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The Challenge of the Book of Mormon

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Daniel H. Ludlow

*M*y topic for discussion here is “The Challenge of the Book of Mormon.” The decision to use the word *challenge* came from a remark by President Spencer W. Kimball in his first press conference after he became President of the Church. He was asked by a reporter, “What problems are being faced by the Church today?” President Kimball’s reply was, “We don’t have any problems—only challenges.”

In checking *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*, I found many definitions and synonyms for the word *challenge*, both as a verb and as a noun. Among the most interesting definitions are “to assert a right, title, or claim to” and “something that is to be striven for.” Some of the synonyms that might have particular significance to our discussion today are *claim*, *protest*, and *test*.

If you would feel more comfortable with the plural “challenges” in the title, just insert it in your mind. The words of King Benjamin come to mind: “I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them” (Mosiah 4:29). In a somewhat similar manner,

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we cannot mention all of the challenges associated with the Book of Mormon. However, at any one time a specific person will probably be concerned with a particular single challenge. Also, after all other challenges are resolved, one will always remain: to learn to live the principles of righteousness contained in the Book of Mormon, which Joseph Smith said was “the keystone of our religion.”

Some of the special challenges associated with the Book of Mormon which I hope to discuss with you today are as follows:

1. To learn everything we can about the Book of Mormon.
2. To learn for ourselves, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God.
3. To learn the great principles of righteousness contained in the Book of Mormon.
4. To live these principles of righteousness.
5. To place our emphasis on the “weightier matters” pertaining to the Book of Mormon.
6. To teach these things to others.

In order to understand the major claims of the Book of Mormon, we need to understand some of the background and experiences of the four major writers associated with this book. Except for the few pages in the books of Enos, Jarom, and Omni, all the remainder of the Book of Mormon comes to us from the literary efforts of four persons: Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni. It is true that some of these writers quote from other persons and sources, but it is also true that they had to decide to include these references for us to have them in our present Book of Mormon. Some interesting experiences shared by these four writers of the Book of Mormon include the following five points:

1. They are all witnesses of Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 11:2, 3; Mormon 1:15; Ether 12:22-33, 38-39). Two of these prophets, Nephi and Jacob, were witnesses of the pre-earthly Jesus Christ; the other two, Mormon and Moroni, were witnesses of the

resurrected Jesus Christ. Thus, all four writers of the Book of Mormon text serve as special types of witnesses of Jesus Christ's divinity.

2. They were all tutored by supernatural beings, either by pre-earthly spirit beings sent as angels, or by translated beings (see 1 Nephi 11; 2 Nephi 10:2-3, 7; 3 Nephi 28:26; Mormon 8:11).
3. They all had a vision of our day and wrote especially for and to us (see 2 Nephi 6:4-9; 25:3-8, 22; 26:16-24; Jacob 4:4, 13; Mormon 8:25-35; 9:26, 30-31; Moroni 1:4).
4. They all received heavenly counsel regarding what they should include in their writings (see 2 Nephi 28:1-3; 32:7; Jacob 2:11; Words of Mormon 1:3-9; 3 Nephi 26:11-12; 30:1; Mormon 5:9, 13; Ether 8:24-26; 13:13).
5. They all warned us that we will be held accountable for what we do with their words (see 2 Nephi 33:10-15; Jacob 6:1, 12-13; Mormon 3:14, 20-22; Moroni 10:24-34).

When we see these attributes and characteristics, the Book of Mormon should take on additional meaning for each of us. Have you ever had the experience, for example, of reading a chapter from Moroni and then closing your eyes and asking yourselves the question, "What was there in the experiences of Moroni, or what did Moroni see in vision concerning our day, that would prompt him to write this particular account?" When we do this, we find additional significance in the Book of Mormon, and its major assertions begin to make more sense.

One of the definitions that seem to apply to part of our discussion today is that a challenge is a *claim*. Thus, perhaps it would be well for us to begin with a review of the major claims made by the Book of Mormon. Unfortunately, many people both in and out of the Church have expended great amounts of time, energy, thought, and even money to prove or disprove claims of the Book of Mormon which are not made by the book itself.

Major Claims or Assertions of the Book of Mormon

The title page of the Book of Mormon claims that the book was "written . . . [for] the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations." First and foremost, then, the Book of Mormon claims to be a witness for the divinity of Jesus Christ.

