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THE BOOK OF MORMON: A GREAT ANSWER TO “THE GREAT QUESTION”

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

I commend BYU and the Religious Studies Center for sponsoring this symposium focusing on such a vital book. My remarks will focus upon my impressions during my rereading of the Book of Mormon during this past summer.

To begin with, the Book of Mormon provides resounding and great answers to what Amulek designated as “the great question”; namely, is there really a redeeming Christ? (Alma 34:5–6.) The Book of Mormon with clarity and with evidence says, “Yes! Yes! Yes!” Moreover, in its recurring theme, the book even declares that “all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of [Christ]” (2 Nephi 11:4). How striking its answers are, considering all that God might have chosen to tell us! He, before whom all things—past, present, and future—are continually (D&C 130:7), has chosen to tell us about the “gospel” (3 Nephi 27:13–14, 21; D&C 33:12; D&C 39:6; 76:40–41)—the transcending “good news,” the resplendent answers to “the great question.”

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Astoundingly, too, God, who has created "worlds without number" (Moses 1:33, 37–38; see Isaiah 45:18), has chosen to reassure us on this tiny "speck of sand" that he "doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of [this] world; for he loveth [this] world" (2 Nephi 26:24); and "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

It should not surprise us that this glorious gospel message is more perfect than any of its messengers, save Jesus only. Nor should it surprise us that the gospel message is more comprehensive than the comprehension of any of its bearers or hearers, save Jesus only.

Apparently translated by Joseph Smith at an average rate of eight or more of its printed pages a day, the Book of Mormon's full significance could not have been immediately and fully savored by the Prophet Joseph. Given this average, according to Professor Jack Welch, only one and a half days, for instance, would have been spent translating all of the first five chapters of Mosiah, a remarkable sermon about which books will be written.

Coming forth as it did in Bible Belt and revival conditions early in this dispensation, we of the Church have been slow to appreciate the special relevance of the Book of Mormon to the erosive conditions in ours, the latter part of this dispensation. Questioning and doubting has grown rapidly on the part of some scholars and even some clerics about the historicity of Jesus. Such, however, was not the America of 1830. Demographically speaking, therefore, the majority of the ministry of the Book of Mormon is occurring in a time of deep uncertainty and unrest concerning "the great question"—the very question which the Book of Mormon was created to answer!

And all this in a time that has been called the post-Christian era—an era, in the irony of ironies, which will come to an abrupt end when Christ, the King of kings, comes to reign over his kingdom.

Another strong reimpression is how the Book of Mormon foretells the latter-day emergence of "other books" of scripture (1 Nephi 13:39), of which it is one: "Proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old" (D&C 20:11).

With regard to omissions from the precious Holy Bible, in only one chapter of 1 Nephi, chapter 13, four phrases appear:

taken away, four times; *taken out*, once; *kept back*, twice; and *taken away out of*, once. Eight indications of omissions because of transmission deficiencies appear in one chapter! Moreover, as Nephi indicated, it was the “precious things” which had been lost. You will recall that Joseph Smith’s translation of Luke 11:52 shows Jesus criticizing those, then, who had “taken away the key of knowledge, the fulness of the scriptures” (JST, Luke 11:53).

While we do not know precisely what was “kept back” or “taken away” (see 1 Nephi 13:40), logically there would be a heavy representation of such plain and precious truths in the Restoration. Therefore, the “other books” provide precisely that which God is most anxious to have “had again” among the children of men, so that we might know the truth of things, in Jacob’s felicitous phrase, of “things as they really are” (Jacob 4:13).

The convergence of these “other books” of scripture with the precious Bible is part of the rhythm of the Restoration. The rhythm would have been impossible except for devoted and heroic individuals including the Jewish prophets and the Jewish people of antiquity who, in the words of the Book of Mormon, had “travails,” “labors,” and “pains” to preserve the Bible for us. Lamentably, as foreseen, for that contribution the Jews have been unthanked as a people, and instead have been “cursed,” “hated,” and made “game” of. (See 2 Nephi 29:4–5; 3 Nephi 29:4, 8.) A much later expression of the rhythm of the Restoration is symbolically reflected, too, in the graves of some Church members of the 1830s buried in Ohio and Indiana. Recently discovered, there is a trail of testifying tombstones which display, in stone, replicas of both the Bible *and* the Book of Mormon. These members felt doubly blessed and wanted the world to know it.

