



BOOK OF MORMON

STUDENT MANUAL RELIGION 121 AND 122

Book of Mormon Student Manual

Religion 121 and 122

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Preface

Why a Student Manual?

The Book of Mormon is one of the easiest of the standard works to read and understand. Even so, the historical narratives, doctrinal expositions, and geographical relationships occasionally become hard to follow. The purpose of this student manual is to provide the companionship of experienced guides as you travel. These guides are trusted and inspired leaders of the Church and devoted students to the Book of Mormon. They will give you insights to broaden your understanding of the Book of Mormon and its more difficult terms and passages.

Study the Book of Mormon to Feel Its Power and Know Its Divinity

Parley P. Pratt spoke of the Book of Mormon as the principal means in directing the entire course of his life. In describing his first reading of the book he said:

“I opened it with eagerness, and read its title page. I then read the testimony of several witnesses in relation to the manner of its being found and translated. After this I commenced its contents by course. I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep.

“As I read, the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true” (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, p. 20).

Elder Spencer W. Kimball had a similar experience and spoke of his “adventure” with the Book of Mormon:

“May I tell you of a great adventure? As I traveled to a weekend assignment, I took with me an unusual book which was my constant companion. I could lay it down only to sleep, eat, and change trains. It fascinated me, captivated me, and held me spellbound with its irresistible charm and engaging interest. I have read it many times.

“As I finished it, I closed the book and sat back, absorbed as I relived its contents. Its pages held me, bound me, and my eyes were riveted to them. I knew the book was factual, but as has been said, ‘Truth is stranger than fiction.’ . . .

“I found in it life at its best and at its worst, in ever-changing patterns. I hardly recovered from one great crisis until another engulfed me. . . .

“This dramatic story is one of the greatest ever played by man. . . .

“Its story has a vital message to all people. . . .

“Archaeologists may be excited as they read of ruins of ancient cities, highways, and buildings. . . .

“Journalists will find in this book crisis after crisis, presenting rich material for limitless climactic stories. . . .

“This unparalleled book should intrigue navigators. . . .

“The student of economics will find in this unusual book the disintegration of nations through pride, soft living, and luxuries, terminating finally in hunger and fetters. . . .

“The astronomer and geologist here may see signs in the heavens and new stars come into focus, three days without sun . . . nights without darkness . . . and a vapor of darkness so impenetrable that no glimmer, nor candles, nor torches, nor fire could give any light. . . .

“Engineers will learn . . . that . . . centuries ago, men erected buildings, temples, and highways with cement. . . .

“The psychologists may find studies in human behavior and the workings of the human mind and the rationalizing processes where men convince themselves that ‘good is bad, and that bad is good.’ . . .

“The educator will find treasures of literature and poetry. . . .

“This comprehensive book should be studied by politicians, government leaders, kings, presidents, and premiers to see the rise and fall of empires, and the difference between statesmanship and demagoguery. . . .

“Scientists will read of unusual instruments never patented or remade or duplicated, of elements which, without recharging, illuminate dark spaces indefinitely. . . .

“Military men may learn much in strategy, intrigue, in movements, in morale. . . .

“But after all, it is not the book’s dramatic crises, its history, its narrative that are so important, but its power to transform men into Christlike beings worthy of exaltation.

“It is the word of God. It is a powerful second witness of Christ. And, certainly, all true believers who love the Redeemer will welcome additional evidence of his divinity. . . .

“My beloved friends, I give to you the Book of Mormon. May you read it prayerfully, study it carefully, and receive for yourselves the testimony of its divinity” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1963, pp. 62–65, 67–68).

Chapter 1

Introductory Lesson

Introduction

The introductory pages to the Book of Mormon contain the following important documents: opening page, title page, Introduction, the Testimony of Three Witnesses, the Testimony of Eight Witnesses, Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and a Brief Explanation about the Book of Mormon.

Notes and Commentary

Opening Page

An Official Announcement

In the October 1982 general conference, Elder Boyd K. Packer announced: “You should know also that by recent decision of the Brethren the Book of Mormon will henceforth bear the title ‘The Book of Mormon,’ with the subtitle ‘Another Testament of Jesus Christ.’” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1982, p. 75; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, p. 53).

President Ezra Taft Benson gave his testimony and encouragement for all to read the Book of Mormon:

“We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ.

“The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace. (See 2 Nephi 3:12.)

“We do not have to prove the Book of Mormon is true. The book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1984, p. 7; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, p. 8).

Two years later President Benson again emphasized the importance of the Book of Mormon and warned that the members of the Church were under condemnation because they were neglecting the Book of Mormon:

“‘And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon’ (D&C 84:54–57).

“Has the fact that we have had the Book of Mormon with us for over a century and a half made it seem less significant to us today? Do we remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon? In the Bible we have the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word *testament* is the English rendering of a Greek word that can also be translated as *covenant*. Is this what the Lord meant when He called the Book of Mormon the “new covenant”? It is indeed another testament or witness of Jesus. This is one of the reasons why we have recently added the words ‘Another Testament of Jesus Christ’ to the title of the Book of Mormon” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1986, p. 4; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, p. 4).

