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The Role of the Book of Mormon in the Restoration of the Church

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THE ROLE OF THE BOOK OF MORMON IN THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH¹

*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.”
(Joseph Smith in History of the Church 4:461)*

Latter-day Saints are generally aware of this declaration, though its full implications are not as apparent as they were when the prophet uttered these words. The declaration that the Book of Mormon can help us “get nearer to God” reflects the purpose of the book as stated in its Preface or Title page, where Moroni declared that the record was for “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.” The idea originated with Nephi, the first of the Nephite prophet-scribes (2 Nephi 26:12) and was shared by Moroni’s father Mormon (Mormon 5:14).

Amaleki, an early Nephite scribe, invited his future readers to “come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption” (Omni 1:26). Moroni, the last of the Book of Mormon writers, addressing our generation, declared, “I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written” (Ether 12:41).

The Book of Mormon is an important tool in helping the Church to fulfill its mission of bringing souls to Christ (D&C

¹ This chapter was circulated as a FARMS preliminary paper in 1997 and is published here for the first time.

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3:20; 18:41; 20:59; 68:6, 25; 107:23, 35). For this reason, in 1982 it was retitled, “The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” The earliest converts to the Church were attracted not by stories of Joseph Smith’s first vision or by impressive new and restored doctrines, but by the witness of the Spirit borne to them as they read the Book of Mormon.

There are several ways in which the Book of Mormon helps bring people to Christ: 1) It testifies of Christ, affirming his divinity and the truth of his teachings; 2) it provides a comprehensive explanation of the atonement by which salvation comes to mankind; 3) it explains how we can take full advantage of Christ’s atonement, enabling us to return to the presence of both the Father and the Son. While the Book of Mormon is the keystone, Christ is the cornerstone of the Church, he on whom the Church is founded (Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-7; Jacob 4:17).

THE FULNESS OF THE GOSPEL

The Lord declared to Joseph Smith that the Book of Mormon contained the “fulness of the gospel” (JS-H 1:34; D&C 20:9; 27:5; 42:12; see 135:3). Some have objected that, since the Book of Mormon does not discuss such key LDS beliefs as premortal existence, eternal progression, God as an exalted man, the plurality of gods, the three degrees of glory, baptism for the dead, eternal marriage, or the word of wisdom, it cannot contain the fulness of the gospel. This reasoning results from the misconception that the term “gospel” refers to all truth from God, and it is unfortunate that Latter-day Saints have come to use it in that sense.

Both the Book of Mormon and other scriptures define the gospel more narrowly, as the good news of Christ’s atonement, with its first principles being faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost (1 Nephi 10:14; 15:13-14; 3 Nephi 27:13-21; Ether 4:18; D&C 3:20; 13:1; 20:9; 27:5; 33:11-12;

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39:5-6; 42:12; 76:40-42; 84:26-27; 107:20; 135:3; 138:2-4, 57; JS-H 1:34; Articles of Faith 3-4). D&C 93:51 uses the term “the gospel of salvation,” while Abraham 2:11 speaks of “the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal” (see D&C 128:5, 17). In Jacob 7:6, the gospel is defined as “the doctrine of Christ,” referring to the doctrine concerning Christ, rather than the totality of Christ’s teachings, since he had not yet been born when these words were uttered (see Mormon 3:21; D&C 76:82). Elsewhere, the Book of Mormon equates the “fulness of the gospel” with coming “to the knowledge of the true Messiah” (1 Nephi 10:14; 15:13-14; see 3 Nephi 20:30-31; D&C 19:27).

The Book of Mormon contains the most lucid, complete explanation of the atonement of Christ found in any of the scriptures (see especially 2 Nephi 2, 9; Mosiah 15; Alma 34, 42), and therefore clearly qualifies as containing the fulness of the gospel. It also teaches that the plan of salvation was not introduced at the time of Christ’s mortal ministry, but that it has always been with us. Christ was chosen before the world began to be our sacrifice for sin and to bring us back to God. Knowing that “all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things” from the beginning (2 Nephi 2:24) reassures us that God is in control and that the power of salvation is not diminished by the bad things we see happening around us.

THE BOOK OF MORMON AND JOSEPH SMITH’S MISSION

The translation of the Book of Mormon was one of the principal tasks assigned to Joseph Smith as the prophet of a new dispensation (D&C 1:29; 24:1), a task that began even before the restoration of the priesthood and the reestablishment of the Church. Indeed, D&C 21:1, reflects the order in which Joseph’s callings were received: “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an

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apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church.” Joseph became a *seer* (from the verb *to see*) when he *saw* the Father and the Son in the sacred grove in the spring of 1820 (JS-H 1:14-20). He became a *translator* when Moroni delivered to him both the plates of the Book of Mormon and the interpreters (JS-H 1:30-54, 59-66). During the course of the translation, Joseph received a series of revelations, which established his role as a prophet (D&C 3-18). In 1829, he was ordained an apostle by Peter, James, and John (D&C 27:12; 128:20). Finally, at the organizational meeting of the Church, held April 6, 1830, Joseph became its “first elder” (D&C 20:2-5; 21:11; JS 1:72).

