



The Book of Mormon: Keystone of Our Religion

*“I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was
the most correct of any book on earth,
and the keystone of our religion.”*

From the Life of Joseph Smith

More than three years had passed since the morning in 1820 when Joseph Smith had prayed to know which church he should join. The young Prophet was now 17 years old, and he desired to know his standing before God and to receive forgiveness. On the night of September 21, 1823, Joseph retired to his attic bedroom in his family’s log home in Palmyra, New York, but he stayed awake after the others in the room had gone to sleep, earnestly praying to know more about God’s purposes for him. “I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God,” he said, “for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him; for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one” (Joseph Smith—History 1:29).

In answer to his prayer, Joseph saw a light appear in his room that grew brighter and brighter until the room was “lighter than at noonday.” A heavenly messenger appeared at his bedside, standing in the air, wearing a robe of “exquisite whiteness.” (Joseph Smith—History 1:30–31.) This messenger was Moroni, the last Nephite prophet, who centuries earlier had buried the plates upon which the Book of Mormon was written and who now held the keys pertaining to this sacred record (see D&C 27:5). He had been sent to tell Joseph that God had forgiven his sins¹ and had a great work for him to do. As part of this work, Joseph was to go to a nearby hill, where a sacred record, written



Joseph Smith received the gold plates from Moroni on September 22, 1827. "I obtained them," the Propbet testified, "and the Urim and Thummim with them, by the means of which I translated the plates; and thus came the Book of Mormon."

on gold plates, was deposited. This record was written by prophets who had lived anciently upon the American continent. By the gift and power of God, Joseph was to translate the record and bring it forth to the world.

The next day, Joseph went to the hill where the Book of Mormon plates were buried. There he met Moroni and saw the plates, but was told that he would not receive them for four years. He was to begin an important period of preparation that would make him equal to the sacred task of translating the Book of Mormon. Joseph returned to the hill each September 22 for the next four years to receive further instructions from Moroni. (See Joseph Smith—History 1:33–54.) During these years, he also received “many visits from the angels of God unfolding the majesty and glory of the events that should transpire in the last days.”²

This period of preparation also brought the blessing of marriage into the Prophet’s life. In January 1827, he married Emma Hale, whom he had met while he was working in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Emma would be an important help to the Prophet throughout his ministry. On September 22, 1827, she went with him to the hill and waited nearby while Moroni delivered the plates into the Prophet’s hands.

With the sacred record in his possession, Joseph soon discovered why Moroni had warned him to protect the plates (see Joseph Smith—History 1:59–60). A local mob began harassing the Prophet, making repeated efforts to steal the plates. On a wintry day in December 1827, hoping to find a place to work in peace, Joseph and Emma left the Smith family home to seek refuge with Emma’s parents in Harmony. There the Prophet began the work of translation. The following February, Martin Harris, a friend of the Smiths from Palmyra, was inspired to go to Harmony to help the Prophet. With Martin as his scribe, Joseph moved forward with the translation of the sacred record.

The results of the Prophet’s work would later be published as the Book of Mormon. This remarkable book, containing the fullness of the gospel, stands as a testimony of the truthfulness of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith.

Teachings of Joseph Smith

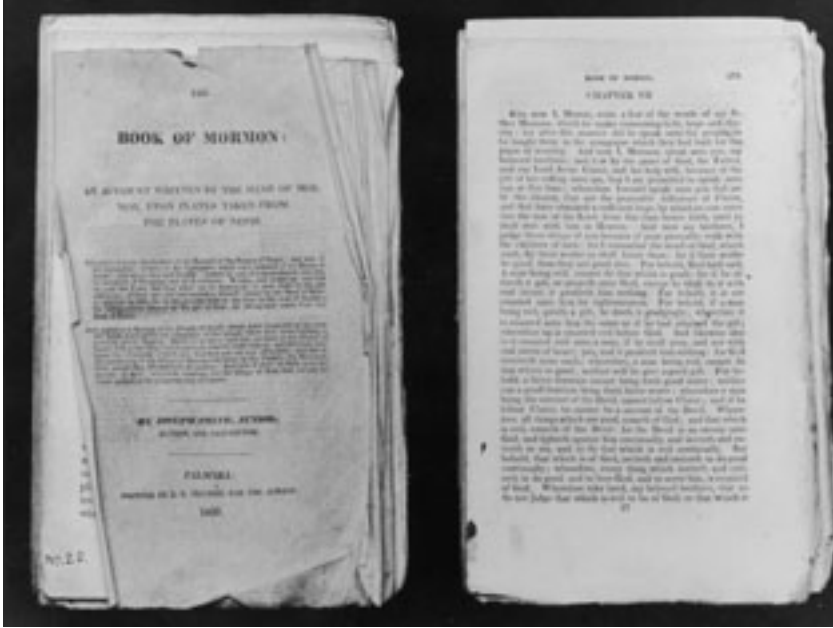
The Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God.