The existing scriptures advise of more than twenty other books to come forth¹ (see 1 Nephi 19:10–16). One day, in fact, “all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been . . . and which ever will be” (2 Nephi 27:11). Hence the ninth Article of Faith is such an impressive statement! My personal opinion, however, is that we will not get additional scriptures until we learn to appreciate fully those we already have.

The “other books,” particularly the Book of Mormon, fulfill—if constitutional lawyers will forgive me—Nephi’s “establishment clause”: “These last records . . . shall *establish* the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”

(1 Nephi 13:40; italics added). What the latter-day seer, Joseph Smith, brought forth will actually aid some people in accepting God's word which had already gone forth, namely the Bible (2 Nephi 3:11), by convincing them "that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true" (1 Nephi 13:39). There is high drama ahead!

Meanwhile, even as the criticism of the Book of Mormon continues to intensify, the book continues to testify and to diversify its displays of interior consistency, conceptual richness, and its connections with antiquity.

The plenitude of the Restoration followed as foreseen by Amos: "a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). The end of that famine was marked by the coming of the Book of Mormon and the "other books."

Such books have been and are the Lord's means of preserving the spiritual memory of centuries past. Without moral memory, spiritual tragedy soon follows: "Now . . . there were many of the rising generation that . . . did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ" (Mosiah 26:1–2). And on another occasion, "And at the time that Mosiah discovered them . . . they had brought no records with them; and they denied the being of their Creator" (Omni 1:17).

Belief in Deity and the Resurrection are usually the first to go. Ironically, though we gratefully accept the Bible as the word of God, the very process of its emergence has, alas, caused an unnecessary slackening of the Christian faith on the part of some. Because available Bible sources are not original, but represent dated derivations and translations, this makes the "other books" of scripture, which have come to us directly from ancient records and modern revelations, even more prized.

Paul, for instance, wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians about A.D. 56. We do not, of course, have that original parchment. Instead, the earliest document involving the first epistle to the Corinthians was discovered in the 1930s and is dated about A.D. 200. By comparison, King Benjamin's sermon was given in about 124 B.C. by a prophet. In the late fourth century A.D. it was selected by another prophet—Mormon—to be a part of the Book of Mormon. Benjamin's sermon was translated into English in A.D. 1829 by Joseph Smith, another prophet. There was, therefore, an unbroken chain of a prophet-originator, a prophet-

editor, and a prophet-translator collaborating in a remarkable process.

Even so, some discount the Book of Mormon because they cannot see the plates from which it was translated. Furthermore, they say that we do not know enough about the process of translation. But Moroni's promise to serious readers, to be discussed shortly, involves reading and praying over the book's substance—not over the process of its production. We are "looking beyond the mark" (Jacob 4:14), therefore, when, figuratively speaking, we are more interested in the physical dimensions of the cross than what was achieved thereon by Jesus. Or, when we neglect Alma's words on faith because we are too fascinated by the light-shielding hat reportedly used by Joseph Smith during some of the translating of the Book of Mormon.²

Most of all, I have been especially struck in rereading and pondering the Book of Mormon with how, for the serious reader, it provides a very, very significant response to what might be called modern man's architectonic needs—that is, our deep needs to discern some design, purpose, pattern, or plan regarding human existence.

No less than fifteen times, the Book of Mormon uses the word *plan* in connection with the plan of salvation or its components. The very use of the word *plan* is itself striking. In bringing back this particular "plain and precious" truth—namely, God not only lives but does have a plan for mankind—the Book of Mormon is unusually relevant for our age and time. Phrases about God's planning from the "foundation of the world" appear not at all in the Old Testament, but ten times in the New Testament, and three times as often in the other books.³ *Foundation*, of course, thus denotes a creation overseen by a loving and planning God.