Mormon foresaw the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and recorded a prophecy concerning the event in 3 Nephi 29. A comparison of that chapter with statements made by Moroni to Joseph Smith on the night he revealed the existence of the plates bears such a striking resemblance to elements in Mormon’s prophecy that it is likely that the resurrected Moroni had in mind the passage written by his father (Table 1).

Table 1. A Comparison of 3 Nephi 29 and Joseph Smith-History

| <i>3 Nephi 29</i> | <i>JS-H</i> |
|--|--|
| The Book of Mormon is to come forth (verse 1). | Moroni revealed the existence of the Book of Mormon (verses 34, 42). |
| “These sayings [the Book of Mormon] shall come unto <i>the Gentiles</i> ” (verse 1). | Moroni “stated that the fulness of <i>the Gentiles</i> was soon to come in” (verse 41). |
| The coming forth of the book would be a sign to Israel “concerning their restoration to the lands of their inheritance” (verses 1-3, 8-9; see Ether 4:17). | Moroni recited Isaiah 11, one of the major themes of which is the gathering of Israel in the last days (verse 40). |

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3 Nephi 29

JS-H

Of "the house of Israel," Mormon declared "the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn" and would "execute judgment until the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the house of Israel" (verses 8-9).

Moroni quoted Malachi 3:5-6, in which there is a promise that the Lord "shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers" (verse 39).

Mormon mentions the "coming" of the Lord (verse 2) and "the sword of [the Lord's] justice" that will "soon overtake" the unbelievers (verse 4).

Moroni cited a variant of Malachi 4:1, 5-6, on the destruction of the wicked and the earth being wasted at "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" unless Elijah comes first (verses 36-39). Later, he spoke of "great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence" (verse 45).

"The sword of his justice in his right hand; and behold, at that day, if he shall spurn at his doings he will cause that it shall soon overtake you. Wo unto him that shall deny the Christ and his works!" He also spoke of those who "shall become like unto the son of perdition, for whom there was no mercy" (verses 5-7).

Moroni cited the passage from Acts 3:22-23, stating that it referred to Christ and that "the day had not yet come when 'they who would not hear his voice should be cut off from among the people,' but soon would come (verse 40).

"Yea, wo unto him that shall deny the revelations of the Lord, and that shall say the Lord no longer worketh by revelation, or by prophecy, or by gifts, or by tongues, or by healings, or by the power of the Holy Ghost!" (verses 6-7).

Revelation is the theme of Moroni's appearance (verses 29-32, 43-44), with a discussion of the urim & thummim (verses 35, 42) and the vision of the hill (verse 46). Moroni also cited Joel 2:28-32, which speaks about the Lord pouring out his spirit in the last days (verse 41).

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3 Nephi 29

JS-H

“Yea, and wo unto him that shall say at that day, to *get gain*, that there can be no miracle wrought by Jesus Christ” (verse 7).

Joseph Smith was told that Satan would tempt him “to get the plates for the purpose of *getting rich*,” and warned him to “have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God” (verse 46).

“Yea, and ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel” (verse 8).

Moroni told Joseph Smith that his name “should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (verse 33).

CHURCH PRACTICES DRAWN FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON

From the beginning, the Book of Mormon formed the basis for many of the practices of the restored Church. Some of these are reflected in D&C 20, the original of which was largely patterned on the operation of the ancient Nephite church.² This section, which comprised the earliest constitution of the LDS Church, begins by devoting twelve verses (5-16) to the importance of the Book of Mormon in the mission of Joseph Smith leading up to the establishment of the Church.

On the day the Church was organized, April 6, 1830, those in attendance accepted what we now know as D&C 20 as “The Articles and Covenants of the church of Christ,” a set of

² For a detailed study of D&C 20 and its precursors, see the FARMS preliminary report by Scott Faulring, “The Articles and Covenants of the Church: D&C 20 and Its Antecedents.”

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regulations governing Church organization and practices.³ Many of the ideas found in D&C 20, especially beginning with verse 30, were taken from the book of Moroni, notably chapters 2-6. Those chapters outline practices followed in the Nephite church following the visit of Christ and are in many instances based on instructions given by Christ during his appearance in the land of Bountiful. Since Moroni was about to hide up the record, making it unavailable until the time of Joseph Smith, it seems evident that his sole intent was to provide the future prophet with basic information on how the restored Church should be governed.