This and other claims of the Book of Mormon can be listed as follows:

1. To be a witness for the divinity of Jesus Christ and to bring to the Jews and Gentiles the testimony that Jesus is the Christ.¹¹
2. To fulfill biblical prophecy and to be a witness for the Bible.¹²
3. To convince the Lamanites that they are of the house of Israel; to show the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord has done for their fathers; to teach them the covenants of the Lord made with their fathers, that they may know they are not cast off forever; to bring them the knowledge of a Savior through the testimony of the Nephites as well as that of the Jews.
4. To restore to the knowledge of mankind many plain and precious truths concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ.
5. To convince mankind that every person must be judged by his works; to test the faith of this generation; to help the faithful.
6. To help the people of this generation solve their problems; to provide mankind with secrets of national survival; to prepare the faithful for the second coming of Jesus Christ and the millennial reign.

Claims or Assertions Made by Others Concerning the Book of Mormon

Please note some of the many claims for the Book of Mormon that are not included in this list. The Book of Mormon does not claim to be primarily a history book, neither primarily an archaeological textbook nor a treatise on geography, economics, or political science. Neither is it a scientific paper on engineering or metallurgy or agriculture or warfare. We should not claim more for the book than what it claims for itself. Also, we should remember that the Book of Mormon tells only part of the story of a relatively small group of people in a limited geographical area during a relatively brief period of time.

Certainly the Book of Mormon contains some historical elements and geographical references, but not in the number or in the detail that some have hoped or others have claimed. Indeed, any items that might be historical or archaeological or geographical or political are incidental and are included in the book only to the degree that they contribute to one of the stated major purposes of the book.

For example, note the following:

1. We learn of the monetary system of the Nephites simply because two missionaries holding a street meeting are bribed by a heckler to deny the existence of Jesus Christ. The recorder feels we should understand the approximate worth of the bribe, so he briefly reviews their monetary system. Also, as you will recall, the incident is included so the reader can learn that God knows the thoughts of men, and he can reveal these thoughts to his representatives.
2. We learn of the weapons and strategy of war of these people primarily so the reader will understand that even though armies are well prepared for war, they still fight only with the strength of men unless God is on their side.
3. We learn of the crops and animals of these people primarily when they are leaving to establish new colonies in order to be free to worship their God.

It is obviously unfair for anyone to judge the Book of Mormon by what it does or does not teach concerning economics or defense or agriculture when these are not the areas emphasized by its writers. As well might we judge the competency of a brain surgeon by ascertaining what he knows about clothing and textiles, or judge a musician by what she knows concerning the water-retention qualities of different types of soils.

Note the insistence of the major writers of the Book of Mormon that it is not a history book:

I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers. . . . I desire the room that I may write of the things of God. For the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto . . . God. . . . Wherefore, the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God (1 Nephi 6:1, 3-5).

These plates . . . are not the plates upon which I make a full account of the history of my people. . . . Upon the other plates should be engraven an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people; wherefore these plates are for the more part of the ministry; and the other plates are for the more part of the reign of the kings and the wars and the contentions of my people (1 Nephi 9:2, 4).

Many . . . sayings are written upon mine other plates; for a more history part are written upon mine other plates (2 Nephi 4:14).

And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates (2 Nephi 5:33).

Subtitle: "Another Testament of Jesus Christ"

In keeping with the major claim of the Book of Mormon that it is a witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ, it is entirely appropriate that a subtitle has now been added to the book: "Another Testament of Jesus Christ."

I was living in Australia when I heard of the decision by the Brethren to include the subtitle. I was thrilled by the announcement, but was a little surprised that the word *testament* was chosen rather than the word *witness*. Many of us had become accustomed to referring to the Book of Mormon as a "second witness" to the divinity of Christ and to the Bible.

At the first opportunity, I checked the most comprehensive and complete dictionary I could find in the major

library in Perth, Australia, and found some very interesting things concerning the etymology of the word *testament*. Among other things I learned that the word is derived from a prehistoric Italic compound whose first and second constituents respectively are akin to the Latin *tres* (three) and the Latin *stare* (to stand). Thus, the idea of three serving as a witness comprises part of the basic meaning of the word *testament*.