The Book of Mormon lays further and heavy emphasis on how the gospel, in fact, has been with mankind from Adam on down. Only six pages into the book, we read of the testifying words of all the prophets "since the world began" (1 Nephi 3:20); five pages later, a recitation notes the words of the "holy prophets, from the beginning" (1 Nephi 5:13). This one verse represents many:

For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever

since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things? (Mosiah 13:33; see 2 Nephi 25:19.)

It seems probable that there will be some additional discoveries of ancient records pertaining to the Old and New Testaments, further shrinking the time between the origination of those scriptures and the earliest available documentation. However, this *shrinking* will not automatically lead to an *enlarging* of the faith—at least of some. Future discoveries of ancient documents which may “throw greater views on [His] gospel” (D&C 10:45) may also focus on portions of Jesus’ gospel which existed *before* Jesus’ mortal ministry. Unfortunately, a few may unjustifiably use such discoveries to diminish the divinity of the Redeemer, inferring that Jesus is, therefore, not the originator, as previously thought. However, the restored gospel, including the Book of Mormon, gives us such a clear reading of the spiritual history of mankind, showing God’s “tender mercies” (see 1 Nephi 1:20; Ether 6:12) from Adam on down. There is thus no need for us to be anxious about finding a reliable portion of Christ’s gospel before Christ’s mortal ministry. The gospel was preached and known from the beginning (see Moses 5:58–59).

The detailed, interior correlation of the Book of Mormon—indeed of all true scripture—is marvelous to behold. Centuries before Christ’s birth, King Benjamin prophesied: “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” (Mosiah 3:8).

The resurrected Jesus introduced himself to the Nephites with strikingly similar words centuries later: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning.” (3 Nephi 9:15.)

But back to God’s enfolding plan. Alma, after a discussion of the Fall, declared it was “expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof [God] had appointed unto them; therefore [God] sent angels to converse with them . . . and [make] known unto them the plan of redemption, which had been prepared from the foundation of the world” (Alma 12:28–30). This is the very process which was followed, of course, in North America in the first half of the nineteenth century through angelic visitations to Joseph Smith.

At the center of this architectonic responsiveness, with its related dispensational emphasis, is the Book of Mormon’s

steady, Christian core. Jacob wrote: "We knew of Christ . . . many hundred years before his coming . . . also all the holy prophets which were before us. Behold, they believed in Christ and worshipped the Father in his name . . . [keeping] the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him." (Jacob 4:4–5.) Jacob was emphatic: "None of the prophets have written . . . save they have spoken concerning this Christ" (Jacob 7:11).

God witnesses to us in so many ways: "Yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator" (Alma 30:44; see also Moses 6:63).

A believing British scientist has observed the following of our especially situated planet:

[Just a bit nearer to the sun, and Planet Earth's seas would soon be boiling; just a little farther out, and the whole world would become a frozen wilderness.]

. . . If our orbit happened to be the wrong shape . . . then we should alternately freeze like Mars and fry like Venus once a year. Fortunately for us, our planet's orbit is very nearly a circle.

The 21 percent of oxygen is another critical figure. Animals would have difficulty breathing if the oxygen content fell very far below that value. But an oxygen level much higher than this would also be disastrous, since the extra oxygen would act as a fire-raising material. Forests and grasslands would flare up every time lightning struck during a dry spell, and life on earth would become extremely hazardous.⁴

When, therefore, we know the affirmative answers to "the great question," we can, in Amulek's phrase, "live in thanksgiving daily" (Alma 34:38), including gratitude for the many special conditions which make daily life on this earth possible.

God's encompassing purposes are set forth to the very end of the Book of Mormon. Moroni urged a precise method of study and verification which, if followed, will show among other things how merciful the Lord has been unto mankind "from the creation of Adam" (Moroni 10:3). Foretelling can be convincing, too, along with remembering, in showing the sweep of God's love. We read in the Book of Mormon, "Telling them of things which must shortly come, that they might know and remember at the time of their coming that they had been made known unto them beforehand, to the intent that they might believe" (Helaman 16:5; see also Mormon 8:34–35).