*In response to the question, "How and where did you obtain the Book of Mormon?" Joseph Smith responded: "Moroni, who deposited the plates in a hill in Manchester, Ontario county, New York, being dead and raised again therefrom, appeared unto me, and told me where they were, and gave me directions how to obtain them. I obtained them, and the Urim and Thummim with them, by the means of which I translated the plates; and thus came the Book of Mormon."*³

"I was [told by Moroni] where were deposited some plates on which were engraven an abridgment of the records of the ancient Prophets that had existed on this continent. . . . These records were engraven on plates which had the appearance of gold; each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long, and not quite so thick as common tin. They were filled with engravings, in Egyptian characters, and bound together in a volume as the leaves of a book, with three rings running through the whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed. The characters on the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved. The whole book exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction, and much skill in the art of engraving. With the records was found a curious instrument, which the ancients called 'Urim and Thummim,' which consisted of two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow fastened to a breast plate. Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God."⁴

"By the power of God I translated the Book of Mormon from hieroglyphics, the knowledge of which was lost to the world, in which wonderful event I stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries, with a new revelation."⁵

"I wish to mention here that the title-page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates, which



At left, the title page from the first edition of the Book of Mormon.

contained the record which has been translated, the language of the whole running the same as all Hebrew writing in general [that is, from right to left]; and that said title page is not by any means a modern composition, either of mine or of any other man who has lived or does live in this generation. . . . I give below that part of the title-page of the English version of the Book of Mormon, which is a genuine and literal translation of the title-page of the original Book of Mormon as recorded on the plates:

“THE BOOK OF MORMON.

“*An account written by the hand of Mormon, upon Plates, taken from the Plates of Nephi.*

“Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites—Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile—Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the

Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

“ ‘An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven—Which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—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.’ ”⁶

**The wisdom of the Lord is greater than the
cunning of the devil.**

By June 14, 1828, Joseph Smith’s work on the translation of the Book of Mormon plates had resulted in 116 pages of manuscript. Then an incident occurred that taught the Prophet profound lessons about God’s guiding hand in bringing forth this sacred record. The Prophet recorded: “Some time after Mr. Harris had begun to write for me, he began to importune me to give him liberty to carry the writings home and show them; and desired of me that I would inquire of the Lord, through the Urim and Thummim, if he might not do so. I did inquire, and the answer was that he must not. However, he was not satisfied with this answer, and desired that I should inquire again. I did so, and the answer was as before. Still he could not be contented, but insisted that I should inquire once more.

“After much solicitation I again inquired of the Lord, and permission was granted him to have the writings on certain conditions; which were, that he show them only to his brother, Preserved Harris; his own wife; his father and his mother; and a Mrs. Cobb, a sister to his wife. In accordance with this last answer, I required of him that he should bind himself in a covenant to me in a most solemn manner that he would not do otherwise than

had been directed. He did so. He bound himself as I required of him, took the writings, and went his way. Notwithstanding, however, the great restrictions which he had been laid under, and the solemnity of the covenant which he had made with me, he did show them to others, and by stratagem they got them away from him, and they never have been recovered unto this day.”⁷

In the preface to the first edition of the Book of Mormon, the Prophet declared that God’s purposes could not be frustrated by the loss of the 116 pages: “As many false reports have been circulated respecting the [Book of Mormon], and also many unlawful measures taken by evil designing persons to destroy me, and also the work, I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon; which said account, some person or persons have stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again—and being commanded of the Lord that I should not translate the same over again, for Satan had put it into their hearts to tempt the Lord their God, by altering the words, that they did read contrary from that which I translated and caused to be written; and if I should bring forth the same words again, or, in other words, if I should translate the same over again, they would publish that which they had stolen, and Satan would stir up the hearts of this generation, that they might not receive this work: but behold, the Lord said unto me, I will not suffer that Satan shall accomplish his evil design in this thing: therefore thou shalt translate from the plates of Nephi, until ye come to that which ye have translated, which ye have retained; and behold ye shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words. I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will shew unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil. [See D&C 10:38–43.]

“Wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, I have, through his grace and mercy, accomplished that which he hath commanded me respecting this thing.”⁸

The Book of Mormon is the word of God.

“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.”⁹

Articles of Faith 1:8: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.”¹⁰

“[The Book of Mormon] tells us that our Savior made His appearance upon this continent after His resurrection; that He planted the Gospel here in all its fulness, and richness, and power, and blessing; that they had Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers, and Evangelists, the same order, the same priesthood, the same ordinances, gifts, powers, and blessings, as were enjoyed on the eastern continent; that the people were cut off in consequence of their transgressions; that the last of their prophets who existed among them was commanded to write an abridgment of their prophecies, history, etc., and to hide it up in the earth, and that it should come forth and be united with the Bible for the accomplishment of the purposes of God in the last days.”¹¹

David Osborn was present when Joseph Smith preached in Far West, Missouri, in 1837. He recalled these words of the Prophet: “The Book of Mormon is true, just what it purports to be, and for this testimony I expect to give an account in the day of judgment.”¹²

The scriptures cheer and comfort us and make us wise unto salvation.

“Connected with the building up of the Kingdom, is the printing and circulation of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, . . . and the new translation of the [Bible]. It is unnecessary to say anything respecting these works; those who have read them, and who have drunk of the stream of knowledge which they convey, know how to appreciate them; and although fools may have them in derision, yet they are calculated to make



The latter-day scriptures are published "so that the honest in heart may be cheered and comforted and go on their way rejoicing."

men wise unto salvation, and sweep away the cobwebs of superstition of ages, throw a light on the proceedings of Jehovah which have already been accomplished, and mark out the future in all its dreadful and glorious realities. Those who have tasted the benefit derived from a study of those works, will undoubtedly vie with each other in their zeal for sending them abroad throughout the world, that every son of Adam may enjoy the same privileges, and rejoice in the same truths."¹³

"[The latter-day scriptures are published] so that the honest in heart may be cheered and comforted and go on their way rejoicing, as their souls become exposed and their understanding enlightened by a knowledge of God's work through the fathers in former days, as well as what He is about to do in latter days to fulfill the words of the fathers."¹⁴

“We take the sacred writings into our hands, and admit that they were given by direct inspiration for the good of man. We believe that God condescended to speak from the heavens and declare His will concerning the human family, to give them just and holy laws, to regulate their conduct, and guide them in a direct way, that in due time He might take them to Himself, and make them joint heirs with His Son.

“But when this fact is admitted, that the immediate will of heaven is contained in the Scriptures, are we not bound as rational creatures to live in accordance to all its precepts? Will the mere admission that this is the will of heaven ever benefit us if we do not comply with all its teachings? Do we not offer violence to the Supreme Intelligence of heaven when we admit the truth of its teachings, and do not obey them? Do we not descend below our own knowledge, and the better wisdom which heaven has endowed us with, by such a course of conduct? For these reasons, if we have direct revelations given us from heaven, surely those revelations were never given to be trifled with, without the trifler’s incurring displeasure and vengeance upon his own head, if there is any justice in heaven; and that there is must be admitted by every individual who admits the truth and force of God’s teachings, His blessings and cursings, as contained in the sacred volume. . . .