The appropriateness of the new subtitle impressed me: “*Another* testament.” Not a first testament, nor a second testament, nor a third—but *another* testament. For some the Book of Mormon might be a second testament of the divinity of Jesus Christ, but for a different person it might be a third testament, or even a first. How appropriate that the word *testament* itself has inherent within it the idea of “three witnesses.”

God’s System of Witnesses

This is entirely consistent with the system of witnesses employed by the Lord himself. In Deuteronomy 19:15 we read, “At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.” And in 2 Corinthians 13:1 and Doctrine and Covenants 6:28, we note the confirming words, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.”

The three members of the Godhead exemplify this law in witnessing or testifying of each other. In the New Testament the Savior testifies so frequently of the oneness of his Father and himself, and of his Father’s work with his work, that traditional Christianity has come to believe that God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are one in virtually all ways, including being one in substance. That they are not one in actual substance was made clear by the Savior’s other statements in the New Testament, including his prayer to his Father to make his disciples one “even as we are one” (see John 17:22). This matter is further clarified in the first vision of Joseph Smith.

The members of the Godhead are one in many respects, however (such as in their goals, purposes, and ideals), and they are also one in testimony. Note the signi-

ficance of the following statement of the resurrected Jesus Christ concerning this matter:

The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one. . . . And I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me. . . . And thus will the Father bear record of me, and the Holy Ghost will bear record . . . of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one (3 Nephi 11:27, 32, 36).

Here the Savior makes two very important points: (1) the three members of the Godhead are one in the sense that they testify or witness of each other, and (2) if we accept or believe in any one of the members of the Godhead, we must accept or believe in the others, for they all testify of each other.

*The Scriptures Testify of Each Other
and of the Members of the Godhead*

The same divine law of witnesses applies also to the holy scriptures. The Holy Bible is one witness to the divinity of Jesus Christ, but where are the second and third witnesses? Latter-day Saints believe the Book of Mormon to be a second witness (the "American" witness) to the divine mission of the Savior, and we believe the third great witness is yet to come forth. The Lord taught of the existence of three scriptural witnesses in these words:

For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it. . . . And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews. . . . And my word . . . shall be gathered in one (2 Nephi 29:12-14).

Thus there shall be three great scriptural witnesses brought forth by the Lord.

The relationship of these records to each other is also made clear in the Book of Mormon. In his farewell address, Mormon made the following statement to the Lamanites of this dispensation: "Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gos-

pel of Christ, which shall be set before you, not only in this record [i.e., the Book of Mormon] but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, which record [i.e., the Bible] shall come from the Gentiles unto you. For behold, this [the Book of Mormon] is written for the intent that ye may believe that [the Bible]; and if ye believe that [the Bible] ye will believe this [the Book of Mormon] also” (Mormon 7:8-9).

Here Mormon is saying that one of the major purposes of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is to testify of the Bible, and he states that if we honestly accept one of these scriptures we will also accept the other, for the two scriptures testify of each other. This is also the testimony of Brigham Young:

No man can say that this book (laying his hand on the Bible) is true . . . and at the same time say, that the Book of Mormon is untrue. . . . There is not that person on the face of the earth who has had the privilege of learning the Gospel of Jesus Christ from these two books, that can say that one is true, and the other is false. No Latter-day Saint, no man or woman, can say the Book of Mormon is true, and at the same time say that the Bible is untrue. If one be true, both are (*Journal of Discourses*, 1:38).

Special Witnesses to the Book of Mormon

The Lord has provided us with a series of witnesses to the scriptures themselves. With regard to the Book of Mormon, at least three types of human witnesses were promised by the Lord and have been provided (see 2 Nephi 11:3; 2 Nephi 27:12-14; Ether 5:2-4; D&C 5:11-15).

First of all, we have the life and testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith as a witness that the Book of Mormon is true. The Prophet declared that the record was given to him by an angel sent from God and that he translated part of it by the gift and power of God (see Joseph Smith—History 1:30-54, 59, 67). Joseph Smith sealed this testimony with his own life.

Second, we have the testimonies of the three special witnesses—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. These men testified that the record of the Book of Mormon had “been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true.” They also claimed

that they had “seen the engravings . . . upon the plates; . . . they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. . . . An angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon” (See “The Testimony of the Three Witnesses” in the front of the Book of Mormon). None of these three special witnesses ever denied his testimony of the things he had both seen and heard.

