

The Book is True

by James S. Menzies

The Bible's message never grows old the story of a living God who constantly ministered to his people when they attempted to faithfully serve him. It covers a four-thousand-year span of varying history during which time direct communication between heaven and earth seemed to cease only when men rebelled (Isaiah 59:1,2). The love of the Almighty and his willingness to continue to bless men with his revelation of himself is evidenced by his declaration: "I am the Lord, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). The love of Christ and his willingness to continue such blessings of revelation is also clear: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). This promise of continuing power was conditioned upon the disciples' faithfulness to Christ's command of "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20).

DIVIDED CHRISTIANITY

Today Christianity is seriously divided, and the teachings of Jesus are interpreted in several hundred different ways. In many places the promised blessings are not even expected. This confusion has been largely responsible for the slow and halting progress of Christian evangelism and its lack of confirming power in many non-Christian nations. In Christian nations it has also been. bewildered many, and often the question has been asked, "Where is truth?" Some have longed for God to move directly with men as in Bible times and by his clear action make his ways known.

A MARVELOUS TESTIMONY

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints believes that the Almighty has done just this -- that in the miraculous events surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon the living God of the Bible once more shows his undiminished power; in the record of the Book of Mormon the love of God for all races is more completely revealed; and in the teachings of the Book of Mormon unity of understanding replaces confusion as the Spirit of God certifies the truthfulness of its message.

The Book of Mormon claims to be an authoritative history of a great pre-Columbian civilization of America -- Israelitish colonies brought from Bible lands by divine guidance and established in the New World in harmony with divine covenants previously made through the prophets with their forefathers. (See Genesis 49:1,22-26; Deuteronomy 33:13-17.) It records the greatness of the heavenly Father's love as he ministered to these ancients through prophets raised up for them by his power. In the fullness of his love God sent them his Son, Jesus Christ, after his resurrection and ascension from the land of Palestine.

It relates how Christ established his church among them to administer his divine ordinances and extend the power and blessings of his spirit, and how a marvelous social system of equity, righteousness, and justice developed, attended by heavenly blessings -- the fruitage of the acceptance and application of the full gospel of Jesus Christ. It also tells of the rapid degeneration of this civilization when, after several generations, the people turned from the teachings of the Lord. Great fratricidal wars broke out among them. Mormon, the last prophet-writer (from whom the book gets its name), was commanded to conceal their record that it might be preserved as a testimony to a people who would later possess America.

In our generation the existence of this sacred record was made known by an angel of God to a young man, Joseph Smith. Its exact hiding place was revealed in a vision. By divine power the ancient inscriptions were translated into English. In 1830 the Book of Mormon was published.

PROPHECIES FULFILLED

That such an event as this was to take place was clearly known to the prophets of old. Notice how the prophetic insight of Isaiah is vindicated as he foresaw a condition of spiritual perplexity and confusion.

"Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger but not with strong drink." -- Isaiah 29:9.

The condition of the religious world, with many denying the possibility of revelation from God, was precisely pointed out:

"For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered." -- Isaiah 29:10.

The Lord promised that in the midst of such conditions, he would restore spiritual power. By means of a "vision," a "book" was to be brought to the attention "of all."

"And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed:

"And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned." -- Isaiah 29:11,12.

Neither the learned nor the unlearned were able to translate it of themselves. Divine aid, however, was promised that the book's testimony would be heard:

"Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of man:

"Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." -- Isaiah 29:13,14.

With the appearance of the book, men previously deaf to the word of God were to hear; those once blind to the glory of the Eternal Father were to see:

"And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness." -- Isaiah 29:18.

This book, foreseen by the prophet, is to add its testimony to that of the Bible, bringing further joyful news of Christ. Because of it, "The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 29:19).

THE TIME FACTOR IN PROPHECY

In order that these prophecies might be authenticated for those who seriously investigate them, the Lord has identified the time of their fulfillment. Isaiah, in direct association with the "vision" and the "book," declared:

"Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall

be esteemed as a forest?" -- Isaiah 29:17.

Since the vision of Joseph Smith in 1823 and the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830 remarkable changes have taken place in previously unproductive and somewhat backward Lebanon, Palestine's neighbor to the north:

"The mixed population, as a whole, displays the usual characteristics of mountaineers. . . but its ancient truculence has given way before strong government action since the nineteenth century and the great increase of agriculture pursuits, to which the purely pastoral are now secondary.

"The culture of the mulberry and silk, of tobacco, of the olive and vine, of many kinds of fruits and cereals, has expanded enormously, and Lebanon is now probably the most productive region in Asiatic Turkey in proportion to its area." -- Encyclopaedia Britannica, eleventh edition.