PRIESTHOOD OFFICES

In the Book of Mormon, we read of elders, priests, and teachers (2 Nephi 5:26; Jacob 1:18; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 23:17; 25:19, 21; 26:7; 27:5; Alma 1:3, 26; 4:7, 16; 6:1; 15:13; 23:4; 30:31; 35:5; 45:22-23; Helaman 3:25; Moroni 3:1, 3-4; 4:1; 6:1, 7). D&C 20 mentions these offices, along with those of deacon, high priest, high councilor, and bishop. The latter three were not in the original of that section, but were added later as these offices were introduced into the Church. The ordination and duties of the elders, priests, teachers, and deacons, found in D&C 20:38-60 are drawn from Moroni 2-3. (Alma 6:1 also notes that Alma₂ “ordained priests and elders, by laying on his hands.”)

In June of 1831, the first high priests were ordained (*History of the Church* 1:175). Looking back on the event more than half a century later, David Whitmer, who had left the Church, declared that he had been opposed to this move, on the grounds that, unlike the offices of elder, priest, and teacher, the office of

³ This title was given to that section in its preface in the 1833 Book of Commandments. See references to the “articles and covenants,” “commandments and covenants,” “laws and covenants,” or sometimes just “covenants” in D&C 28:12, 14; 33:14; 42:13, 78; 51:4; 68:13, 24; 107:12, 20, 63, 85-87, 89; *History of the Church* 1.386; 2.525. From these passages, it is clear that some subsequent revelations were considered to be appendages to D&C 20.

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high priest is not mentioned in the Book of Mormon.⁴

But Whitmer was wrong. In addition to the discourse of Alma₂ on Melchizedek and other high priests of earlier days (Alma 13), we learn that he was “high priest over the church of God” (Mosiah 26:7; 29:42; preface to book of Alma; Alma 4:4, 18; 5:3; 8:11, 23; 16:5) and that his father before him had been a high priest (Mosiah 23:16). One passage speaks of other Nephite “high priests” (Helaman 3:25), and we learn from other passages that each city or land in Nephite territory seems to have had a presiding high priest (Alma 30:20-22, 29).

After the departure of Alma₂, his sons, who are called “high priests over the church” (Alma 46:6, 38), led the Nephite church, appointing priests and teachers in each congregation (Alma 45:22-23). The fact that these sons were three in number (Alma 31:6-7; 35:16; 36-42) suggests that they may have been comparable to the First Presidency in the LDS Church. Indeed, when that presidency was first organized in December 1832, it was termed “the presidency of the high priesthood” or “the presidency of the Melchizedek priesthood” (D&C 68:15, 19; 81:2; 107:9, 17; 107:78-79; *History of the Church* 1:333, 353, 359; 2:4) and consisted, as it remains today, of a president and two counselors, with the counselors also being termed “presidents” (D&C 102:3, 33; 207:24, 29; *History of the Church* 1:24, 333, 370). In D&C 107:22, the “three Presiding High Priests” are said to “form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church.”

The responsibility of the elders “to conduct the meetings as they are led by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 20:45) is also found in Moroni 6:9 and was repeated in D&C 46:2. Nephi had written that “when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1). This seems to be behind the latter-day commandment to teach by the power of the Spirit (D&C 42:14-

⁴ David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Missouri, 1887), 62-67.

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16) and the declaration that if both speaker and listener are empowered by the Spirit, there is understanding between them (D&C 50:13-22).

The concept of an unpaid clergy, for which the LDS Church is noted, was also a feature of the Nephite church (Mosiah 27:5; Alma 1:26).⁵

Because of the number of people in the land of Zarahemla, it was impossible for all of them to meet together to be taught, so Alma₁ established different congregations or churches and “to ordain[ed] priests and teachers over every church” (Mosiah 25:19-23). In D&C 20:49, 56, we find that priests are “to take the lead of meetings when there is no elder present” and that teachers are “to take the lead of meetings in the absence of the elder or priest.” Indeed, just as the Nephite teachers were local officers in individual churches, the teacher in the restored Church “is to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them” (D&C 20:53), for which reason teachers have never served as missionaries.

BAPTISM

The wording of D&C 20:25 (those who are “baptized . . . and endure in faith to the end, should be saved”) was drawn from Jesus’ words to the Nephite disciples in 3 Nephi 27:16. But the concept of being “saved in the kingdom of God” through baptism is found in earlier Book of Mormon passages (2 Nephi 9:23-24; 25:13). Of course, baptism alone is not sufficient. D&C 20:29 declares “that all men must repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ, and worship the Father in his name, and endure in faith on his name to the end, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of

⁵ Some critics have objected that, since General Authorities receive compensation for their full-time service, the LDS Church cannot truly be said to have an “unpaid ministry.” But the salaries paid to these few dozen men fades into insignificance when one considers the tens of thousands of stake and district presidencies, bishoprics and branch presidencies, that receive no compensation for their time.

