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The Modern Scriptures—Our Greatest Aids

Author(s): Milton R. Hunter

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Abstract: Joseph Smith's contributions to the scriptural canon include the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. Both are added witnesses of Jesus Christ and clarify the teachings and doctrines of Jesus Christ, including the conditions for eternal life or exaltation.

THE MODERN SCRIPTURES— Our Greatest Aids

by Milton R. Hunter

OF THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY

MY DEAR brethren and sisters: I humbly pray that I shall be guided by the Spirit of the Lord in the brief remarks that I make this afternoon.

I hold here in my hand what I consider to be three of the most valuable treasures in the world. From a monetary standpoint, they are beyond price. If all of the people in the world would make complete application of what these three treasures contain, utilizing them to the fullest, I believe their contents would do more good for the human family than do all the armies in the world, all the kings that sit on thrones, all the governments that rule, or any other things that we might attain in this world. I am holding in my hand the Latter-day Saints' triple combination of holy scriptures—the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. They contain the word of God as revealed in the latter days from heaven through the Prophet Joseph Smith, for the salvation and exaltation of all the members of the human family who will receive their divine teachings and render obedience.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ accept one more book as scripture—the Holy Bible—and hence they regard it as authoritative and binding on their lives. I shall not speak of that scripture today but confine my remarks to the scriptures given to the world by the power of the Lord through his Prophet Joseph Smith.

The first of these three scriptures of the Latter-day Saints, as it appears in the triple combination, is the Book of Mormon. This volume contains the gospel of Jesus Christ as the ancient Americans received and understood it.

The most vital purpose that the writers had in mind in preparing the Book of Mormon was that it should serve as a new witness for Christ, especially a new witness for Christ to the Jews and gentiles in the latter days.¹ It was written to verify the messiahship of the Only Begotten as proclaimed in the Old and New Testaments.

Towards the close of his life, Nephi, the first writer on the Nephite records, handed the plates to his brother Jacob and instructed Jacob to record carefully

... preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, . . . and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, . . .²

And so the Nephite records were written and preserved to come forth in the latter days to bear witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Mediator between the heavens and the earth, the Only Begotten of the Eternal Father in the flesh, and the Redeemer of the human family. A careful reading of the Book of Mormon convinces one that not only Jacob but also all the prophets who succeeded him carefully followed Nephi's injunction. Throughout the entire book witness is born almost continuously to the divine mission of the Lamb of God, the Anointed One of Israel.

In fact, Moroni, the last prophet of the Nephite race, in his preface to the Book of Mormon, pointed out that the record had been written primarily for the purpose of

... the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations— . . .

I think that both the Jaredite and Nephite prophets did an excellent work in giving us much evidence of the divinity and mission of Jesus Christ; thus making the Book of Mormon indeed a new witness.

The Book of Mormon contains a number of teachings which help to explain, amplify, and clarify doctrine found in the Bible; for example, according to the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, while Jesus was talking to the entire multitude of people he instructed:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.³

Brilliant scholars—and I think many of them faithful men, perhaps believing that Christ was the greatest of all teachers, proclaiming at all times eternal truths—saw in the Master's foregoing statement what appeared to be an economic fallacy. They observed that if people in general throughout the world took no heed of what they should eat

or wear or drink, they would soon be hungry, thirsty, and unclothed; and so those scholars wrote numerous explanations in their efforts to interpret what the Master may have meant.

But the Book of Mormon in one brief statement gives, I believe, more clarification to that problem than is found in all the explanations given by the scholars. According to that record, Jesus appeared to the Nephites following his resurrection and gave a sermon similar to the one known in the New Testament as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus was talking to the multitude, and then the Nephite record states:

And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he looked upon the twelve whom he had chosen, and said unto them: . . . Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.⁴

Thus by turning from the multitude and giving his instruction to only twelve men, Jesus reduced the problem of those who would be provided for by the Lord to only twelve servants of God. Certainly the laborers in the Lord's vineyard are worthy of their hire.