We have been urged to "search the scriptures" (John 5:39) and directed to "take heed" to such "sure word of prophecy" (II Peter 1:19). Appearing in such precise fulfillment of Bible prophecy, at such an exact time in history as the scriptures foretold, the Book of Mormon is supported as to its divine authenticity and invites serious investigation of its message.

WITNESSES TESTIFY

Just as our heavenly Father required faith of the people in Christ's day, so he requires faith in his continuing love and power in our day; but he guarantees that such faith shall be founded in prophecy and fact and not simple credulity. When Christ arose from the dead he appeared "not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God" (Acts 10:41). When the Sonship of Jesus Christ was to be revealed, it was to the special witnesses -- Peter, James, and John on the mount of Transfiguration -- that a voice from heaven attested, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 17:5). In our day the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon was similarly certified to the witnesses, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer. While they were engaged in prayer an angel of God showed them the plates from which it was translated, while a voice from heaven declared, "The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you: to bear record of what you now see and hear."¹ Eight other witnesses were shown the plates by Joseph Smith and were also permitted to handle them. None of these eleven witnesses ever denied his testimony.

David Whitmer, an aging man and the last of the witnesses, wrote this letter forty six years after the event:

"Richmond, Missouri,
March 2nd. 1875 H. Forscutt

"Mr. Mark "Dear Sir:

"My testimony to the world is writ ten concerning the Book of Mormon, and it is the same I gave at first and it is the same as shall stand to my latest hour in life, linger with me in death and shine as gospel truth beyond the limits of life, among the tribunals of heaven, and that the nations of the earth will have known too late the divine truth written on the pages of that book is the only sorrow of this servant of the Almighty Father.

"DAVID WHITMER"²

In the Chicago Sunday Times of December 20, 1885, this question and answer appeared in an editorial:

"Do people in general want to know the truth about Joseph Smith? ... Apparently they do not. ... At last accounts, David Whitmer, the last of the original testifiers of the existence of the golden plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, was approaching death at his home in Richmond, Missouri. He went to that state over forty years ago. ... His neighbors of every sort of political and religious predilections unite in giving him an exceedingly high character for honesty, truthfulness, and courage. No man, it is said, ever doubted his word in regard to any ordinary matter. Why should not the testimony of a man so truthful, so honest, so courageous, be accepted in relation to the golden plates and the character of the man who professed to find them?"³

Why not indeed, and why not the testimony of the other ten men who were also witnesses? Ridicule was heaped upon these men because of their testimony; persecutions came their way; some of them separated from the church because of offenses-yet not one of them ever denied his testimony! The united and unchanged testimony of these eleven latter-day witnesses is a powerful assurance of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCES

Added to the testimony' of the sacred scriptures and to that of faithful witnesses is a further evidence-the ancient and extensive ruins of the banished races of the Western Hemisphere. In 1830 when the Book of Mormon was published little was known of these ancient people or of their traditions and beliefs. Since that time additional archaeological discoveries have been made, and many manuscripts written by the Spanish conquerors and sent back to their superiors in Spain at the time of the conquest have been located and translated into English. These evidences powerfully support the Book of Mormon testimony that Jesus Christ visited and ministered to these ancient people.

For example, the Book of Mormon affirms that these ancient people in America knew of Jesus Christ and his role as preexistent creator.⁴ Prophets among them foreknew of his incarnation and virgin birth in Palestine.⁵ At the time of his crucifixion a great storm accompanied by unprecedented upheavals devastated their land and obliterated many cities.⁶ At the end of three hours this storm was stilled and the voice of the Lord was heard calling the survivors to repentance.⁷ Darkness, however, continued to envelop them for three days before it was dispersed.⁸ Sometime after his ascension from Palestine he descended in white garments to these waiting worshipers, thus fulfilling the prophecies of Ezekiel 34:6;11,12; and John 10:16.⁹ While in their midst he healed their sick,¹⁰ blessed their children,¹¹ taught his gospel laws, and established his church and its ordinances.¹² He then prophesied of their subsequent apostasy and collapse,¹³ the far-distant coming of the Europeans,¹⁴ and then ascended¹⁵ after promising to return at a future time in glory.¹⁶

So profound and so lasting was the impression of this visit upon their culture that in spite of the great span of years the Spanish conquerors still found these basic beliefs persisting at the time of the conquest.