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God.” This is a paraphrase of 2 Nephi 9:23-24:

And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it.

Nephi, after speaking of baptism (2 Nephi 31:17), counseled his readers to “endure to the end” through Christ in order to “be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:20-21), and several other Book of Mormon passages speak of being “saved in the kingdom” (1 Nephi 13:37; 2 Nephi 33:12; Jacob 6:4; Alma 11:37; Ether 15:34; Moroni 10:21, 26; see 3 Nephi 11:33; 12:20).

The conditions outlined for baptism in D&C 20:37 are drawn from Moroni 6:1-3, which is based on the earlier practice from the time of Alma₂, noted in Alma 6:2.⁶ In both 3 Nephi 11:23 and D&C 20:72, we find instructions that baptism is to be administered to those who repent, confirmed in Moroni 6:2.⁷ The

⁶ The mention of the reception of the Spirit in connection with remission of sins in D&C 20:37 may have been prompted by the fact that the conditions for baptism in Moroni 6:1-3 are immediately followed by the statement that those who “had been received unto baptism . . . were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 6:4).

⁷ That baptism is unto repentance is affirmed in Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4; Mosiah 26:21-22; Alma 5:62; 6:2; 7:14-15; 8:10; 9:27; 48:19; 49:30; Helaman 3:24; 5:17, 19; 3 Nephi 1:23; 7:24-26; Moroni 8:10-11. See also Acts 2:38; 2 Nephi 9:23-24; 13:11, 13-14; 31:17; 62:45; Helaman 16:4-5; 3 Nephi 11:37-38; 18:11, 30; 21:6; 23:5; 27:16, 20; 30:2; 4 Nephi 1:1; Mormon 3:2; 7:8; Ether 4:18; Moroni 7:34; 8:25; D&C 13:1 (=JS-H 1:69); 18:22, 41-42; 19:31; 33:11; 35:5; 39:6; 42:7; 49:13; 55:2; 68:25; 84:27; 107:20.

BAPTISM

procedure and wording for baptism found in D&C 20:72-74 is based on Jesus' instructions to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 11:21-26. Today, the only difference in wording of the baptismal prayer is that while the Book of Mormon uses "having authority given me of Jesus Christ" (3 Nephi 11:25), D&C 20:73 reads "having been commissioned of Jesus Christ." But the original of the latter passage, in the 1833 Book of Commandments, was the same as the Book of Mormon reading (BC 24:53), and was changed in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (2:22) to the current wording. The sense, of course, is the same in both versions.

The fourth Article of Faith specifies "baptism by immersion for the remission of sins." Immersion is the method described in the Book of Mormon, in both 3 Nephi 19:10-13 and Mosiah 18:13-16.

YOUNG CHILDREN NOT TO BE BAPTIZED

Moroni cited a letter in which his father, Mormon, condemns the practice of infant baptism (Moroni 8). Mormon wrote that "little children need no repentance, neither baptism. Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins" (Moroni 8:11). The idea is repeated in D&C 20:71: "No one can be received into the church of Christ unless he has arrived unto the years of accountability before God, and is capable of repentance" (see also D&C 18:42). The age of accountability is established as eight years in D&C 68:25. King Benjamin had already made the distinction between "little children" and those who knew the Lord's plan (Mosiah 2:34; see 26:1-4), while Abinadi taught that "little children also have eternal life" through Christ.

While baptism is not to be administered to young children, D&C 20:70 specifically instructs that they are to be blessed. This verse is patterned after Christ's blessing of children, found in both the Bible (Mark 10:13-16) and in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 17:21).

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND DISCIPLINE

D&C 20:81-83 calls for the keeping of membership records in the Church. Similarly, the Nephites took care to record the names of those who had been baptized (Moroni 6:4). D&C 20:80 requires that “any member of the church of Christ transgressing, or being overtaken in a fault, shall be dealt with as the scriptures direct,” while D&C 20:83 speaks of those who “have been expelled from the church, so that their names may be blotted out of the general church record of names” (see also D&C 109:34).

Among the Nephites, the names of those guilty of unrepentant sins were “blotted out, and they were not numbered among the people of Christ,” while those who repented and confessed their sins were forgiven (Moroni 6:7-8). In the Book of Mormon, this practice is first attested in the time of Alma₁ (Mosiah 26:13-36) and his son (Alma 1:24; 6:3). The restored church followed the same rule, being told by the Lord, “And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the church, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by commandment or by revelation” (D&C 64:12). The “scripture” referred to here is evidently the Book of Mormon.