Then we have the testimonies of the eight special witnesses. They said Joseph Smith had shown them the plates and they had handled them with their own hands and had seen the engravings thereon: “And this we bear record with words of soberness, . . . that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken” (See “The Testimony of Eight Witnesses” in the front of the Book of Mormon). Again, not one of these men ever denied his testimony.

These groups of special witnesses not only testify of each other, but they also serve as witnesses to the claims of Joseph Smith, including the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. If we accept the testimony of any of these human witnesses, we must accept the Book of Mormon and also the Bible and the divinity of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Ghost Testifies of the Truth of These Things

In addition to the testimony of other people and of the scriptures, however, the Lord has promised us a “more sure witness” of the truth of these things. This more sure witness is that of the Holy Ghost. Paul tells us that no man knoweth of the things of God except by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:11), and in 1 John 5:6 we read, “It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.”

Thus the best and most effective way to discover truth in the spiritual and religious realm is to ask God. “Ask, and it shall be given you,” the Savior said (Matthew 7:7), but James adds, “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering” (James 1:6).

The last writer in the Book of Mormon gives us a specific formula by which we can gain a knowledge of the

truth of spiritual things, including the knowledge of whether or not the Book of Mormon is true:

Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with a real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things (Moroni 10:3-5).

Surely the Lord has provided us with ample witnesses in our day that the work of this dispensation is true. He has borne his own testimony to us through his prophets and his divine Son; he has sent angels again to the earth with the glad tidings of the gospel; he has provided scriptural and human witnesses to his great work; and he has promised us a personal witness by his emissary the Holy Ghost if we are sincere and faithful. As the prophet Moroni stated, "All this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day" (Ether 5:4).

It now behooves us to examine honestly and sincerely these witnesses and their testimonies, and, if we do, the Lord has promised us we shall not find them wanting.

We have all heard the truism "God will force no man to heaven." It is also true that "God will force no man to obtain a testimony of the Book of Mormon."

One of the major purposes of our existence on this earth is to learn to walk by faith. To help us realize this purpose, the Lord has removed the memory of our pre-earthly existence; thus we can truly learn to develop our powers of faith in him here in this life. God does not let our faith go unanswered, however. He has promised that certain *evidences* or *witnesses* will "follow them that believe" (Mark 16:17-18); therefore, we can know our faith in him is not in vain, and we are encouraged in the further development of faith.

A Challenge for the Non-Believer: Gaining a Testimony of the Book of Mormon by the Power of the Holy Spirit

At the beginning of our discussion I mentioned that the challenge of the Book of Mormon differs from person to person, and from time to time. May I now speak briefly to those who face the test of finding out for themselves whether or not the Book of Mormon is true. Undoubtedly there will be several who read this chapter who do not *know* whether the book is true; these persons may or may not be members of the Church.

You will note that so far in our discussion we have emphasized that a testimony of the Book of Mormon is based on spiritual power. After all, the foremost claim of the Book of Mormon—that Jesus is the Christ and is the divine Son of God—is of a spiritual nature, and the things of the Spirit are known only through the power of the Spirit. You cannot gain or measure a spiritual truth, such as a testimony, by physical things alone. The charts of physical weights and measurements do not help in spiritual matters.

However, our Heavenly Father is willing to provide us with additional types of “witnesses” or “proofs” or “signs” that the claims of the Book of Mormon are true. But, as indicated in both ancient and modern scripture, these “proofs” come *after* the exercise of faith, which again is the result of spiritual power. As Moroni stated, “I . . . would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6).

Perhaps the two best-known definitions of faith in the scriptures come from Paul in the New Testament and Alma in the Book of Mormon: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), and “Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (Alma 32:21).

You will note that *hope* is closely allied with faith in both of these definitions. Alma continues with his explanation: "If ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words" (Alma 32:27).

Note the key words: *hope, desire, believe*. If you want to recognize and receive "proofs" of the Book of Mormon, you begin with the *hope* that the Book of Mormon is true. Then you *desire* to find out whether or not it is true. Then you start acting upon that desire until you come to *believe*. Then, and not until then, can you come to *know*.

There is a great misconception among some that the Lord is averse to giving signs or proofs. Evidently this idea comes from the words of the Lord in the New Testament: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign" (Matthew 12:39; cf. 16:4). A key word in this verse is *seeketh*.

However, the scriptures also teach:

And these signs shall *follow* them that *believe* (Mark 16:17; emphasis added).

