

“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” chapter 9 in TOPC: Ezra Taft Benson (2014), 125–35.

On January 5, 1986, President Ezra Taft Benson presided at a stake conference in Annandale, Virginia—his first stake conference as President of the Church. Latter-day Saints in attendance were “visibly moved” as they listened to him speak. In his sermon, “he bore testimony of the power of the Book of Mormon to change lives and lead people to Christ.” He issued a “spirited challenge [to] study this book of scripture.”

This message was not new in President Benson’s ministry. As a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he had frequently encouraged Latter-day Saints to study the Book of Mormon and follow its teachings. But as President of the Church, he was inspired to emphasize the message even more. He said: “The Lord inspired His servant Lorenzo Snow to reemphasize the principle of tithing to redeem the Church from financial bondage. . . . Now, in our day, the Lord has revealed the need to reemphasize the Book of Mormon.” President Benson testified of the Book of Mormon wherever he went: in missionary meetings, stake and regional conferences, general conferences, and meetings with General Authorities.

In his first general conference address as President of the Church, President Benson shared one reason for the urgency of this message. “Unless we read the Book of Mormon and give heed to its teachings,” he warned, “the Lord has stated in section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants that the whole Church is under condemnation: ‘And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all’ [D&C 84:56]. The Lord continues: ‘And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written’ [D&C 84:57].”

The following quotations, all from sermons President Benson delivered as President of the Church, provide a sampling of his warnings and promises related to the Book of Mormon:

“Now we not only need to *say* more about the Book of Mormon, but we need to *do* more with it. Why? The Lord answers: ‘That they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father’s kingdom; otherwise there remaineth a scourge and judgment to be poured out

upon the children of Zion’ [D&C 84:58]. We have felt that scourge and judgment!

“... The Book of Mormon has not been, nor is it yet, the center of our personal study, family teaching, preaching, and missionary work. Of this we must repent.”

“We have not been using the Book of Mormon as we should. Our homes are not as strong unless we are using it to bring our children to Christ. Our families may be corrupted by worldly trends and teachings unless we know how to use the book to expose and combat falsehoods. . . . Our missionaries are not as effective unless they are [teaching] with it. Social, ethical, cultural, or educational converts will not survive under the heat of the day unless their taproots go down to the fulness of the gospel which the Book of Mormon contains. Our Church classes are not as Spirit-filled unless we hold it up as a standard.”

“I bless you with increased understanding of the Book of Mormon. I promise you that from this moment forward, if we will daily sup from its pages and abide by its precepts, God will pour out upon each child of Zion and the Church a blessing hitherto unknown—and we will plead to the Lord that He will begin to lift the condemnation—the scourge and judgment. Of this I bear solemn witness.”

“I do not know fully why God has preserved my life to this age, but I do know this: That for the present hour He has revealed to me the absolute need for us to move the Book of Mormon forward now in a marvelous manner. You must help with this burden and with this blessing which He has placed on the whole Church, even all the children of Zion.

“Moses never entered the promised land. Joseph Smith never saw Zion redeemed. Some of us may not live long enough to see the day when the Book of Mormon floods the earth and when the Lord lifts His condemnation. (See D&C 84:54–58.) But, God willing, I intend to spend all my remaining days in that glorious effort.”

The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion.

How important is the Book of Mormon? Joseph Smith called it “the keystone of our religion.” (*History of the Church*, 4:461.) “Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations,” he said, “and where

is our religion? We have none.” (*History of the Church*, 2:52.)

A keystone is the central stone in an arch. It holds all the other stones in place, and if removed, the arch crumbles.

... Just as the arch crumbles if the keystone is removed, so does all the Church stand or fall with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. The enemies of the Church understand this clearly. This is why they go to such great lengths to try to disprove the Book of Mormon, for if it can be discredited, the Prophet Joseph Smith goes with it. So does our claim to priesthood keys, and revelation, and the restored Church. But in like manner, if the Book of Mormon be true—and millions have now testified that they have the witness of the Spirit that it is indeed true—then one must accept the claims of the Restoration and all that accompanies it.

Perhaps there is nothing that testifies more clearly of the importance of this book of scripture than what the Lord Himself has said about it.

By His own mouth He has borne witness (1) that it is true (D&C 17:6), (2) that it contains the truth and His words (D&C 19:26), (3) that it was translated by power from on high (D&C 20:8), (4) that it contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ (D&C 20:9; 42:12), (5) that it was given by inspiration and confirmed by the ministering of angels (D&C 20:10), (6) that it gives evidence that the holy scriptures are true (D&C 20:11), and (7) that those who receive it in faith shall receive eternal life (D&C 20:14).

The Book of Mormon testifies of Jesus Christ and brings us nearer to God.

The major mission of the Book of Mormon, as recorded on its title page, is “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”

The honest seeker after truth can gain the testimony that Jesus is the Christ as he prayerfully ponders the inspired words of the Book of Mormon.

Do we remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon? In the Bible we have the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word *testament* is the English rendering of a Greek word that can also be translated as *covenant*. Is this what the Lord meant when He called the Book of Mormon the “new

covenant”? It is indeed another testament or witness of Jesus. This is one of the reasons why we have recently added the words “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” to the title of the Book of Mormon. ...