Confession as a necessary step in the repentance process is also discussed in D&C 42:88-92 and in other modern revelations (D&C 19:20; 58:43, 60; 59:12; 61:2; 64:7). This, too, is a principle found in the Book of Mormon, where we read that the repentant Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah went about seeking to repair the damage that they had done to the church and confessing their sins (Mosiah 27:32-36; Alma 17:4). The Lord told Alma₁, “whosoever transgresseth against me, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed; and if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also” (Mosiah 26:29; see 26:35-36). Similarly, in D&C 82:1, the Lord said, “that inasmuch as you have forgiven one another your trespasses, even so I, the Lord, forgive you.”

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Among the Nephites, conviction of sins could be achieved only if “three witnesses of the church did condemn them before the elders” (Moroni 6:7). D&C 42:80-81 requires that such testimony come from “two witnesses of the church,” but notes that “if there are more than two witnesses it is better.”⁸ That same revelation distinguishes between the kinds of wrongdoing that are judged by the Church and those that must be turned over to civil authorities (D&C 42:74-87). This same principle is found in Mosiah 26:1-12, where we read that king Mosiah left to the high priest Alma¹ the right to judge those found in sin; nevertheless, the king continued to punish those who committed specific crimes such as strife, theft, and murder (Mosiah 29:14-15). The distinction between civil and religious wrongs continued into the period of the judges (Alma 1:17-18; 30:7-11).

HOME TEACHING

Moroni 6:4 makes it clear that recording the names of members of the Church was to make it possible to nourish them “by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer” (Moroni 6:4). This reminds us of D&C 20:47, 51, 53-54, which establishes the duties of teachers to “visit the house of every member, and exhort them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties.” The Nephites “were strict to observe that there should be no iniquity among them” (Moroni 6:7), and modern home teachers are to “see that there is no iniquity in the church” (D&C 20:54). They are also to “see that the church meet together often, and also see that all the members do their duty” (D&C 20:55; see verse 75). Among the Nephites, “the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls” (Moroni 6:5; see verse 6). Jesus also commanded the

⁸ Compare D&C 6:28; 128:3, where we read that “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.”

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Nephites to “pray in your families unto the Father” and to “meet together oft” (3 Nephi 18:21-22).

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

D&C 20:75 notes that “it is expedient that the church meet together often to partake of bread and wine in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus.” Again, the idea is paralleled in the Book of Mormon, where we read, “And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls. And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus” (Moroni 6:5). This practice was based on Jesus’ commandment in 3 Nephi 18:22, but it is also attested in Alma 6:6.

Moroni gives the sacramental prayers in Moroni 4, as they are found in D&C 20:76-79, noting that “the elder or priest did minister it--And they did kneel down with the church, and pray to the Father in the name of Christ, saying . . .” (Moroni 4:1-2). D&C 20:76 also specifies that “the elder or priest shall administer it; and after this manner shall he administer it—he shall kneel with the church, and call upon the Father in solemn prayer, saying . . .” (see verses 40, 46, 58).⁹

Christ commanded his Nephite disciples to administer the sacrament to those who had been baptized (3 Nephi 18:11, 30). He further instructed that they should not allow any to partake of the sacrament unworthily,¹⁰ but added that the unbaptized must not be expelled from meetings of the Church (3 Nephi 18:22-23,

⁹ For a study of the development of the sacrament prayers as used by the Nephites, see John W. Welch, “Our Nephite Sacrament Prayers,” in Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1992), 286-289, and the 1986 FARMS paper by the same author, “The Nephite Sacrament Prayers: From King Benjamin’s Speech to Moroni 4-5.”

¹⁰ See Mormon 9:29; 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

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28-32)—a concept already established in the days of Alma₂ (Alma 6:5). Likewise, in a modern revelation, he declared,

Ye are commanded never to cast any one out from your public meetings, which are held before the world. Ye are also commanded not to cast any one who belongeth to the church out of your sacrament meetings; nevertheless, if any have trespassed, let him not partake until he make reconciliation. And again I say unto you, ye shall not cast any out of your sacrament meetings who are earnestly seeking the kingdom—I speak this concerning those who are not of the church. And again I say unto you, concerning your confirmation meetings, that if there be any that are not of the church, that are earnestly seeking after the kingdom, ye shall not cast them out (D&C 46:3-6).