“. . . He that can mark the power of Omnipotence, inscribed upon the heavens, can also see God’s own handwriting in the sacred volume: and he who reads it oftenest will like it best, and he who is acquainted with it, will know the hand wherever he can see it; and when once discovered, it will not only receive an acknowledgment, but an obedience to all its heavenly precepts.”¹⁵

“O ye Twelve! and all Saints! profit by this important *Key*—that in all your trials, troubles, temptations, afflictions, bonds, imprisonments and death, see to it, that you do not betray heaven; that you do not betray Jesus Christ; that you do not betray the brethren; that you do not betray the revelations of God, whether in the Bible, Book of Mormon, or Doctrine and Covenants, or any other that ever was or ever will be given and revealed unto man in this world or that which is to come.”¹⁶

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Review the experiences Joseph Smith had between September 21, 1823, and September 22, 1827 (pages 57–59). How do you think these experiences prepared him to translate the gold plates? In what ways have you been prepared for callings from the Lord?
- Review the first full paragraph on page 62, noting the purposes of the Book of Mormon. In what ways have you seen these purposes fulfilled in your life and in the lives of others?
- As you ponder the Prophet’s account of being commanded not to retranslate the 116 pages of manuscript that were lost (pages 62–63), what do you learn about God? How might an understanding of this account influence the decisions we make?
- Read the first paragraph on page 64. Note that in an arch made of stones, the keystone is placed at the top, holding all the other stones in place. In what ways is the Book of Mormon “the keystone of our religion”? How has the Book of Mormon helped you “get nearer to God”?
- Joseph Smith spoke of the blessings that come when we have “drunk of the stream of knowledge” in the scriptures and “tasted the benefit” of the word of God (pages 64–65). What do these expressions suggest to you about scripture study? What can we do to make our scripture study more meaningful?
- Read the paragraph beginning at the bottom of page 64. Why do you think that those who study the scriptures develop a zeal for sharing them with others? What can we do to share the Book of Mormon? What experiences have you had when you have shared the Book of Mormon or when someone has shared it with you?
- Read the last paragraph on page 65. What are some passages from the Book of Mormon that have “cheered and comforted” you? In what ways has the Book of Mormon enlightened your understanding?

Related Scriptures: Ezekiel 37:15–17; introduction to the Book of Mormon; 1 Nephi 13:31–42; 2 Nephi 27:6–26; D&C 20:6–15; Joseph Smith—History 1:29–54

Notes

1. See Joseph Smith, History 1832, p. 4; Letter Book 1, 1829–35, Joseph Smith, Collection, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. *History of the Church*, 4:537; from a letter from Joseph Smith written at the request of John Wentworth and George Barstow, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, p. 707.
3. *History of the Church*, 3:28; from an editorial published in *Elders' Journal*, July 1838, pp. 42–43; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
4. *History of the Church*, 4:537; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a letter from Joseph Smith written at the request of John Wentworth and George Barstow, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, p. 707.
5. *History of the Church*, 6:74; from a letter from Joseph Smith to James Arlington Bennet, Nov. 13, 1843, Nauvoo, Illinois; James Bennet's last name is incorrectly spelled "Bennett" in *History of the Church*.
6. *History of the Church*, 1:71–72; bracketed words in original; from "History of the Church" (manuscript), book A-1, pp. 34–35, Church Archives.
7. *History of the Church*, 1:21; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from "History of the Church" (manuscript), book A-1, pp. 9–10, Church Archives.
8. Preface to the first (1830) edition of the Book of Mormon; paragraph divisions altered.
9. *History of the Church*, 4:461; from instructions given by Joseph Smith on Nov. 28, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
10. Articles of Faith 1:8.
11. *History of the Church*, 4:538; punctuation modernized; from a letter from Joseph Smith written at the request of John Wentworth and George Barstow, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, pp. 707–8.
12. Quoted by David Osborn, in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Mar. 15, 1892, p. 173.
13. *History of the Church*, 4:187; from a letter from Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency to the Saints, Sept. 1840, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1840, p. 179.
14. Letter from Joseph Smith to the *Times and Seasons*, about Mar. 1842, Nauvoo, Illinois; Miscellany, Joseph Smith, Collection, Church Archives; the letter was apparently not sent.
15. *History of the Church*, 2:11, 14; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from "The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad," Jan. 22, 1834, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Feb. 1834, p. 136; Mar. 1834, p. 142.
16. *History of the Church*, 3:385; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on July 2, 1839, in Montrose, Iowa; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards. Elder Richards's record of this discourse was based on records of the discourse made by others. Elder Richards also used the records of others when recording the Prophet's discourse given on June 27, 1839, and the two discourses dated "about July 1839." These discourses will be referred to throughout this book.