The Book of Mormon contains some of the most marvelous doctrinal teachings found in any scripture or in any other writings in the world. The ancient American prophets explained the gospel doctrines as clearly and as beautifully as any prophets have ever explained the gospel. I rejoice in the superb vision beheld by Nephi in which he viewed the history of the world down to the present time. I marvel as I read the teachings of King Benjamin. Perhaps no other teacher except the Master has given a more beautiful, humble sermon. I thrill every time I contemplate the marvelous teachings of Alma and Amulek on death, resurrection, immortality, judgment day, and the atonement of Jesus Christ. I take delight in meditating on Mormon's strong denunciation of the doctrine and practice of infant baptism, realizing that nowhere is this doctrine more forcefully condemned. And of course the greatest of all the teachings found in the Book of Mormon are those found in the Third Nephi. Herein is recorded the marvelous and beautiful story of the appearances of the resurrected Lord to the inhabitants of ancient America, proclaiming his victory over death and offering eternal life unto all those who would accept and obey his gospel. The book delineates in an astounding manner the Master teaching the inhabitants of this land the same gospel plan of salvation which he had taught while in mortality among the Jews. For example, read chapter twenty-seven of Third Nephi. Herein Christ gave a definition of the gospel of Jesus Christ which, I think, is unsurpassed anywhere in religious literature.

There are numerous individual statements on various subjects in the Book of Mormon which I choose to call diamond-like statements, and which I think are unsurpassed in other scrip-

¹2 Nephi 26:12; Mormon 5:9-14.

²Jacob 1:4.

³Matthew 6:25.

⁴3 Nephi 13:25.

tures and in world literature; for example, the oft-repeated, sincere, simple, but beautiful expression of faith given by Nephi is superb. To quote:

I will go and do the things the Lord hath commandeth, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.⁵

I believe that possibly the greatest statement recorded on the purpose of man or purpose of life was given in two short lines by father Lehi wherein he said: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy."⁶ It is my conviction that the joy of which Lehi spoke is a joy that would come today and remain tomorrow, next week, next year, a hundred years, a thousand years, yes—joy eternally. A thorough study of the Book of Mormon and its companion scriptures which I hold in my hand assures us that the only way to attain that joy is to render obedience to all of God's commandments continuously. The more completely our lives conform to the teachings of the Master, the greater shall be our joy.

The Doctrine and Covenants, the second volume of these latter-day scriptures which I hold in my hand, is filled with revelation from heaven, given primarily through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith for the salvation of all the members of the human family who will receive and obey. These revelations were also given for the building of the kingdom of God or the Church of Jesus Christ here upon the earth in the latter days preparatory for the coming of the Savior to usher in the millennial reign.

The Doctrine and Covenants, in my opinion, like the Book of Mormon, contains many of the greatest teachings found in any book in the world; for example, I know of no revelation given through the holy prophets in any age of world's history regarding post-mortal life and the final status of the human family which surpasses section seventy-six of the Doctrine and Covenants, known as the vision, or the three degrees of glory. This stupendous revelation was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. They were permitted to look into the celestial degree of glory, behold conditions there, and record what they saw while "yet in the Spirit."⁷ Then they were shown in vision the terrestrial glory and likewise the telestial glory. A short vision of perdition was also shown unto them. The conditions requisite for entrance into any of these worlds were made known unto them.

In addition to the great revelation on the three degrees of glory, the Doctrine and Covenants contains many more revelations regarding post-mortal life. For example, section eighty-eight expands our knowledge of the three degrees of glory. Also, there is a marvel-

ous statement found in section 131. To quote:

In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];

And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.

He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.⁸

One of the greatest revelations in any scripture is the one on celestial marriage, found in section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This marvelous revelation deals with the crowning principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ, setting forth the condition on which one may gain eternal life or exaltation in the presence of God. This revelation informs us that man cannot be exalted without woman, nor the woman without man. It makes clear the doctrine that those who prove faithful in all things which the Lord hath commanded, go to the house of the Lord and enter into the covenant of marriage according to God's plan, and continue faithful all the days of their lives, shall rise in the resurrection and

... shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

Then shall they be gods, . . .⁹

Thus section 132 gives us an understanding of how to obtain the highest blessing that our Eternal Father has in store for those who love him and keep his commandments. Furthermore, the revelations which I have referred to briefly give us more definite information on the post-mortal life of man and the ultimate goals to be attained than can be found in any other scriptures in the world.