This revelation came as a result of a dispute that arose in the early days of the restored Church regarding whether non-members should be allowed to attend such meetings. Those who opposed exclusion of the unbaptized pointed to the Book of Mormon teachings on the subject as evidence for their view, and this was confirmed by the Lord in his words to the prophet Joseph Smith.¹¹

Jesus' instructions to the Nephites regarding the unbaptized were, "ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name; and if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood" (3 Nephi 18:30). It is interesting that, in D&C 46:4-6, the instruction to "not cast any out" of the meetings is also

¹¹ See John Whitmer's *History of the Church*, chapter 4, cited in a footnote to D&C 46 in *History of the Church* 1:163-4.

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followed by the instruction to pray. In this case, however, the Saints are to pray “that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils” (D&C 46:7)—a concept that is related to Nephi’s instructions in 2 Nephi 32:8.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PRAYER

We have noted the duty of home teachers to instruct the Saints to pray. Some early revelations instructed specific individuals to “pray vocally before the world as well as in secret, in your family, and among your friends, and in all places” (D&C 23:6; D&C 19:28). This same principle was taught by Amulek during his missionary service among the Zoramites. After listing the various places and circumstances in which one should pray (Alma 34:17-26), he added, “Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you” (Alma 34:27), then noted that prayer avails nothing unless one is charitable and assists the needy and the sick (Alma 34:28-29). Christ also instructed the Nephites to “pray in my church, among my people who do repent and are baptized in my name” (3 Nephi 18:16).

LAW OF CONSECRATION

The book of Mormon recounts that, following Christ’s visit to the Nephites and his selection of twelve disciples, “they taught, and did minister one to another; and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another” (3 Nephi 26:19). Within two years,

the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. And they had all things

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common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift (4 Nephi 1:2-3).¹²

This era of peace lasted for two centuries. It came to an end when some began to flaunt their wealth and would no longer help the poor. These actions led to class divisions that resulted in the establishment of apostate churches (4 Nephi 1:24-26).

But the basis of the Nephite law requiring that the rich share with the poor goes back to the time of Alma₁:

Alma commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given. And thus they should impart of their substance of their own free will and good desires towards God, and to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul . . . imparting to one another both temporally and spiritually according to their needs and their wants. (Mosiah 18:27-29)

The practice continued in the days of Alma₂, of which we read, that the Nephites “did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted” (Alma 1:27).

In Joseph Smith’s day, the Lord commanded “that certain men . . . shall be appointed by the voice of the church; and they shall look to the poor and the needy, and administer to their relief

¹² Joseph Smith learned by revelation that Enoch’s people also practiced the law of consecration (Moses 7:18-21).

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that they should not suffer” (D&C 38:34-35). This imparting of goods “unto the poor and the needy” through the consecration of surplus property is also commanded in subsequent revelations (D&C 51:1-14; 72:9-12; 104:18; see D&C 70:7-11; 72:15-16). As in the case of the Nephites, stewardships were appointed to make “every man equal according to his family, according to his circumstances and his wants and needs” (D&C 51:3).

THE BOOK OF MORMON AS A SOURCE OF CHURCH DOCTRINE

The importance of the Book of Mormon in establishing Church doctrine cannot be overemphasized. The Lord has commanded that “the elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fulness of the gospel” (D&C 42:12). The earliest missionaries of the Church went forth with the message of the restoration and of the translation of the Book of Mormon, which became the tool by which many early members came to accept Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling.

The Lord declared that “the Book of Mormon and the holy scriptures are given of me for your instruction” (D&C 33:16) and later castigated Church members because they did not “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 84:55-57).

In a letter addressed to the bishop and the Saints in Zion, Missouri, dated January 14, 1833, the conference of high priests at Kirtland recommended that the bishop read the revelation and “tell them to read the Book of Mormon, and obey it; read the commandments that are printed, and obey them” (*History of the Church* 1:320). The importance of the Book of Mormon for Church doctrine was stressed by Joseph Smith at a conference held April 21, 1834, when he declared, “Take away the Book of

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Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion We have none” (*History of the Church* 2:52).

An official declaration by the leaders of the Church in Missouri, issued in July 1834, declares that “the faith and religion of the Latter-day Saints are founded upon the old Scriptures, the Book of Mormon, and direct revelation from God” (*History of the Church* 2:133). The importance of these three sources of scripture—known today as the “standard works”—is also stressed in the minutes of the high council meeting held in Kirtland on September 24, 1834, under the presidency of Joseph Smith, which speak of the appointment of “a committee to arrange the items of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, for the government of the Church of Latter-day Saints, which Church was organized and commenced its rise on the 6th of April, 1830. These items are to be taken from the Bible, Book of Mormon, and the revelations which have been given to the Church up to this date, or that shall be given until such arrangements are made” (*History of the Church* 2:165).¹³

So important was the Book of Mormon to the restored Church that one of its early members, Almon W. Babbitt, was brought up “before a council of the Presidency . . . for not keeping the Word of Wisdom; *for stating the Book of Mormon was not essential to our salvation*, and that we have no articles of faith except the Bible” (*History of the Church* 2:252).

