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KnoWhy #379 - How Can We Be Strengthened by Lucy Mack Smith's Testimony of the Book of Mormon?

Author(s): Book of Mormon Central Staff

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Abstract: One of the most powerful witnesses of the Book of Mormon in the early days of this dispensation came from Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of Joseph Smith. Lucy Smith was intimately involved in bringing forth the Book of Mormon and bore testimony of the book throughout her life. Lucy had the rare privilege of handling the golden plates as well as the Urim and Thummim and the breastplate while they were covered with a cloth, and may have actually seen the plates uncovered as well. The Book of Mormon was an important key to her testimony, and the same can be true of us.



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Image of Lucy Mack Smith via LDS Church History

HOW CAN WE BE STRENGTHENED BY *Lucy Mack Smith's* TESTIMONY OF THE BOOK OF MORMON?

“Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book; and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word.” 2 Nephi 27:14

THE KNOW

In 2 Nephi 27:14, Nephi boldly testified that “the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book; and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word.” One of the most powerful witnesses of the Book of Mormon in the early days of this dispensation came from Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of Joseph Smith.¹ Lucy Smith was intimately involved in bringing forth the Book of Mormon and bore testimony of the book throughout her life.²

Lucy had the rare privilege of handling the golden plates as well as the Urim and Thummim and the breastplate while they were covered with a cloth, and may have actually seen the plates uncovered as well.³ She was also present for several important occasions, such as when the plates were first brought to the Smith house and when the Three Witnesses went into the woods to receive their vision.⁴ It is not surprising, then, that she would turn to her witness of the Book of Mormon during times of trouble.

For example, while leading a group of immigrants by boat from New York to Ohio, Lucy inspired them by comparing their journey to Lehi’s voyage across the ocean: “Now Brethren and Sisters, we have just set out as Father Lehi did to travel, by the commandment of the Lord, to a land that He will show us if we are faithful. I want you all to be solemn and lift your hearts to God in prayer continually, that we may be prospered.”⁵

During the voyage, the boat she oversaw got stuck because of ice jamming the waterway. A man heckled her from the shore, yelling “Is the Book of Mormon true?” She replied, “The book was brought forth by the power of God and translated by the same power, and if I could make my voice sound as loud as the trumpet of Michael, the archangel, I would declare the truth from land to land and from sea to sea and echo it from isle to isle, until everyone in the whole family of man was left without excuse—for all should hear the truth of the gospel of the Son of God.”⁶

Once, while doing missionary work in Michigan, Lucy encountered a man called Reverend Ruggles, who asked her, “Are you the mother of that poor foolish, silly boy, Joe Smith, who pretended to translate the Book of Mormon?” She replied, “I am, sir, the mother of Joseph Smith; but why do you apply to him such epithets as those?” He replied, “Because that he should imagine he was going to break down all other churches with that simple Mormon book.” When she asked him if he had ever read the book, he said it was, “beneath my notice.” She replied, “Let me tell you boldly, that that book contains the everlasting Gospel, and it was written for the salvation of your soul, by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost.”⁷

Years later, after the Haun’s Mill massacre, the survivors found comfort through a song written by Lucy Mack Smith.⁸ It was called Moroni’s Lamentation, and is a re-interpretation of the last great Nephite battle from Moroni’s point of view.⁹ For these people who, like Moroni, had seen so many friends and family members die, the song meaningfully paralleled their own situations. Perhaps because the song resonated with the early Latter-Day Saints, who had seen so much death and violence because of their religion, it was included in its entirety in her obituary as a tribute of her faith in and reliance on the Book of Mormon in times of hardship.¹⁰

THE WHY

Lucy Mack Smith’s testimony of the Book of Mormon remained firm throughout her life.¹¹ When people confronted her about her faith, she appealed to the Book of Mormon.¹² When challenges came her way, she drew strength from its inspired pages. It served as an anchor of hope in a chaotic world. Her example of unwavering commitment to the gospel can inspire us to also anchor ourselves to the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon can be our anchor when people or circumstances challenge us or our faith, as it was for Mother Smith.

As Marion G. Romney stated, “From almost every page of the book, there will come to [us] a moving testimony that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God, our Redeemer and Savior. This witness alone will be a sustaining anchor in every storm.”¹³ The testimony of Christ found in the Book of Mormon can be the thing that we cling to in difficult times, and the truth that we return to when our faith is challenged.¹⁴

Ultimately, we can gain inspiration from the individuals in the Book of Mormon, the way Lucy gained inspiration from Lehi and his family. The Book of Mormon can help us to stand boldly against opposition, just as she did when she responded to criticism. And our testimonies of the Book of Mormon can bring comfort to those around us, as hers did in the aftermath of the Haun’s Mill massacre. We can all be a little more like Lucy and allow the Book of Mormon to help us every day of our lives.¹⁵

FURTHER READING

Gracia N. Jones, *Emma and Lucy* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2005), 75–84.

Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, UK: S. W. Richards, 1853), 99–147.

Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1958), 102–163.

NOTES

1. For one of her accounts of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, see Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, UK: S. W. Richards, 1853), 99–147.
2. Her witness of things Joseph said about the Nephites and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is still of interest today. See, for example, Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 87, online at www.josephsmithpapers.org.
3. Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo, in 1842*, 2nd ed., revised and enlarged, (London, UK: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1843), 27.
4. Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 104–106, 139.
5. Gracia N. Jones, *Emma and Lucy* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2005), 76–77.
6. Jones, *Emma and Lucy*, 79.
7. Jones, *Emma and Lucy*, 83.
8. According to the sources, Lucy sang this song spontaneously in a meeting in a Nephite dialect, and it was translated into English by Levi Hancock. Jones, *Emma and Lucy*, 140.
9. Jones, *Emma and Lucy*, 140
10. Jones, *Emma and Lucy*, 187.
11. For more on the firmness of Lucy’s witness of the Book of Mormon, see Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, “A Multiplicity of Witnesses: Women and the Translation Process,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry Hull (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 133–153.
12. This approach was likely because of her intimate knowledge of how it came forth. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Smith, Lucy Mack,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1993), 3:1356–1357.
13. Marion G. Romney, “The Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, April, 1980, online at lds.org.
14. Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1987–1992), 4:294–295.
15. For more on how our hope in Christ, stemming from the Book of Mormon, can be an anchor to us every day, see Larry E. Dahl, “Faith, Hope, Charity,” in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, ed. Paul R. Cheesman (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 137–150.