And they [the disciples] went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and *confirming the word with signs following* (Mark 16:20; emphasis added. These are the last words in Mark).

I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! (Daniel 4:2-3).

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book (John 20:30).

The Lord is not averse to giving signs. He loves to give signs; he greatly desires to provide evidence; he is willing to prove all his works. But these signs, evidences, and proofs have real meaning and significance only to those who have faith. Signs follow faith, they do not precede it. Signs are given to help develop faith already present; they

are not given to produce or replace faith. Thus, if we are interested in finding proof of the Book of Mormon, we should begin by *seeking faith* rather than by seeking signs.

If the world understood this principle and the scriptures pertaining to it, they would also understand why the Lord does not have the Book of Mormon plates displayed in the new Church museum, or why he does not send an angel to demonstrate the Urim and Thummim on television. Now we can better understand the words of the Lord to his prophet in March 1829: "I have reserved those things which I have entrusted unto you, my servant Joseph, for a wise purpose in me, and it shall be made known unto future generations; but this generation shall have my word through you" (D&C 5:9-10). And, in section 105: "It is expedient in me that they should be brought thus far for a trial of their faith" (vs. 105:19). This scripture ties in beautifully with Ether 12:6: "Ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith."

The steps on how you can find and accept physical evidences or proofs concerning the Book of Mormon thus seem to be quite clear:

1. You *desire* to know that the Book of Mormon is true.
2. You *hope* the Book of Mormon is true.
3. You *read the Book of Mormon* and *ponder* its teachings (Moroni 10:3-5).
4. You *ask God* whether or not the Book of Mormon is true. (Who would know better than our Heavenly Father whether or not the Book of Mormon is indeed "Another Testament of Jesus Christ"?)

The degree to which you can or will accept an evidence or proof of the Book of Mormon will be in exact proportion to your *desire* to know if the Book of Mormon is true and in exact proportion to your *hope* that the Book of Mormon is true. However, even a *knowledge* or a *testimony* of the Book of Mormon alone is not enough.

A Challenge for the Believer: Becoming Converted to the Book of Mormon

Now may I speak briefly to those who already know that the Book of Mormon is true, who have already received a witness of its authenticity. Far too many of us who have this knowledge are content to rest in it—although we may want to have it nourished occasionally by the additional evidences or testimonies we receive at gatherings such as this symposium. However, we must go beyond knowledge alone to become truly converted to this book. We must not only believe and know the Book of Mormon is true; we must live the principles of righteousness contained in this sacred scripture.

Note the words of the Lord concerning this matter:

And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—

Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation.

And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all.

And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written (D&C 84: 54-57).

Some may ask, “What is the difference between knowing that the Book of Mormon is true and being converted to the truths of the Book of Mormon?” My understanding is that a person can *know* something and not do anything about it. There is no causal relationship between *knowing* and *doing*. However, when a person is converted there is a change; his actions become 100 percent consistent with his knowledge. Otherwise he is not truly converted.

Our challenge as believers is to become truly converted, so that we not only can *say* that the Book of Mormon is true but will also *do* what the Lord has commanded to be written in his holy record.

A Challenge to Non-Believers and Believers: Living the Teachings of the Book of Mormon

And now may I speak to all of us—to the non-believer, the believer, and the believer who is also a doer.

The Savior was speaking of priorities when he said, “Wherefore, seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (JST Matthew 6:38). A similar teaching is found in the book of Jacob in the Book of Mormon: “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” (Jacob 2:18-19). Again, the Savior was speaking of the relative importance of things when he asked: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37).

Now may I paraphrase these scriptures and apply them to our topic here:

Wherefore, seek not for those physical proofs that only establish the authenticity of the Book of Mormon; rather seek first to obtain the knowledge that “Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations,” and then shall the other proofs be added unto you.

Before ye seek for the physical evidences of the Book of Mormon, seek ye for a spiritual testimony of its truthfulness. And after ye have obtained a testimony of its truthfulness by the power of the Holy Ghost, the physical evidences shall be made manifest unto you if ye seek them, for ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to interest the non-believer, to strengthen the believer, to liberate those bound down with false traditions, to free the honest in heart from incorrect teachings and doctrines, and to strengthen the believer and those who are wavering from the pressures of ridicule and persecution.

