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## How to Teach the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** Teachers of the Book of Mormon may teach the historical, geographical, literary, or archaeological aspects of the book, but they should emphasize the doctrines and teachings of Jesus Christ and demonstrate in what manner the book assists individuals in our present day world conditions.



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# HOW TO TEACH

BY WILLIAM  
E. BERRETT

# THE BOOK OF MORMON

Teaching the Book of Mormon is one of the most rewarding of teaching experiences. This is true because generally speaking the reward to a teacher is linked to the effect his teaching has upon his pupil, and the Book of Mormon properly taught has the power to change the whole life of one who studies it. It is the most important book to appear in American times, and it is destined, as was predicted by its translator, Joseph Smith, to divide the world into two camps.

Henry Wallace, one time Secretary of Agriculture, himself a non-Mormon, once said of it, "Of all the American religious books of the nineteenth century, it seems probable The Book of Mormon was the most powerful. It reached perhaps only one percent of the people of the United States, but it affected this one percent so powerfully and lastingly that all the people of the United States have been affected, especially by its contribution in opening up one of our great frontiers."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the reading of it has not only affected the history of western America but has also affected its readers so powerfully as to cause them to give up their homes, families, and national allegiance, and to migrate halfway round the world where necessary to be able to affiliate with others similarly affected.

<sup>1</sup>The United States Secretary of Agriculture, address before the New York Times National Book Fair, Nov., 1937.

The teacher of the Book of Mormon thus has in his hands a powerful book, and he would do well to warn his students in the beginning that this book may change their lives, their hopes, and their aspirations. Indeed he should warn them that this book will convince them that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Christ, the Redeemer of Mankind, that he lives and that we too will live again. For this is the objective of the author and should be the principal objective of one who teaches this book.

It is quite obvious that a teacher of the Book of Mormon will fail to achieve what its chief author, Mormon, meant the Book of Mormon to achieve unless the teacher has a divine objective and approaches his subject with an enthusiasm which can only come from a firm conviction of the truth of the record.

The teacher of the Book of Mormon will be most successful if he does four things:

*First: Keeps constantly in mind that the purpose of the book is to convince the reader "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, manifesting himself unto all nations. . . ."*<sup>2</sup>

The objective of each lesson then, should have some relationship to this over-all purpose. The teacher will find in doing this that the objective comes easily and need not be forced.

<sup>2</sup>Preface, Book of Mormon, title page.

The Book of Mormon is not a book on the geography of early America, and the teacher who is forever concerned with geographical questions will find the references too few and entirely inadequate for map-making. Further, he is apt to mislead the students because no two Book of Mormon geographers seem to reach the same conclusions as to the location of particular places, peoples, and events. No proposed map of the Book of Mormon has been or probably could be accepted by the Church as being authentic.

As it is impossible, at this time, to locate the civilizations referred to in the Book of Mormon, the use of archaeological findings in the Americas should be used cautiously regarding the establishment of the claim of the Book of Mormon that ancient civilization comparable to those in the Old World did exist in the Americas at the times required by the Book of Mormon account.

The use of archaeological findings at best but arouses interest in the Book of Mormon. A testimony concerning the truth of the doctrines contained therein must remain a matter of the Spirit, and the reader who wishes to know of the truth must forever turn to the formula so clearly set forth by Moroni: to study and ponder the contents of the book and then pray to God in faith for a revelation concerning the truth thereof.<sup>3</sup> The teacher should already have applied that formula, so that he can present the contents of the book without doubt in his own mind and without conveying any shadow of doubt to his student—for the gift of discernment in the youth of the Church is everywhere manifest, and students discover hypocrisy in its earliest manifestations.

The Book of Mormon was not written to portray the nature of early American industry, commerce, art, law, or medicine, and while occasional statements are illuminating and suggestive, they are insufficient for discussion concerning those fields. Hence, the book is disappointing to those whose objectives are other

than those proclaimed in the preface.

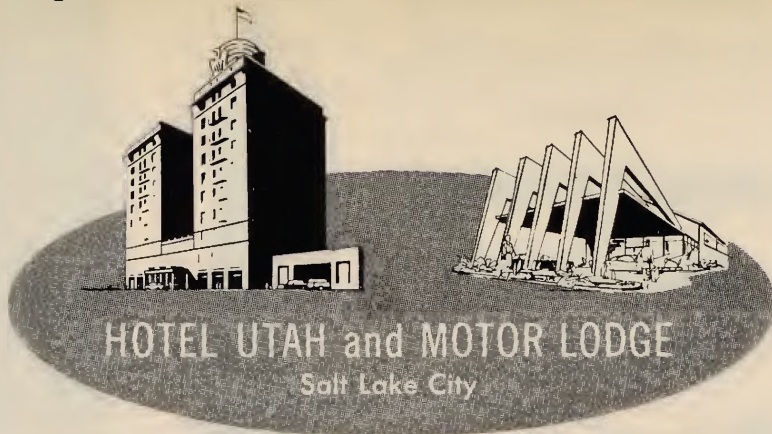
*Second: Realizes that he is aided in teaching the principles of the gospel taught by the book by a stirring and graphic account of how those principles affected individuals and nations.*