The Lord informed the Saints that one of the purposes of the Book of Mormon was to “bring to light the true points of my doctrine,” to “establish my gospel, that there may not be so much contention . . . concerning the points of my doctrine” (D&C 10:62-63). Here, we shall discuss some of the doctrines of the

¹³ The result was the “doctrine” portion of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, which comprised the Lectures on Faith, a series of lessons used in the school of the prophets. The “covenants” portion comprised the revelations given to Joseph Smith, some of which had been previously published in 1833 in the Book of Commandments, forerunner to the Doctrine and Covenants. The first section in our Doctrine and Covenants was originally intended as the “preface” to the Book of Commandments (D&C 1:6).

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Church that are based on teachings found in the Book of Mormon. As with early Church practices, we shall see that some of these are found in D&C 20.

Unity of the Godhead. D&C 20:28 declares that the “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God, infinite and eternal, without end.” The wording is taken directly from the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 31:21; Mosiah 15:5; Alma 11:44; 3 Nephi 11:27; Mormon 7:7). The role of the Holy Ghost as one who bears record of the Father and the Son (D&C 20:27) also derives from the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 12:18; 3 Nephi 11:32, 35-36; 28:11; Ether 12:41).

Salvation & Judgment. The essential message of the plan of salvation, as noted earlier, is that Christ’s atonement brought salvation and that he expects certain things of us. The idea of justification and sanctification through Christ and loving God with one’s might, mind, and strength, found in D&C 20:30-34, also appears in Moroni 10:32-33.

The laws by which we shall be judged are found in the revelations of God. In D&C 20:20, we read that “by the transgression of these holy laws man became sensual and devilish, and became fallen man.” Similar wording is found in Mosiah 16:3, Alma 42:10, Helaman 12:4, and Ether 3:2.

Speaking of “the holy scriptures” (D&C 20:11), we read that “by them shall the world be judged.” Christ had told the Nephites that “out of the books which have been written, and which shall be written, shall this people be judged” (3 Nephi 27:25-26).

Preaching Repentance. The concept of repentance as an essential principle of the gospel is found throughout the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants and has always been emphasized by the leadership of the Church. Earlier, we saw that baptism was administered by the Nephites only to those who were repentant, and that the Lord has established the same pattern in the restored Church.

Alma₁ instructed his people “that they should teach

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nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets. Yea, even he commanded them that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who had redeemed his people” (Mosiah 18:19-20). The concept of teaching only the revealed word of God and of emphasizing faith and repentance is one of the most frequently quoted instructions in the Doctrine & Covenants (D&C 6:9; 11:9; 14:8; 15:6; 16:6; 19:31; 34:6; 36:6).

The New Jerusalem. From the Book of Mormon, the early Latter-day Saints learned that there would be a “new Jerusalem” built on the American continent (3 Nephi 20:22; 21:23-24; Ether 13:2-6). The promise of a future Zion or New Jerusalem was also contained in the prophecy of Enoch, revealed to Joseph Smith in December, 1830 (Moses 7:62). Two months later, the Lord promised Joseph that he would reveal its location to him (D&C 42:9, 35, 62, 67; 45:64-68). At length the site of Zion or the New Jerusalem was designated as Independence, Missouri (D&C 84:2-4; *History of the Church* 1:188f, 359; see Articles of Faith 10). On several occasions, Joseph Smith and other early Church leaders tied the establishment of this new city with the Book of Mormon prophecies (*History of the Church* 2:52, 128, 261-2).

The Lord’s Law of Warfare. In August, 1833, Joseph Smith received a revelation in which the Lord outlined his law of warfare for the benefit of members of the Church being persecuted by the Missouri mobs. He declared that the Saints would be blessed if they took no action after the first, second, and third attacks on their settlements, but that they would be justified in retaliating after that (D&C 98:23-31). He further declared he had commanded “Nephi, and thy fathers, Joseph, and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham, and all mine ancient prophets and apostles . . . that they should not go out unto battle” unless commanded, and that they should thrice “lift up a standard of peace” to aggressors before they would be justified in taking action (D&C 98:32-44).

That this was the law among the Nephites is confirmed in Alma 43:46, where we read that “the Lord had said unto them, and

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also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies.” In Mormon’s day, the Lord declared, “thrice have I delivered them out of the hands of their enemies,” but instead of repenting, the Nephites swore to avenge themselves against the Lamanites, in consequence of which Mormon relinquished his position as commander of the Nephite armies (Mormon 3:13-16).

