (*History of the Church*, 4:461)” (“Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 4).

In President Benson’s powerful talks regarding the Book of Mormon, he quoted extensively from previous talks delivered by President Marion G. Romney. President Romney was a General Authority for many years and later served in the First Presidency for many years. [Informally and off any record you will ever read, I heard President Packer one time refer to President Romney as the Apostles’ Apostle, which I took to mean that when he spoke the Apostles listened and gained great insight from what he said.] Well, in this declaration of President Benson, this call to repentance for reading the Book of Mormon in 1986, and in his other discourses on the subject, he quoted extensively from talks that President Romney had given in previous general conferences.

President Romney had recounted a special experience that he had had with the Book of Mormon when he was the age of most of you, when he had gone away to school. This is his story:

“A few years ago as I began to practice law, members of my family were a little uneasy. They were afraid I would lose my faith. I wanted to practice law, but I had an even greater desire to keep my testimony, and so I decided upon a little procedure which I recommend to you. For thirty minutes each morning before I began the day’s work I read from the Book of Mormon and in just a few minutes a day I read the Book of Mormon through, every year, for nine years. I know that it kept me in harmony, so far as I did keep in harmony, with the Spirit of the Lord” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1949, 36).

Can’t we pause and think about the Book of Mormon in our life, what we want it to be for us individually and what we want it to be for our families in the future? Could we take that step or make that commitment to bring it forth, as it were, into our hearts 30 minutes a day? Or could we make the commitment that as we begin our families, and as children begin to come, that in our families from the very beginning, reading the Book of Mormon will be a family exercise every day? Or that we can make it the center of our study, like the prophets and apostles have counseled us to do?

President Romney had some other strong statements. Let me give you a sampling:

“If we would avoid adopting the evils of the world, we must pursue a course which will daily feed our minds with and call them back to the things of the spirit. I know of no better way to do this than by reading the Book of Mormon” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1960, 111).

“From almost every page of the book, there will come ... a moving testimony that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Redeemer and Savior. This witness alone will be a sustaining anchor in every storm. In the Book of Mormon, [we] will find the plainest explanation of Christ’s divine mission and atonement to be found anywhere in sacred writ” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1960, 112).

I know that a moving testimony comes from every page of the Book of Mormon. The book speaks for itself . What I mean by that is its message is carried into the heart of the sincere person without the need of much explanation or discussion.

The key is this: Because the Book of Mormon testifies so frequently and so vividly of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit conveys the truth of that doctrine, the truth of the book, into the heart of those who read with real purpose, with true intent.

I would like to conclude with a lesson from the Book of Mormon—to let the book speak for itself. And it’s simply this. Throughout the Book of Mormon we find mini summaries of the plan of salvation and of the Atonement and of the Savior’s role in the plan of salvation and in the Atonement. We should watch for them as we read. Try to listen carefully as I recall one such passage. In the matter of just a few verses we can

hear, if we are listening, who the Lord was before He came to the earth, why He came , what He did while He was here on earth, how people responded to Him, that He was resurrected, and that He stands to provide a righteous judgment for all mankind.

You will remember these words, spoken by King Benjamin, when he received this vision from an angel. Maybe as his people were listening to him they were trying to see this in their minds, too. They didn't have pictures to look at that we know of. Here is the mini summary:

“For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, and the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases.

“And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.

“And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.

“And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.

“And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him.

“And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world; and behold, all these things are done that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men” (Mosiah 3:5-10).

Just a few verses later, another mini summary:

“And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17).

I know you have read the Book of Mormon. I know that it has spoken to you like it has spoken to me. But I testify to you and hope that testimony can be borne again in your heart as it is pronounced here.

I do know. I know through the power of the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is true. I know that Jesus is the Christ and that the Book of Mormon testifies of Him. I

know that Jesus spoke with Joseph Smith, and I know that he brought forth the Book of Mormon to us through him and that the Lord stands at the head of this Church today and that He guides it through revelation to His appointed servants. I know these things and I testify to you of these things in the name of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.