Every age needs this architectonic message, but none more desperately than our age, which is preoccupied with skepticism and hedonism: "For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?" (Mosiah 5:13).

If, however, one gets too caught up in the warfare in the Book of Mormon, or if he is too preoccupied with the process of the book's emergence, such transcendent truths as the foregoing can easily be overlooked.

Even the title page' declares, among other things, that the Book of Mormon was to advise posterity "what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers." The very lack of such a spiritual memory once led to a decline of ancient Israel: "There arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).

Why was it so difficult for a whole people—or for Laman and Lemuel—to maintain faith? Because they were uninformed and unbelieving as to "the dealings of that God who had created them." (1 Nephi 2:12; 2 Nephi 1:10.) Many efforts were made: "I, Nephi, did teach my brethren these things; . . . I did read many things to them, which were engraven upon the plates of brass, that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old" (1 Nephi 19:22).

The current prophetic emphasis by President Benson on the Book of Mormon, therefore, is so timely!

Even the criticisms of the book will end up having their usefulness in God's further plans. Granted, the great answers in the book will not now be accepted by disbelievers. Such people would not believe the Lord's words—whether coming through Paul or Joseph Smith—even if they had an original Pauline parchment or direct access to the gold plates. The Lord once comforted Joseph Smith by saying such individuals "would not believe my words . . . if [shown] all these things" (D&C 5:7).

Thus, at the same time some decry the Book of Mormon, for those who have ears to hear, it represents an informing but haunting "cry from the dust" (2 Nephi 3:20). It is the voice of a fallen people sent to lift us. Described as a "whisper out of the dust" (2 Nephi 26:16) from "those who have slumbered" (2 Nephi 27:9), this sound from the dust is the choral cry of many anguished voices with but a single, simple message. Their spiritual struggles span a few centuries but concern the message of

the ages—the gospel of Jesus Christ! The peoples of the Book of Mormon were not on the center stage of secular history. Instead, theirs was a comparatively little theater. Yet it featured history's largest message.

Not pleasing to those who crave other kinds of history, the Book of Mormon is pleasing to those who genuinely seek answers to “the great question” (Alma 34:5). Contrary to the sad conclusion now reached by many, the Book of Mormon declares to us again and again that the universe is not comprised of what has been called “godless geometric space.”⁶

Granted, too, usually the “learned shall not read [these things], for they have rejected them” (2 Nephi 27:20). This is not solely a reference to Professor Anthon, since the plural pronoun *they* is used. The reference suggests a mind-set of most of the learned of the world, who, by and large, do not take the Book of Mormon seriously. Even when they read it, they do not *really* read it, except with a mind-set which excludes miracles, including the miracle of the book's coming forth by the “gift and power of God.” Their flawed approach diverts them from scrutinizing the substance. Sometimes, as has been said, certain mortals are so afraid of being “taken in,” they cannot be “taken out” of their mind-sets.⁷

How dependent mankind is, therefore, upon emancipating revelation: “Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways. And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God.” (Jacob 4:8.)

Now to Moroni's promise, which is a promise that rests on a premise; a promise with several parts. The reader is (1) to read and ponder, (2) while remembering God's mercies to mankind from Adam until now, and (3) to pray in the name of Christ and ask God with real intent if the book is true—(4) while having faith in Christ—then (5) God will manifest the truth of the book. The reverse approach, scanning while doubting, is the flip side of Moroni's methodology and produces flippant conclusions. Moroni's process of verification is surely not followed by many readers or reviewers of this book. This leads to misapprehension on their part—something like mistakenly labeling rumor with her thousand tongues as the gift of tongues!

Therefore, we should not be deluded into thinking that these

"other books" will be welcomed, especially by those whose sense of sufficiency is expressed thus: "There cannot be any more" such books and "we need no more" such books (2 Nephi 29:3, 6).

Another strong impression from my rereading is how the Book of Mormon peoples, though Christians, were tied, until Jesus came, much more strictly to the pre-exilic law of Moses than we in the Church have fully appreciated. "And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled" (2 Nephi 25:24).