Dr. Daniel Brinton, former professor of American archaeology and linguistics in the University of Pennsylvania, writes of this "fundamental myth of a very large number of American tribes," a myth "so prominent" that upon "its recognition and interpretation depends the correct understanding of most of their mythology and religious life":

"The outlines of this legend are to the effect that in some exceedingly remote time this divinity took an active part in creating the world and in fitting it to be the abode of man, and may himself have formed or called forth the race. At any rate, his interest in its advancement was such that he personally appeared among the ancestors of the nation, and taught them the useful arts, gave them the maize or other food plants, initiated them into the mysteries of their religious rites, framed the laws which governed their social relations, and having thus started them on the road to self-development, he left them, not suffering

death, but disappearing in some way from their view. Hence, it was nigh universally expected that at some time he would return. ...

"The place of his birth is nearly always located in the East; from that quarter he first came when he appeared as a man among men; toward that point he returned when he disappeared; and there he still lives, awaiting the appointed time for his reappearance. Whenever the personal appearance of this hero-god is described it is, strangely enough, represented to be that of one of the white race, a man of fair complexion, with long, flowing beard, with abundant hair, and clothed in ample and loose robes. This extraordinary fact naturally suggests the gravest suspicion that these stories were made up after the whites had reached the American shores, and nearly all historians have summarily rejected their authenticity, on this account. But a most careful scrutiny of their sources positively refutes this opinion. There is irrefragable evidence that these myths, and this ideal of the hero-god, were intimately known and widely current in America long before anyone of its millions of inhabitants had ever seen a white man."¹⁷

Pictures carved in stone of this deity in temples of antiquity confirm the pre-Columbian origin of these pervasive beliefs. The account obtained by Cieza de Leon from the natives at the time of the conquest confirms further details of the Book of Mormon testimony:

"For they declare that they were a long time without seeing the sun, and that, suffering much evil from its absence, great prayers and vows were offered up to their gods, imploring for the light they needed. ... Presently afterwards, they say, that there came from a southern direction a white man of great stature, who, by his aspect and presence, called forth great veneration and obedience. This man who thus appeared had great power, insomuch that he could change plains into mountains, and great hills into valleys, and make water flow out of stones. As soon as such power was beheld, the people called him the Maker of created things. the Prince of all things, Father of the Sun. For they say that he performed other wonders, giving life to men and animals, so that by his hand marvelous great benefits were conferred on the people, ... In many places he gave orders to men how they should live, and he spoke lovingly to them and with much gentleness, admonishing them that they should do good, and no evil or injury to another, and that they should be loving and charitable to all."¹⁸

Imperfect and vague as archaeology and tradition may be over great spans of years, when united -- as they are in this case -- they confirm the central witness of the Book of Mormon, the ministry of Jesus Christ to these people.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

There is a definite promise in every Book of Mormon that any honest person may claim -- the promise that those who will prayerfully investigate it may know by the power of the spirit of God the truthfulness of its message.

An interesting example of such an experience is found in the case of Joseph Luff, a young minister who was living in London, Ontario, Canada, in 1876. He had read some literature of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and was mildly interested but well- content with the truth which he possessed. In this paragraph he describes what occurred as he continued his investigation:

"Having heard considerable about the Book of Mormon, I secured a copy and shut myself up in the parlor nearly all day to read it. While thus engaged I was visited several times by as peaceful an influence as ever pervaded my frame. ... The persuasive force of that influence drew tears from my eyes and praise from my lips almost involuntarily and my suspicions regarding the book melted under it It was strange to me then, for it was no mere feeling of gladness or ecstacy but the distinct consciousness of a presence and power near me that was associated in some way with the book." -- The Auto biography of Elder Joseph

Luff, pp. 133, 134.

Wondering whether this beautiful influence was the manner in which the spirit of God manifest itself in former times, and wondering if the spiritual gifts in this organization were genuine expressions from God, he attended a prayer service. During the service he offered a silent prayer, asking if the influence which he had so richly enjoyed was the spirit of God. And he prayed that if this church was approved of heaven, the Lord would speak to him in the anciently enjoyed gift of prophecy through a young boy, Robert Parker (at that time only ten years old) and instruct him further of the divine will. He records the answer to that unspoken prayer in the following words:

"When the number so desiring had prayed vocally, the company rose and was seated, and the singing and testimony were resumed. Soon Robbie, as he was familiarly called, stood up and began to speak as any child of that age would in testimony. He had not uttered many words till his face became waxen and the tears started from his eyes and flowed profusely down his cheek, and turning till he faced me, he raised his hand and said, as nearly as I can remember: 'Verily, thus saith the Lord God unto you, O son of man, Go now and obey my gospel, for this is indeed my church. It Is my will that you shall be baptized at the hands of one of these my servants, for you have received of my Spirit, saith the Lord.' " -- Ibid., p. 136.

