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KnoWhy #483 - The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon into Ukrainian

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Abstract: Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon into English was arguably one of the most miraculous occurrences of this dispensation. But translations of the Book of Mormon into other languages have also been miraculous, in their own small way. The translation of the Book of Mormon into Ukrainian is one such small miracle in Church history.

In 1991, Zoya Gulko, a Ukrainian of Jewish descent, agreed to translate the Book of Mormon into English. Translating the Book of Mormon into another language usually takes years to complete, but Zoya was able to do it in nineteen months, working part-time, so she could keep her full-time job as a schoolteacher.



Kyiv Ukraine Temple via LDS Media Library

THE MIRACULOUS TRANSLATION OF THE BOOK OF MORMON INTO UKRAINIAN

“He manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith.”

2 Nephi 26:13

THE KNOW

Often, when we think about the translation of the Book of Mormon, we immediately think of how Joseph Smith miraculously translated its Reformed Egyptian characters into English.¹ This is certainly appropriate, considering that this event was one of the most miraculous occurrences of this dispensation.² But translations of the Book of Mormon into other languages have also been miraculous, in their own small way.

At least portions of the Book of Mormon have been translated into 111 languages, from Danish (1851), Welsh (1852) and Hawaiian (1855),³ to Pohnpeian, Sesotho, and Tshiluba, announced in 2017.⁴ Each translation has been a major effort of dedication, and

many have been accompanied by miracles. The translation of the Book of Mormon from English into Ukrainian is one such small miracle in Church history.

1991 was a difficult year for Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union had become increasingly unstable, with an attempted coup in August of that year, and the USSR would be officially non-existent by New Year's Eve.⁵ Hyperinflation gripped the economies of new Eastern European countries like Ukraine, and people were struggling to survive.⁶ One of these people was a woman named Zoya Gulko, a Ukrainian of Jewish descent, who was working full-time teaching English in Kiev.⁷

This time of turmoil left Zoya and her husband Slava wondering what they could do to come to know God

and find meaning in their lives.⁸ Although both of them were atheists, they tried various things to discover God's existence, looking into Judaism, Bahaim, and Protestant Christianity.⁹ Eventually, they discovered The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and were baptized on December 8, 1991.¹⁰

Around this time, Howard L. Biddulph, president of the Ukraine, Kiev mission, and Elder Steven Struk, from the Church Translation Department, began looking for someone to translate the Book of Mormon into Ukranian.¹¹ At the time, it was very uncommon to find a Ukranian person who spoke English well enough to translate a lengthy document like the Book of Mormon.¹²

To make things more complicated, the Translation Department of the Church had determined that only a member of the Church would be allowed to translate the Book of Mormon into another language.¹³ The two men prayed desperately that, somehow, someone fluent in both languages would join the Church, allowing Ukrainians to read the Book of Mormon in their own language, and not just in Russian.¹⁴ It was shortly after this that Zoya was baptized.¹⁵ As an English teacher, she was truly an answer to their prayers.¹⁶

But, even still, there was one obstacle in the way of the translation. Translating the Book of Mormon into another language usually takes years to complete, even when someone is able to dedicate themselves to the task full-time.¹⁷ Because of the difficult economic circumstances facing Ukraine at the time, Zoya was not able to quit her full-time job as a teacher in order to dedicate herself to translating the Book of Mormon.¹⁸

According to President Biddulph, nobody was quite sure how she could possibly translate the Book of Mormon in a timely manner while working full-time, but she accepted the assignment anyway, knowing God would help her. And help her He did! Zoya completed the initial manuscript of the Ukrainian translation of the Book of Mormon in nineteen months, despite working full-time as an English teacher and serving as the district Young Women's president in Kiev.¹⁹

President Biddulph stated that Zoya told him of "sacred experiences that came to her during the process of translation late into the night. She experienced the power of revelation and the gift of

tongues in which words came to her in a spiritual stream, beyond her previous understanding and ability."²⁰ Because of this experience, "her testimony of the Book of Mormon as a holy scripture of God has become profoundly strong."²¹

THE WHY

Translations like this show that the Spirit of the Lord continues to manifest the gift of "the interpretation of languages" (Moroni 10:16) today in this and many other ways. Moroni 10:16 counts the gift of "the interpretation of languages and of divers kinds of tongues" among the gifts that Moroni hopes will not be denied. He counts on many gifts of the Spirit to bring forth, bear testimony of, and help with the understanding of the Book of Mormon record as he seals and buries it. How else could he imagine that anyone could read and receive his record at some future day except through such gifts? Among the gifts he mentions in Moroni 10:9-16 are wisdom, miracles, prophesy, beholding angels and ministering spirits, interpretation of languages. All these were part of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Stories like this teach us something else as well. Sometimes, when we are weighed down by the burdens of life, it might be easy to think we just cannot do everything we need to.²² We may feel overwhelmed and burned out and wonder how we can go on. However, Zoya's story is a reminder that God has a habit of making things work out unexpectedly. It was just as President Biddulph and Elder Struk were praying desperately for someone to translate the Book of Mormon into Ukranian, perhaps wondering how they were ever going to find the right person, that Zoya was baptized.

In the same way, Zoya finishing her translation of the Book of Mormon on time probably seemed impossible to her when she received the assignment. How could she possibly translate such a long and complex book while still working full-time to support her family? Yet, somehow, God blessed her with the ability to translate the book in record time, despite all the obstacles in her path and the burdens she would still have to bear.

One finds something similar in the Book of Mormon, when Alma and his people were in bondage.²³ Mosiah 24:15 states that "the burdens which were laid upon

Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.”²⁴

Just as God blessed Zoya and Alma’s people when they were bearing a heavy load, God will bless us when we put our trust in Him. Through God’s help, we can perform the seemingly impossible tasks we need to perform in life, and God can, through small miracles in our lives, help us do everything He has asked us to do.

FURTHER READING

Howard L. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks: Stories of Conversion and Faith in the Former Soviet Union* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1996).

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does the Lord Make Our Burdens Light? \(Mosiah 24:15\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 102 (May 18, 2016).

David A. Bednar, “[Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease](#),” *Ensign*, May 2014, 87–90.

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NOTES

1. See John W. Welch, “[The Miraculous Timing of the Translation of the Book of Mormon](#),” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd edition (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2017), 76–213.
2. See Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did the Book of Mormon Come Forth as a Miracle? \(2 Nephi 27:23\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 273 (February 10, 2017)
3. See W. Jeffrey Marsh, “[Brigham Young and the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2002): 15.
4. See, “[Church to Translate Scriptures in 34 More Languages; Will Release Portions Online](#),” October 10, 2017, online at lds.org.
5. Howard L. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks: Stories of Conversion and Faith in the Former Soviet Union* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1996), 1.
6. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
7. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 74.
8. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 75.
9. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 75.
10. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 76.
11. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
12. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
13. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
14. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
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16. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
17. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
18. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
19. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
20. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
21. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks*, 77.
22. For more on how the Book of Mormon helped other early pioneers, see Book of Mormon Central, “[What Did the Book of Mormon Teach the Early Saints about Enduring Persecution? \(2 Nephi 26:8\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 339 (July 14, 2017).
23. For more on this topic, see Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does the Lord Make Our Burdens Light? \(Mosiah 24:15\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 102 (May 18, 2016).
24. For more in this idea, see David A. Bednar, “[Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease](#),” *Ensign* (May 2014), 90.