Histories generally relate chronologically the events of the times and nations concerned with little reference to primary causes which led to the rise and fall of nations. But in the Book of Mormon we have authors who largely ignore history, giving but a brief running outline, and devote themselves to a treatment of principles and their effect on persons and nations. And here we have a book unique among books. Here are portrayed the rise and fall of two nations, in each instance isolated from the rest of the world where causes and effects can be isolated from those intertwining factors which so confuse the historians of other peoples. Here are portrayed the great experiments in national life, and from a study of them the student should emerge with indisputable evidence of the relationship of beliefs and principles to individual and national welfare. The teacher should become aware of these great teachings of the Book of Mormon and not become enmeshed in having students trace genealogies, memorize names and places, and devise charts and graphs.

In this book we see faith and repentance in operation. We see the value of baptism and the influence of the Holy Ghost. We see what faith in Christ or loss of faith does to individuals and nations—and in the seeing, the principles cease to be abstract but take on substance and meaning for all generations. This is what the youth and the adult need. When we teach faith in God as an abstract principle, the students ask "So what?" The Book of Mormon gives the answer. The Nephites and Lamanites shared the same social, racial, and ethical background. They lived in comparable physical surroundings. The only variable is a spiritual variable—the difference in belief regarding God and the gospel of (Continued on page 856)

<sup>3</sup>Moroni 10:3-5.

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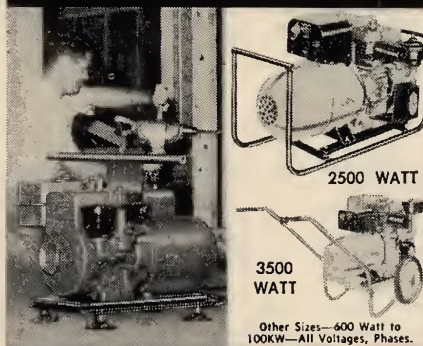
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*How to Teach the Book of Mormon*

(Continued from page 805)

Jesus Christ. But that variable is important. One people achieves great culture while the other sinks into barbarism.

The influence of God, when accepted, led to prosperity, peace, and happiness. The rejection of God led invariably to war, degradation, and oblivion. Thus the book becomes a promise and a warning to nations.

*Third: Relate the principles and problems discussed in the book to present-day situations.*

The Book of Mormon is not a book "to have read." The book is one to which we should constantly turn as a guide to present-day living. Nephi followed this principle in teaching his people the Hebrew scripture: "And I did read many things unto them . . . for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning. . . . I spake unto them saying: Hear ye the words of the prophet . . . and liken them unto yourselves. . . ."4

4I Nephi 19:23-24

**WINTER PEACE**

BY ROWENA JENSEN BILLS

The valley rests in winter peace.  
Harvesting done, the combines cease.  
Each orchard tree, fruitless and bare,  
Becomes a silhouette in prayer.  
Inside, the fires burn yellow bright,  
And hearts mellow from an inner sight  
As slow winds push outside the door.  
Cellars and cupboards hold in store  
The lavish lush of summer's yield.  
Books and music firmly shield  
Young active minds while Mother knits—  
Father dozes as he sits  
Content to dream and secretly bring  
Visions of another spring.

*The Purpose of Life*

This is a problem of every individual, in every age. The answer of Lehi is gratifying: "Men are, that they might have joy." But the answer is not left here. Prophet after prophet bears witness to the kind of joy which man may attain and the possible eternal nature of happiness. Nephi sings of the joy to his soul in this life:

"My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

"He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.

"He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.

"Behold he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the nighttime.

"And by day have I waxed bold in mighty prayer before him; yea, my voice have I sent up on high; and angels came down and ministered unto me."

52 Nephi 4:20-24.

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Yours be the hands to hold the cup.  
 Mine be the hands to pour;  
 Theirs be the thirst that we shall slake,  
 The strength we shall restore.

Yes, for the world has many tasks  
 In which each servant shares,  
 And seeks the sum of the toil of all:  
 Of yours and mine and theirs.