The prayer of Joseph Luff had been completely answered, and in words beyond the ordinary ability of a ten-year-old child to frame the answer had the question been audibly asked of him. Joseph Luff obeyed the instructions, and for the remaining years of his full life served with honor and distinction as a missionary.

IN OUR TIME

Another remarkable experience in modern times is recorded by a distinguished minister, Evangelist E. Y. Hunker.

"Twenty-one years ago at this time of year I came to Independence (Missouri) and for the first time in my life was having direct contact with Latter Day Saints. By the door of the living room in the home where I roomed was a small stand table and on it a copy of the Book of Mormon. My prejudice against it, however, was so strong that I never touched the book but eyed it with suspicion, feeling surely that it was a book of satanic power and inspiration. Then one morning as I was waiting for my lunch to be packed, being in the room alone, I cautiously and gingerly reached out and picked up the Book of Mormon. The book in my hand came open at the flyleaf that carried the brief statement of the nature of the record. These words seemed to flash out at me: '... and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations. And now, if there are faults, they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ.'

"Those last words burned into my consciousness like a fire. I hastily closed the book and threw it down on the table. All day while I was at work those words would bum in my memory, and I found it impossible not to think of them. As prejudiced as I was, I realized that any work that had as its purpose the convincing of nations that Jesus is the Christ was not a satanic mission, yet I did not wish to bring myself to believe that there was or could be any good whatever in the Book of Mormon. Day and night, however, those words hammered at me until I asked myself if it might be possible that in my stubborn prejudice I was actually withholding something God wished to share with me.

"After a number of days I decided to read the Book of Mormon. I planned to compare it with the Bible and to endeavor to prove that it was entirely out of harmony therewith. I told my cousin that I would read the book, but I expected to find it false, and inasmuch as J did would declare it to all I knew. She smiled

kindly and replied, 'That is just what we want you to do.'

"Each night after returning from work I would go to my room and, before beginning to read the Book of Mormon, I would kneel in prayer to ask divine direction that I might not be deceived by any strange spirit not of God. I really hoped I should find those things in the book that would satisfy me that it was false. I found, however, that as I continued to read I came to feel an increasing spiritual warmth that I had often felt when I had read the New Testament narrative of the birth and mission of Christ. The quickening was unmistakable, but I did not feel satisfied at the first about its origin, so I continued to pray for guidance and light. The presence of spiritual power became so marked as I progressed with my study that I would find tears coming to my eyes. I would lay the book aside and pray that I might not be misguided by such spiritual experience; then, as I would return to my reading, I would find it increasing in power.

"By the time I was half way through it I was convinced that no mere person could have written a book like that. So powerfully did the Spirit of God witness to me the divinity of the book that when on page 775 I read, 'And when ye receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost; and by the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things,' I knew by my own experience that these words were true, and that I had a divine witness to the validity of the Book of Mormon story."

As a result of this experience and the further guidance of God Mr. Hunker united with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and hundreds have been blessed through his ministry. As in earlier days, God continues to bear witness of his work.

A QUESTION

This question appeared in an editorial in the Des Moines Register, October 10, 1930:

"Now here is something that happened or did not happen. ... Ought there not be some way for an impartial investigation into the facts of the Ending of the golden plates? Shall we ever get far with what we call civilization until we have ascertained the actual facts of the record?"

This is indeed a relevant question. If the almighty Ruler of the universe has guided ancient peoples by his power; if he has given us an additional testimony of Jesus Christ, clear and well attested; if he has intervened directly by spiritual power in our generation by vision and prophecy should we not investigate this hopeful message? When the scriptures bear witness that by means of a "vision" a "book" speaking of "the Holy One of Israel" was to come to the attention of men before the restoration of Lebanon to fruitfulness (a fact now accomplished); when eleven men, ridiculed and persecuted but unchanging to death, affirm that they saw the metallic plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated; when archaeological ruins support the legend of the natives (a legend deeply cherished at the time of the conquest that the preexistent, virgin-born Creator of the universe, as a bearded white man from another culture, had ministered to them); when honorable men of the highest integrity affirm that the heavenly Father has powerfully assured them by his Spirit that the record is true and essential-should we not take advantage of the promise of spiritual confirmation that is extended to all?

This confirmation is extended by the Almighty directly to you:

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; "And if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost; and by the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things." -- Moroni 10:4,5.

We suggest that you prayerfully read the Book of Mormon, think upon the love of God revealed from the days of Adam until this time, and then, with faith in the resurrected and living Christ, ask God if these things are not true, expecting an answer.

We cannot say how the heavenly Father will give this evidence to you, but we are assured from the testimonies of others and from personal experience that he will confirm his great work today, and that you -- with tens of thousands of others -- will be able to joyfully acclaim, "The book is true!"

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