The effect of following the Lord’s law of warfare was that Moroni, “knowing that it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands, and their liberty, and their church, therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem” (Alma 43:30; see verse 23). A later Nephite general, Gidgiddoni, rejected suggestions that he launch an attack on the Gadianton robbers, saying that “if we should go up against them the Lord would deliver us into their hands” (3 Nephi 3:20-21).¹⁴ Though the robbers planned to attack the Nephites, they had not yet come against them. The basic law was that neither the Latter-day Saints nor the Nephites should be the aggressors, though they were allowed to defend their families (D&C 98:31-33; Alma 43:23; 48:10, 14-16).

Religious Tolerance. The eleventh Article of Faith declares, “We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.” The Lord instructed Joseph Smith, “contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil” (D&C 18:20). This concept of religious tolerance is also found in the early Nephite church: “Now there was a strict law among the people of the church, that there should not any man, belonging to the church, arise and persecute those that did not belong to the church, and

¹⁴ Centuries later, Mormon noted that the Lord would not sustain the Nephites when they launched an offensive against the Lamanites rather than fighting a defensive war (Mormon 4:1-5).

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that there should be no persecution among themselves” (Alma 1:21; see also Mosiah 27:2-4). As a result, there were Nephites who did not belong to the church that God had established among them (Mosiah 27:1, 8; Alma 4:11; 5:62).

Their belief and practice of religious liberty was one of the things that set the Nephites apart from many ancient peoples. The principle is explained in Alma 30:7-11:

Now there was no law against a man's belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds. For thus saith the scripture: Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve. Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege; or rather, if he believed in God it was his privilege to serve him; but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him. But if he murdered he was punished unto death; and if he robbed he was also punished; and if he stole he was also punished; and if he committed adultery he was also punished; yea, for all this wickedness they were punished. For there was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes. Nevertheless, there was no law against a man's belief; therefore, a man was punished only for the crimes which he had done; therefore all men were on equal grounds.

The same principle is held in the restored Church, as explained in D&C 134:4-5:

We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others; but we do not believe that

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human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul. We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments; and that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected, and should be punished accordingly; and that all governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest; at the same time, however, holding sacred the freedom of conscience.

Because their system of government was the source of their religious liberty, the Nephites felt it their duty to defend both. Thus, we read that they “had sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government” (Alma 51:6). Alma 43:47 declares that “the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.”

The Nephite chief captain, Moroni, tied “faith . . . religion . . . rites of worship . . . church” and family to “that liberty which binds us to our lands and our country” (Alma 44:5). For this reason, when a crisis arose in his nation, he prepared a banner and wrote on it, “In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children” (Alma 46:12). Nephite soldiers rallied around the banner to “enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord

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God may bless them” (Alma 46:20; see also Alma 48:13; 54:10).

CONCLUSION

It seems obvious that God expects his people to follow the same basic practices and beliefs in different dispensations. From this point-of-view, we are not surprised to find modern revelations finding agreement with both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. But while both of these ancient volumes of scripture give much information about the plan of salvation, the Bible is mostly silent on how the early Christian church operated. Such is not the case with the Book of Mormon, where we have a fair amount of detail about many Church practices.

Church leaders have emphasized time and again that the Book of Mormon was not written for the Nephites, from whose records it was drawn, but for our day. Moroni hid the plates containing the book in a deliberate attempt to preserve them for a future generation. He wrote of Joseph Smith, who would bring the record to light (Mormon 8:16) and declared to his latter-day audience, “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me” (Mormon 8:35). His words in Ether 5:1-4 were addressed specifically to Joseph Smith:

And now I, Moroni, have written the words which were commanded me, according to my memory; and I have told you the things which I have sealed up; therefore touch them not in order that ye may translate; for that thing is forbidden you, except by and by it shall be wisdom in God. And behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work; And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true. And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these

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things be established; and the testimony of three, and this work, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record—and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day.

Immediately before recording the information that details such things as ordination to the priesthood, the blessing of the sacrament, the conditions for baptism, procedures for Church membership and discipline, and the conducting of Church meetings (Moroni 2-6), Moroni expressed the desire that these “few more things . . . may be of worth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day” (Moroni 1:4). In order for his desire to be fulfilled, it was necessary that the Church be restored to the earth.

It is clear that Moroni and his father Mormon deliberately included in the abridged record information that they knew would be helpful to Joseph Smith in reorganizing the Church on the earth in the last days. Once he had translated the Nephite record into English, Joseph had all of the essentials necessary to establish a fully-functioning Church, once the priesthood was restored.