Yours be the hand that sows the wheat,  
 And mine to make the bread;  
 And theirs be the hand to break the bread  
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- I Know That My Redeemer Lives
- Though in the Outward Church
- Father in Heaven
- Abide with Me; 'Tis Eventide
- Come Follow Me
- God of our Fathers
- Nearer My God to Thee
- Rock of Ages
- Lead, Kindly Light
- Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah
- Ye Simple Souls Who Stray
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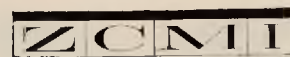
(Selections)

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- Flemish Carol
- Bring Your Torches
- Hark Now, O Shepherds
- Angels We Have Heard on High
- O Holy Night
- While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks
- Watts Nativity Carol
- First Noel
- Good King Wenceslas
- The Holly and the Ivy
- When Jesus Was a Little Child
- A Boy is Born
- Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent
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Alma portrays the peace of rest of the righteous beyond the veil. To those troubled and afflicted he promises rest, to those in prison he promises succor, to those righteous slain in the field of battle he promises "they shall be received up in glory."<sup>6</sup>

### The Question of Prayer

To him who wonders about the very existence of God and his willingness to respond to our pleas, the book answers in graphic examples; to the brother of Jared, Christ shows himself long before gracing the earth in the flesh.<sup>7</sup> To Lehi and Nephi, God opens the heavens and makes his plans known; to Alma he sends angels to assure him of conditions beyond the grave;<sup>8</sup> to Mormon he sends angels to reveal the innocence of little children;<sup>9</sup> to Moroni the road to personal revelation.<sup>10</sup> The half-hearted prayer is chided by the persistence of Enos;<sup>11</sup> and the wicked are warned by the fate of Zoram.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Alma 40: 41; 60:12-13.

<sup>7</sup>Ether 3:6-16.

<sup>8</sup>Alma 40: 41.

<sup>9</sup>Moroni 8:5-15.

<sup>10</sup>Moroni 10:3-5.

<sup>11</sup>Book of Enos.

<sup>12</sup>Alma 30:59-60.

### Economic Questions

To the individual who is disturbed by the collection and distribution of wealth, the book brings a sensible and revolutionary answer in the words of Jacob:

"Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you.

"But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

"And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted."<sup>13</sup>

### Government

In the Book of Mormon we see government in its many forms and under varying conditions and come to the conclusion that then and now the form of government is not so important as the righteousness of the people; that the practice of principles transcends the operations of

<sup>13</sup>Jacob 2:17-19.

## THE CONVERT

(a tribute to the missionaries)

BY EVELYN ELIZABETH VESTERFELT

My door was open but my heart was shut  
Tighter than Shylock's fist against your word;  
And yet . . . I bade you welcome to my house,  
I could not judge a man untried, unheard!

You spoke of God; you bowed your head in prayer  
And told of Saints in these, the latter days;  
Skeptic at first, I listened silently,  
Loath to discard the old familiar ways.

"What are your teachings? Whom do you worship then?"  
"Why should I take your word these things are true?"  
I questioned them . . . before my wondering eyes,  
The Book of Mormon opened pathways new!

Peace which I ne'er possessed has laved my soul;  
Oh, there is much to teach and more to learn,  
If I would number with God's very own,  
If I would tread his path without return!

Thou art God's chosen teachers, this I know;  
And ere you journey to your homes again,  
Grant me these words to speed you on your way.  
"You did not knock upon my door in vain!"

politics. We witness the failure of governments to meet the underlying problems of society without the conversion of that society to the standards of Christ. All of the above lessons are basic to the survival of civilization in any age and must not be lost sight of in the minutia which too often accompanies teaching.

*Fourth: The teacher should catch the willingness of the writers to discuss the reasons behind the work and plans of the Lord, the purpose of ordinances and the reasonableness and inevitability of judgments.* In 2 Nephi 31:6-9 we learn of the need and purpose of Christ's baptism; in Mosiah 18:13 and elsewhere we learn of the need of our own baptism. In 3 Nephi 1:22-29 and 3 Nephi 12:1-2 we come to understand the method and value of baptism.

In 3 Nephi 18:1-11 and in Moroni 4:5 we get a new look at the ordinance of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In Mormon 9:3-5 and Alma 12:14-18 among others, we get a new look at the nature and inevitability of judgments.

The student should be led to use the Book of Mormon as a handbook on the principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in the discussion of each of those principles and ordinances the student should be brought to an understanding of the part the Book of Mormon has played in restoring the truth regarding the teachings of the Master.

The student should be brought to an appreciation of the great contribution of 3 Nephi 12:13 and to an understanding of the Sermon on the Mount, especially verses 1 to 12 as explaining Matthew 5:1-12. The teacher should be constantly aware of the contributions of the book to an understanding of the Holy Bible so that the student catches the relationship thereto and realizes that the Book of Mormon both supplements and affirms the message of the Hebrew scriptures.

From a consideration of the four areas, it should be apparent to the teacher that the Book of Mormon is not a story to have read; that the chronological account is secondary to its great teachings; and that in those teachings we find the application to us and to our times so that the book becomes vibrant with life—a living book that may forever be a guide to those who would open its pages.



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