Title Page

Author of the Title Page

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “The title-page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates” (*History of the Church*, 1:71). Since it was the last leaf, or page, of the record, and the title page says the Book of Mormon was “sealed by the hand of Moroni,” it is believed that the title page was written by Moroni.

“By Way of the Gentile”

“Joseph Smith (through whom the Book of Mormon was revealed) was of the Tribe of Ephraim. At the same time the Prophet was of the Gentiles, meaning that he was a citizen of a Gentile Nation” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 311).

The Purpose of the Book of Mormon

“What is the major purpose of the Book of Mormon? To bring men to Christ and to be reconciled to him, and then to join his church—in that order. (See 2 Nephi 25:23; D&C 20:11–14, 35–37.)” (Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, Oct. 1984, p. 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, p. 6).

Introduction

The Keystone of Our Religion

Joseph Smith said, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (*History of the Church*, 4:461; see also President Benson’s talk in appendix A).

“The Prophet’s expression that ‘the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion’ means precisely what it says. The keystone is the central stone in the top of the arch. If that stone is removed, then the arch crumbles, which, in effect, means that Mormonism so-called—which actually is the gospel of Christ, restored anew in this day—stands or falls with the truth or the falsity of the Book of Mormon. . . .

“The Book of Mormon—which has come forth to prove that God inspires men and calls them to his holy work in this age and generation—establishes the verity of these great truths which comprise the message of the restoration. If the Book of Mormon is true, our message to the world is truth; the truth of this message is established in and through this book. . . .

“The Book of Mormon stands as a witness of the divine Sonship of Christ; it has come forth for ‘. . . the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that *Jesus* is the *Christ*, the *Eternal God*, manifesting himself unto all nations— . . .’ (Preface to the Book of Mormon.)

“This book also is a witness of the divine mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith and of the divinity of the Church set up under his instrumentality. It establishes and proves to the world that Joseph Smith is a prophet, for he received the book from a resurrected personage and translated it by the gift and power of God. And since the Book of Mormon came by revelation, which included the ministering of angels, then obviously Joseph Smith also received other revelations and was ministered to by other heavenly beings. Among those revelations was the command to organize the Church. The Church is thus the one true Church because it was set up by a prophet acting under command of God. Thus the truth of the message of the restoration is established in and through and by means of the Book of Mormon” (Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, Apr. 1961, pp. 39–40).

The Book of Mormon Is for Our Day

“The Book of Mormon was written for us today. God is the author of the book. It is a record of a fallen people, compiled by inspired men for our blessing

today. Those people never had the book—it was meant for us. Mormon, the ancient prophet after whom the book is named, abridged centuries of records. God, who knows the end from the beginning, told him what to include in his abridgment that we would need for our day” (Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, Apr. 1975, p. 94; or *Ensign*, May 1975, p. 63).

Church Members Must Read the Book of Mormon

President Joseph Fielding Smith spoke of the importance of seriously studying the Book of Mormon:

“It seems to me that any member of this Church would never be satisfied until he or she had read the Book of Mormon time and time again, and thoroughly considered it so that he or she could bear witness that it is in very deed a record with the inspiration of the Almighty upon it, and that its history is true. . . .

“. . . No member of this Church can stand approved in the presence of God who has not seriously and carefully read the Book of Mormon” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1961, p. 18).

President Ezra Taft Benson indicated that an individual’s spirit and conviction to the gospel are greatly affected by their knowledge of the Book of Mormon:

“Members of the Church everywhere should know the Book of Mormon better than any other book. Not only should we know what history and faith-promoting stories it contains, but we should understand its teachings. . . .

“I have noted within the Church the difference in discernment, in insight, conviction, and spirit between those who know and love the Book of Mormon and those who do not. That book is a great sifter” (“Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations,” *New Era*, May 1975, p. 19).

The Testimonies of Witnesses

The Lord’s Law of Witnesses

“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 hearers without excuse in the day of judgment should the testimony be rejected” (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 436).

The Testimony of Twelve Witnesses

President Heber J. Grant emphasized the importance of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon:

“I do not believe that in any court of justice in the world if a man was being tried for murder and twelve reputable citizens testified of their knowledge of the circumstances leading to the murder, and there was no one who could testify against what they said, there would be a failure to convict the man. We have the testimony of Joseph Smith and the testimony of three witnesses to the effect that God gave them a knowledge regarding the Book of Mormon, that an angel of God declared from heaven that the book had been translated by the gift and power of God. These men were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris. They left the Church, but to the day of their death they maintained their testimony regarding the declaration of the angel, and that they were commanded to bear witness of the divinity of this book, and they did so. Eight men, some of whom were excommunicated from the Church, maintained their testimony that they had seen and handled the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and they remained true to that testimony to the day of their death. The disbelief of all the world does not prove that those men did not tell the truth, because there are no witnesses on the other side” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, p. 128).