The Doctrine and Covenants, like the Book of Mormon, also contains diamond-like statements which are superb; for example, the one on law is remarkable. To quote:

There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—

And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.¹⁰

Another diamond-like statement is: "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth."¹¹

In addition to the great revelations referred to, the Doctrine and Covenants contains the wonderful instructions known as the Word of Wisdom, several revelations on missionary work, instruction on priesthood, and numerous other pertinent revelations which I cannot name in the short time allotted to me.

The third great treasure which I hold in my hand is the Pearl of Great Price, a pearl indeed. It is composed of two

revelations given to Moses and revealed to Joseph Smith; the book of Abraham, written by the great patriarch and translated by the Prophet Joseph; the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew; some of the early visions beheld by the Prophet; some of his teachings; and the Articles of Faith. They are compacted in approximately sixty pages, but every page is dynamic and powerful. It is a wonderful book.

The Pearl of Great Price also contains revelations on certain subjects superior to any other scriptures or writings on those subjects found in the world; for example, Abraham's vision of pre-mortal life in which he learned of the eternal nature of things; of the grand council in heaven; and of the plan of salvation as presented there constitutes one of the greatest of God's revelations to his holy prophets. And the knowledge obtained by Moses in his vision of Lucifer and the part he played at the grand council, added to Abraham's vision, gives us the most complete understanding found in any literature regarding man's pre-mortal life and God's purposes for the good of man.

The Pearl of Great Price also helps to clarify some of the difficult passages in the other scriptures; for example, when Jesus Christ was living in mortality, the New Testament writers report that time and time again he referred to himself as the Son of Man. Many modern scholars in their commentaries have endeavored to explain what the Master may have meant by this appellation. These scholars have almost universally maintained that Jesus in referring to himself as the Son of Man meant that he was a mortal man. They maintain that Christ was making no claims of his divinity in referring to himself as Son of Man, but that he was merely pointing out his mortality. The Pearl of Great Price, however, clarifies this point beautifully. Speaking of God the Eternal Father, this record tells us that

... in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time.¹²

Thus we see that Jesus of Nazareth was not pointing out his mortal manhood but that he was declaring his divinity, his Godhood, his Messiahship, his powers as a Savior, his position as the Only Begotten of the Father, each time that he called himself the Son of Man. He was referring to himself as the "Son of the Man of Holiness," even the Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father.

The Pearl of Great Price also contains some diamond-like statements, as do the other latter-day scriptures. As an example, I shall quote: "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."¹³

Never in my life have I read in any scripture or in any other writing a

(Continued on following page)

⁵1 Nephi 3:7.

⁶2 Nephi 2:25.

⁷D & C 76:80, 113.

⁸*Ibid.*, 131:1-4.

⁹*Ibid.*, 132:19-20.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 130:20-21.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 93:36.

¹²Moses 6:57.

¹³*Ibid.*, 1:39.

statement which defines the work of God (meaning the Father and the Son) more completely, more thoroughly, and more accurately, in one short statement, than does that one. Jesus Christ came into the world, being sent here by the Father to die, to be resurrected, and to break the bands of death. He did rise from the grave, and he did put into operation, so to speak, a universal law of resurrection so that every man, woman, and child who ever lives upon this earth will rise from the grave and thereby receive immortality. The wicked as well as the righteous shall be resurrected and, through the grace of Christ and by the authorization of the Father, receive immortality. Thus God's work is to give immortality to the human family.

Shortly after Adam and Eve were cast from the Garden of Eden, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, began his work to give man eternal life by revealing the gospel plan of salvation to Father Adam. In the Meridian of Time Christ came to the world to show us how to live. The revelation of the gospel has continued to come from heaven throughout the various gospel dispensations and climaxed in our dispensation, coming to the world through the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times. All the sons and daughters of God who live fully in accordance with this gospel plan will receive eternal life, thereby helping to complete the work and the glory of God.

In conclusion, I desire to speak briefly to the members of Church of Jesus

Christ. If we as members will give heed to the teachings of the Savior, rendering obedience to all of his commandments, if we will walk along the path which these latter-day scriptures point out, all of the blessings promised in these scriptures will be ours. Some day we shall come back into the presence of the Father and the Son and receive eternal life.