People back then were thus to "look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was" (Jarom 1:11). Moses indeed prophesied of the Messiah, but not all of his words are in the treasured Old Testament. Recall the walk of the resurrected Jesus with two disciples on the road to Emmaus? Their walk probably covered about twelve kilometers and provided ample time for Jesus' recitation of not merely three or four, but many prophecies by Moses and others concerning Christ's mortal ministry (Luke 24:27).

Scriptures attesting to Jesus' divinity are vital in any age. Otherwise, as the Book of Mormon prophesies, he will be considered a mere man (Mosiah 3:9) or a person of "naught" (1 Nephi 19:9). Over the decades, what has been called the "dilution of Christianity from within"⁸ has resulted in a number of theologians not only diminishing their regard for Christ, but likewise regarding the Resurrection as merely "a symbolic expression for the renewal of life for the disciple."⁹ Once again we see the supernal importance of the "other books" of scripture: they reinforce the reality of the Resurrection, especially the Book of Mormon's additional gospel with its report of the visitation of and instruction by the resurrected Jesus. The resurrection of many others occurred and, by Jesus' pointed instruction, was made record of. (See 3 Nephi 23:6–13.)

Thus the Book of Mormon resoundingly, richly, and grandly answers the "great question." Granted, in our day, the post-Christian era, many who are preoccupied are not even asking that great question anymore, regarding Christianity "not as untrue or even as unthinkable, but simply irrelevant,"¹⁰ just like some in Benjamin and Mosiah's times (see Mosiah 28:1–2; Omni 1:17).

If the answer to "the great question" were "No," there

would quickly come a wrenching surge of what Professor Hugh Nibley has called the “terrible questions.”

Even the historical, political, and geographical setting of the emergence of the Book of Mormon was special. President Brigham Young boldly declared:

Could that book have been brought forth and published to the world under any other government but the Government of the United States? No. [God] has governed and controlled the settling of this continent. He led our fathers from Europe to this land . . . and inspired the guaranteed freedom in our Government, though that guarantee is too often disregarded. (JD 8:67.)

In the midst of this continually unfolding drama, a few members of the Church, alas, desert the cause; they are like one who abandons an oasis to search for water in the desert. Some of these few will doubtless become critics, and they will be welcomed into the “great and spacious building.” Henceforth, however, so far as their theological accommodations are concerned, they are in a spacious but third-rate hotel. All dressed up, as the Book of Mormon says, “exceedingly fine” (1 Nephi 8:27), they have no place to go except—one day, hopefully, home.

The great answers to the “great question” repeatedly focus us, therefore, on the reality of the “great and last sacrifice.” “This is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14). These great answers reaffirm that mortal melancholy need not be, however frequently and poignantly expressed.

Furthermore, what we receive in the Book of Mormon is not a mere assemblage of aphorisms, nor is it merely a few individuals offering their philosophical opinions. Instead, we receive the cumulative witness of prophetic individuals, especially those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus, including Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Alma, the brother of Jared, Mormon, and Moroni. The biblical account of the five hundred brothers and sisters witnessing the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:6) is joined by the witnessing throng of twenty-five hundred in the land of Bountiful (3 Nephi 17:25). All of these are thus added to the burgeoning cloud of witnesses about whom the apostle Paul wrote (Hebrews 12:1).

The Book of Mormon might have been another kind of book, of course. It could have been chiefly concerned with the

ebb and flow of governmental history; that is, "Princes come and princes go, an hour of pomp, an hour of show." Such would not have offset, however, the many despairing books and the literature of lamentation so much of which we have already, each reminiscent in one way or another of the hopelessness of these lines from Shelley:

. . . Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, . . .
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.¹¹

Because the editing of the Book of Mormon, with its gospel of hope, occurred under divine direction, it has a focus which is essentially spiritual. Yet some still criticize the Book of Mormon for not being what it was never intended to be, as if one could justifiably criticize the phone directory for lack of a plot!