The Book of Mormon is the keystone in our witness of Jesus Christ, who is Himself the cornerstone of everything we do. It bears witness of His reality with power and clarity. Unlike the Bible, which passed through generations of copyists, translators, and corrupt religionists who tampered with the text, the Book of Mormon came from writer to reader in just one inspired step of translation. Therefore, its testimony of the Master is clear, undiluted, and full of power. But it does even more. Much of the Christian world today rejects the divinity of the Savior. They question His miraculous birth, His perfect life, and the reality of His glorious resurrection. The Book of Mormon teaches in plain and unmistakable terms about the truth of all of those. It also provides the most complete explanation of the doctrine of the Atonement. Truly, this divinely inspired book is a keystone in bearing witness to the world that Jesus is the Christ.

In the Book of Mormon, the testimony of Jesus Christ is “clear, undiluted, and full of power.”

The Prophet Joseph Smith ... said, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” [*History of the Church*, 4:461]. ... Is there not something deep in our hearts that longs to draw nearer to God, to be more like Him in our daily walk, to feel His presence with us constantly? If so, then the Book of Mormon will help us do so more than any other book. ...

Our beloved brother, President Marion G. Romney, ... who knows of himself of the power that resides in this book, testified of the blessings that can come into the lives of those who will read and study the Book of Mormon. He said:

“I feel certain that if, in our homes, parents will read from the Book of Mormon prayerfully and regularly, both by themselves and with their children, the spirit of that great book will come to permeate our homes and all who dwell therein. The spirit of reverence will increase; mutual respect and consideration for each other will grow. The spirit of contention will depart. Parents will counsel their children in greater love and wisdom. Children will be more responsive and

submissive to the counsel of their parents. Righteousness will increase. Faith, hope, and charity—the pure love of Christ—will abound in our homes and lives, bringing in their wake peace, joy, and happiness” (*Ensign*, May 1980, p. 67).

These promises—increased love and harmony in the home, greater respect between parent and child, increased spirituality and righteousness—are not idle promises, but exactly what the Prophet Joseph Smith meant when he said the Book of Mormon will help us draw nearer to God.

The Book of Mormon teaches true doctrine, confounds false doctrine, and exposes the enemies of Christ.

The Lord Himself has stated that the Book of Mormon contains the “fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (D&C 20:9). That does not mean it contains every teaching, every doctrine ever revealed. Rather, it means that in the Book of Mormon we will find the fulness of those doctrines required for our salvation. And they are taught plainly and simply so that even children can learn the ways of salvation and exaltation. The Book of Mormon offers so much that broadens our understandings of the doctrines of salvation. Without it, much of what is taught in other scriptures would not be nearly so plain and precious.

As far as preaching the gospel is concerned, the Book of Mormon contains the clearest, most concise, and complete explanation. There is no other record to compare with it. In what record do you get such a complete understanding of the nature of the Fall, the nature of physical and spiritual death, the doctrine of the Atonement, the doctrine of justice and mercy as it relates to the Atonement, and the principles and ordinances of the gospel? The Book of Mormon contains the most comprehensive account of these fundamental doctrines.

The Book of Mormon ... verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace. (See 2 Ne. 3:12.)

We ... should know the Book of Mormon better than any other book. Not only should we know what history and faith-promoting stories it contains, but we should understand its teachings. If we really do our homework and approach the Book of Mormon doctrinally, we can expose the errors and find the

truths to combat many of the current false theories and philosophies of men.

I have noted within the Church a difference in discernment, insight, conviction, and spirit between those who know and love the Book of Mormon and those who do not. That book is a great sifter.

The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention. (See 2 Ne. 3:12.) It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time.

The Doctrine and Covenants is the binding link between the Book of Mormon and the continuing work of the Restoration.

I would like to speak particularly about the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. These two great books of latter-day scripture are bound together as revelations from Israel’s God for the purpose of gathering and preparing His people for the second coming of the Lord. ...

To the Prophet Joseph Smith the Lord said, “This generation shall have my word through you” (D&C 5:10). The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants are part of the fulfillment of that promise. Together these two great works of scripture bring great blessings to this generation. ...

Each of these two great latter-day scriptures bears powerful and eloquent witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Virtually every page of both the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Mormon teaches about the Master—His great love for His children and His atoning sacrifice—and teaches us how to live so that we can return to Him and our Heavenly Father.

Each of these two great latter-day books of scripture contains the knowledge and the power to help us live better lives in a time of great wickedness and evil. Those who carefully and prayerfully search the pages of these books will find comfort, counsel, guidance, and the quiet power to improve their lives.

The Doctrine and Covenants is the binding link between the Book of Mormon and the continuing work of the Restoration through the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors.

In the Doctrine and Covenants we learn of temple work, eternal families, the degrees of glory, Church organization, and many other great truths of the Restoration. ...

The Book of Mormon is the “keystone” of our religion, and the Doctrine and Covenants is the capstone, with continuing latter-day revelation. The Lord has placed His stamp of approval on both the keystone and the capstone.

The Doctrine and Covenants is a glorious book of scripture given directly to our generation. It contains the will of the Lord for us in these last days that precede the second coming of Christ. It contains many truths and doctrines not fully revealed in other

scripture. Like the Book of Mormon, it will strengthen those who carefully and prayerfully study from its pages.

Do we, as Saints of the Most High God, treasure the word He has preserved for us at so great a cost? Are we using these books of latter-day revelation to bless our lives and resist the powers of the evil one? This is the purpose for which they were given. How can we not stand condemned before the Lord if we treat them lightly by letting them do no more than gather dust on our shelves?

My beloved brothers and sisters, I bear my solemn witness that these books contain the mind and the will of the Lord for us in these days of trial and tribulation. They stand with the Bible to give witness of the Lord and His work. These books contain the voice of the Lord to us in these latter days. May we turn to them with full purpose of heart and use them in the way the Lord wishes them to be used.