My brothers and sisters, I have merely given a brief analysis of these three great treasures. Let me admonish that we all study the scriptures—that we study them day and night, and that we keep their teachings in our minds continuously. The Savior said: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”¹⁴

The holy scriptures have been my closest companion throughout my life. I love them and read them continually. I think I have gone through the Book of Mormon forty-five times. Every time I read it I find new thoughts. I believe with all my heart, as I said in the beginning of my talk, that these three latter-day scriptures, together with the Bible, constitute some of the greatest treasures that we possess. If we will permit them to do so, they will serve as our guides to bring us back unto God. May our Heavenly Father bless us that we may fully utilize effectively in our lives these great treasures, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹⁴John 5:39.

Your Interest in the Future

by Carl W. Buebner

OF THE PRESIDING BISHOPRIC



MY DEAR brethren and sisters: I think if I were perfectly honest with you at this moment, I would tell you that I appreciate shaking before you the next few

minutes.

This has been a marvelous conference. I expected it to be so, knowing of some of the great events that have happened in the Church during this past year. I am sure it has been one of the greatest years in the history of the Church. When I think of temple work and temple building alone—one temple dedicated, one ready for dedication, ground broken for a third, a fourth one ready for construction immediately, and land purchased for a fifth, all in one year—it is a great day in the history of the Church.

We have heard marvelous reports of what has happened in other parts of the Church, the creation of new mis-

sions, and the growth of the Church. I was very impressed yesterday morning when President McKay announced how many new members had come into the Church in the past year, I suppose more than in any other one year in the history of the Church. I have been interested in how some of these new converts have joined the Church and the reasons for their joining the Church. I thought today I would like to say just a few words about some of them.

I remember a mother standing up in a conference in the southern part of Utah, giving credit for her membership in the Church to a four-year-old daughter. She said, “My husband and I and our three children moved into this community a few months ago, and shortly after we became established, we decided that our children should have some religious affiliation. I do not know why I did not think the parents should, but at least we thought the children ought

to have some. So we suggested to the children that they go to Church with other children living in the community. A few weeks later my little daughter, four years old, came home to me after Sunday School one morning, and said, “Mother, how is it that everyone else’s mother goes to Sunday School with them, but you don’t go to Sunday School with me?” And the mother said, “You might as well have stabbed me in the back with a dagger, it cut that deep. I decided I wasn’t going to have my little daughter accuse me of being the only mother not attending Sunday School with her daughter, so I began going.” Then she said, “I met some of the most wonderful people that I have ever learned to know in my life, and I heard things in Sunday School that were new and impressive to me, and it wasn’t very long after that, that I became a member of this Church.”

I have heard some who have had some unusual experiences in becoming members of the Church through the building program. I was down in a stake in California a while ago. We had a little time to visit, and the stake president took me to a new branch that was under construction. While we were riding to the new building, he said, “You know, this has been a very unusual project. The Church has furnished the material, and the branch has done all of the work. They have a man here who is a non-member of the Church who has contributed free all of the plumbing labor for this building, and a senior member of the Aaronic Priesthood who has done all of the electrical work in the building.”

As we approached the building, I noticed the roof was on, and the outside was stuccoed. We went around to the front. There we saw a plaster mixer running, and a woman shoveling sand and hard-wall into the mixer. That seemed a little unusual to me. We walked into the building, and I was made acquainted with the branch president. I said to him, “Say, I am a little worried about a woman outside, shoveling sand and hard-wall into a mixer.” He said, “You better be careful what you say; that is my wife. She is a part of my firm. She is the best hod carrier we have here in Yucaipa.” Just at that time she came into the front door with a large wheelbarrow full of plaster and loaded up her husband’s mortar board until he could not talk to us any longer. He had to get it on the wall. I feel certain that the man who did the plumbing in that building has plumbed himself right into the Church. I am quite sure he has.

I have heard of others who have painted their way into the Church. Not long ago I heard of a man who had some good Mormon neighbors who were building a chapel. He was a painter. He was invited to assist in painting the chapel, and he not only made a fine contribution painting, but he painted himself right into the Church.

I heard of a man down in Las Vegas, just a month or so ago, that plastered himself into the Church. So you see,

THE IMPROVEMENT ERA