Some verses in the Book of Mormon are of tremendous salvational significance, others less so. The book of Ether has a verse about lineage history: "And Jared had four sons" (and names them) (Ether 6:14). However, Ether also contains another verse of tremendous salvational significance:

And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27.)

We read of a battle "when . . . they slept upon their swords . . . were drunken with anger, even as a man who is drunken with wine. . . . And when the night came there were thirty and two of the people of Shiz, and twenty and seven of the people of Coriantumr." (Ether 15:20–26.) Such, however, is of a much lower spiritual significance for the development of our discipleship than are these next lines. In all of scripture, these constitute

the most complete delineation of Jesus' requirement that we become as little children (see Matthew 18:3): ". . . and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19).

One reason to "search the scriptures" is to discover these sudden luxuriant meadows of meaning, these green pastures to nourish us in our individual times of need. The Book of Mormon surely has its share and more of these. Immediately after words about economic conditions in the now vanished city of Helam, we encounter an enduring and bracing truth: "Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith" (Mosiah 23:20–21; see also D&C 98:12; Abraham 3:25).

Similarly, the Book of Mormon provides us with insights we may not yet be ready to manage fully. Astonishingly, Alma includes our pains, sicknesses, and infirmities, along with our sins, as being among that which Jesus would also "take upon him" (Alma 7:11, 12). It was part of the perfecting of Christ's mercy by his experiencing "according to the flesh." Nephi in exclaiming "O how great the plan of our God" (2 Nephi 9:13) also declared how Jesus would suffer "the pains of all . . . men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam" (2 Nephi 9:21). The soul trembles at those implications. One comes away weeping from such verses, deepened in his adoration of our Redeemer.

Given such richness, it is unsurprising that the prophets urge us to read the Book of Mormon. In closing his writings to those who do not respect (1) the words of the Jews (the Bible), (2) his words (as found in the Book of Mormon), and (3) also the words from Jesus (from the future New Testament), Nephi said simply, "I bid you an everlasting farewell" (2 Nephi 33:14).

Mormon is equally emphatic regarding this interactiveness between the Bible and the Book of Mormon (see Mormon 7:8–9). The interactiveness and cross-supportiveness of holy scripture was attested to by Jesus. "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46–47.)

Meanwhile, from those who say "We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have" (2 Nephi

28:30). Obviously, this refers not to the physical loss of the Bible, which may still be on the bookshelf or may be used as a bookend, but to a sad loss of conviction concerning it on the part of some.

When we "search the scriptures," the luminosity of various verses in the various books is focused, laserlike. This illumination arcs and then converges, even though we are dealing with different authors, people, places, and times: "Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also." (2 Nephi 29:8.)

Believing, however, is not a matter of accessing antiquity with all its evidence, though we welcome such evidence. Nor is it dependent upon accumulating welcomed historical evidence either. Rather, it is a matter of believing in Jesus' words. Real faith, like real humility, is developed "because of the word" — and not because of surrounding circumstances! (Alma 32:13–14.)

How fitting it is that it should be so! The test is focused on the message, not on the messengers; on principles, not on process; on doctrines, not on plot. The emphasis is on belief "because of the word." As Jesus told Thomas on the Eastern Hemisphere, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). He proclaimed to the Nephites: "More blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me" (3 Nephi 12:2).

True faith, therefore, is brought about by overwhelming and intimidating divine intervention. The Lord, the Book of Mormon tells us, is a shepherd with a mild and pleasant voice (see Helaman 5:30–31; 3 Nephi 11:3)—not a shouting and scolding shepherd. Others may, if they choose, demand a "voiceprint" of the "voice of the Lord," but even if so supplied, they would not like his doctrines anyway (see John 6:66). The things of the Spirit are to be "sought by faith" and they are not to be seen through slit-eyed skepticism.

Without real faith, individuals sooner or later find one thing or another to stumble over (Romans 9:32). After all, it is a very difficult thing to show the proud things which they "never had supposed," especially things they do not really want to know. When Jesus was speaking about himself as the bread of life, a powerful doctrine laden with life-changing implications, there was murmuring. Jesus asked them, "Doth this offend you?" (John 6:61.) "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Luke 7:23).