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

The phrase, “the Father, and . . . the Son, and . . . the Holy Ghost, which is one God,” in the Testimony of the Three Witnesses, or similar phrases (see Mosiah 15:4, Alma 11:44, Mormon 7:7, and D&C 20:28) should not be understood to mean that the members of the Godhead are the same physical personage. Rather, they are three separate, distinct individuals who are agreed in one (see 1 John 5:7–8).

With reference to John 17:11, 20–23, Joseph Smith taught: “I want to read the text to you myself—‘I am agreed with the Father and the Father is agreed with me, and we are agreed as one.’ The Greek shows that it should be agreed. ‘Father, I pray for them which Thou hast given me out of the world, and not for those alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through

their word, that they all may be agreed, as Thou, Father, are with me, and I with Thee, that they also may be agreed with us,’ and all come to dwell in unity” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 372).

Points to Ponder

- Carefully analyze the title page of the Book of Mormon to find answers for the following questions:
 - Who was the Book of Mormon written to?
 - Why was it written, and what were the authors trying to accomplish?
 - What indications are there of the hand of the Lord in its coming forth?
 - What warning is given to those who might criticize it?
- When an individual comes to know that the Book of Mormon is true, what other truths must also be accepted? (see D&C 20:1–12).
- The prophets have taught us that the Book of Mormon was written for our time. What indications are there in this book that the writers knew of our particular needs? How did they know what to include that would be of value to us today? (see Mormon 8:25–35; note especially vv. 34–35).

Chapter 2

1 Nephi 1–5

Introduction

Revelation is the way God communicates with man. Nephi and his father, Lehi, were both prophets who received such communication. As you read 1 Nephi, consider the various ways and the many times God revealed his will to Lehi and Nephi. Notice particularly the faithful responses of these two great servants.

Notes and Commentary

1 Nephi. Headnote

The headnote is a summary of 1 Nephi and is part of the original text. It was not added by modern writers (note the last sentence). All of the headnotes in the Book of Mormon are part of the original record given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, including the inserts preceding individual chapters (for example, Mosiah 9 and Alma 21). The brief summaries at the head of each chapter are later additions for the reader's convenience.

1 Nephi 1:1. A Record of Nephi's People

Nephi wrote this record about thirty years after Lehi's colony left Jerusalem and journeyed to the promised land (see 1 Nephi 19:1–5, 2 Nephi 5:28–31).

1 Nephi 1:1–3. The Book of Mormon Language

In Mormon 9:32–33, Moroni indicates that the plates were written in reformed Egyptian that had been altered by the Nephites according to their manner of speech. Some scholars believe that reformed Egyptian was a type of shorthand. Moroni explains that if the plates had been larger they would have been written in Hebrew, and then the record would have been without imperfections (see v. 33). This suggests that reformed Egyptian must not have been as precise and accurate as Hebrew, and it must have required less space to write reformed Egyptian than to write Hebrew. Knowing this gives us a greater appreciation of how efficient the reformed Egyptian language must have been.

The Hebrew language is very compact when compared to English and many other western languages. A typical English sentence of fifteen words will often translate into seven to ten Hebrew words.

We have no indication of the size of the characters Mormon and Moroni used, but if they rejected Hebrew because the plates were not “sufficiently large” (v. 33), then reformed Egyptian must have been a language remarkable for its ability to convey a lot of information with few words.

1 Nephi 1:4. Prophets to Warn the People

Nephi said that “many prophets” (1 Nephi 1:4) came among the people. We know these included Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. In Jeremiah 35:15 a similar comment is made about numerous prophets being sent by the Lord to warn the people.

1 Nephi 1:4. Political Conditions

“For three years the Pharaoh of Egypt exercised political control of the kingdom of Judah through the puppet Jehoiakim. Then in the memorable year 605 B.C. the Babylonians marshalled a mighty army and crushed the Pharaoh's cohorts in the battle of Carchemish and, in so doing, took the Jewish nation out of Egypt's grasp. (The biblical account of this era is found in 2 Kings, chaps. 23–25; 2 Chronicles, chap. 36; Jeremiah, chaps. 26–39.)

“But the Jewish people did not gain their freedom. Instead of Egyptian foreigners ruling their country, Babylonian foreigners took their place. Southern Palestine became a Babylonian vassal state. Unfortunately for all concerned, they allowed the quisling Jehoiakim, Jewish appointee of Egypt, to retain his throne. Before long the new monarch and his subjects were in revolt. In response, King Nebuchadnezzar moved an army to Jerusalem and laid siege against the rebellious city. About this time Jehoiakim either died or was taken captive by the enemy, for Jehoiachin, his son, is spoken of in the biblical account as surrendering to the Babylonians.

“These struggles between Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt took place before the Book of Mormon record opens but during the lifetime of its early leading characters. When the account commences, twenty-one-year-old Zedekiah, the well-meaning but utterly weak uncle of the ill-fated King Jehoiachin, is spoken of as being in the first year of his reign. According to the book of 2 Kings, he was appointed to the throne by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It was a time of great