As if all this were not enough, the splendid Book of Mormon advises that a third scriptural witness is yet to come from the lost tribes (see 2 Nephi 29:12–14). Its coming is likely to be even more dramatic than the coming forth of the second testament. Those who doubt or disdain the second testament of Christ will not accept the third either. But believers will then possess a triumphant triad of truth (see 2 Nephi 29:12–14). Were it not for the Book of Mormon, we would not even know about the third set of records!

We do not know when and how this will occur, but we are safe in assuming that the third book will have the same fundamental focus as the Book of Mormon—“that . . . their seed [too] . . . may be brought to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer” (3 Nephi 16:4). If there is a title page in that third set of sacred records, it is not likely to differ in purpose from the title page in the Book of Mormon, except for its focus on still other peoples who likewise received a personal visit from the resurrected Jesus (see 3 Nephi 15:20–24; 16:1–4).

Thus, in the dispensation of the fulness of times there is not only a “welding together” (D&C 128:18) of the keys of all the dispensations, but there will also be a “welding together” of all the sacred books of scripture given by the Lord over the sweep of human history. Then, as prophesied, “my word also shall be gathered in one” (2 Nephi 29:14). Then there will be one fold, one shepherd, and one stunning scriptural witness for the Christ!

Given all the foregoing, it is touching that a jailed Joseph Smith, during his last mortal night, 26 June 1844, bore “a powerful testimony to the guards of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the Gospel, the administration of angels”¹² (see Alma 12:28–30). The guards apparently did not hearken then any more than most of the world hearkens now. Heeded or unheeded, however, the Book of Mormon has a further rendezvous to keep: “Wherefore, these things shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God; and the nations who shall possess them shall be judged of them according to the words which are written” (2 Nephi 25:22).

For my part, I am glad the book will be with us “as long as the earth shall stand.” I need and want additional time. For me, towers, courtyards, and wings await inspection. My tour of it has never been completed. Some rooms I have yet to enter, and there are more flaming fireplaces waiting to warm me. Even the rooms

I have glimpsed contain further furnishings and rich detail yet to be savored. There are panels inlaid with incredible insights and design and decor dating from Eden. There are also sumptuous banquet tables painstakingly prepared by predecessors which await all of us. Yet, we as Church members sometimes behave like hurried tourists, scarcely venturing beyond the entry hall to the mansion.

May we come to feel as a whole people beckoned beyond the entry hall. May we go inside far enough to hear clearly the whispered truths from those who have "slumbered," which whisperings will awaken in us individually the life of discipleship as never before.

That it may be so for the people of the Church, spurred by this symposium and, more important, by the Spirit is my witness to you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Wars of the Lord, Jasher, more from Samuel, the Acts of Solomon, the book of Nathan, Shemaiah, Ahijah, Iddo, Jehu, the Sayings of the Seers, at least two epistles of Paul, books of Enoch, Ezias, Adam's Book of Remembrance, and Gad the Seer. Thus we are dealing with over twenty missing books. We also have certain prophecies from Jacob, or Israel, and extensive prophecies by Joseph in Egypt, only a portion of which we have (2 Nephi 3:1-25 and 4:1-3; JST, Genesis 50:24-37; Alma 46:24-26).

2. Furthermore, too few people are inclined to follow the counsel of Moroni regarding the book's substance: "Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been" (Mormon 9:31).

3. Twenty-two times in the Book of Mormon, ten times in the Doctrine and Covenants, and three times in the Pearl of Great Price.

4. Alan Hayward, *God Is* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1980), pp. 62, 63, 68.

5. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), p. 7.

6. Michael Harrington, *The Politics at God's Funeral: The Spiritual Crisis of Western Civilization* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1983), p. 114.

7. C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Collier, 1970), p. 148.

8. Harrington, *The Politics at God's Funeral*, p. 153.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
10. Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Knox Brothers* (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc.: New York, 1977), p. 106-7.
11. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias," *Norton Anthology of English Literature* 2 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 2:691.
12. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 383.