And, what shall you be profited, if you gain a testimony of these truths, but do not live them? Or what shall you give in exchange for the truths of exaltation and eternal life?

Thomas à Kempis, in his classic *The Imitation of*

Christ, emphasized the importance of living the truths we know. He stated:

Whosoever . . . would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must endeavor to conform his life wholly to the life of Christ.

Surely great words do not make man holy and just; but a virtuous life maketh him dear to God.

I had rather *feel* compunction [another translation reads contrition] than know the definition thereof.

I believe there is a message there for each of us. I would rather *feel* the truths of the Book of Mormon, through trying to live them, than simply *know* they are true.

Don't Get on a "Hobbyhorse"

Another word of caution for all of us.

It was in the summer of 1955 that I first joined the faculty at Brigham Young University. At that time and shortly before, the leaders of the Church were cautioning us as members: "Do not get on a hobbyhorse in the Church. If you do, it will ride you right out of the Church and kingdom." Some of us have lived long enough to see the wisdom of this counsel. We have seen friends and family, students and colleagues, who have become so enamored over this program or that teaching that they have neglected the weightier things of pure testimony and righteous living.

My plea here would be that we would not repeat those errors in relationship to the Book of Mormon. May I illustrate my concern by quoting from a recent talk by Elder Robert L. Backman:

In Africa, the natives have a unique, effective way to capture monkeys. They lop the top off a coconut, remove the meat, and leave a hole in the top of the coconut large enough for the monkey to put his paw in. Then they anchor the coconut to the ground with some peanuts in it. When the natives leave, the monkeys, smelling those delicious peanuts, approach the coconuts, see the peanuts in them, put their paws in to grasp the nuts, and attempt to remove the nuts—but find that the hole is too small for their doubled-up fists. The natives return with gunny sacks and pick up the monkeys—clawing, biting, screaming—but they won't drop the peanuts to save their lives.

Do you know anyone who is caught in a monkey trap, where the things that matter the most are at the mercy of those things

that matter the least? ("To the Young Men of the Church," *Ensign*, November 1980, p. 42).

I would repeat Elder Backman's concern: "Do you know anyone who is caught in a monkey trap, where the things that matter the most are at the mercy of those things that matter the least?"

Do you know of some who have become too enamored of the lack of proof of the Book of Mormon, or some at the other extreme who are so concerned about the abundance of physical evidences of the Book of Mormon that they believe faith and testimony of the Spirit are no longer necessary? Might some of us even see within ourselves such a great love of or longing for the tasty peanuts that we might be sacrificing some of our spiritual life for things that in the long run might not really be very important? If we do see this tendency in ourselves or in others, I pray that something we have heard or seen or thought or felt in this symposium will help us to seek, first and above all, those things which are of eternal worth.

Closing Statement and Testimony

In closing, I would like to bear my testimony concerning the Book of Mormon. May I introduce it by quoting several excerpts from President Kimball's masterful general conference address of April 1963, entitled "A Book of Vital Messages."

There is a book I have read many times, yet each time I read it I find it engages my interest the more. . . . It is a story of courage, faith, and fortitude, of perseverance, sacrifice, and super-human accomplishments, of intrigue, of revenge, of disaster, of war, murder, and rapine, of idolatry, and of cannibalism, of miracles, visions, and manifestations, of prophecies and their fulfillment.

I found in it life at its best and at its worst, in ever-changing patterns. . . .

It is a fast-moving story of total life, of opposing ideologies, of monarchies and judgeships and mobocracies. . . . Class distinction is there with its ugliness, race prejudice with its hatefulness, multiplicity of creeds with their bitter conflicts. . . .

Its story has a vital message to all people. The gentiles will find the history of their past and the potential of their destiny; and the Jewish people, the blueprint of their future. . . .

Archaeologists may be excited as they read of ruins of ancient cities, highways, and buildings; and there may yet be hidden buried gold and priceless records. . . .

Engineers will learn from this great book that those centuries ago, men erected buildings, temples, and highways with cement, and paved roads connected city to city and land to land. . . .

The psychologists may find studies in human behavior and the workings of the human mind and the rationalizing processes where men convince themselves that "good is bad, and that bad is good." Here they will watch history unfold for thousands of years and see not only episodes in the lives of individuals but causes and effects in a total history of races. . . .

This comprehensive book should be studied by politicians, government leaders, kings, presidents, and premiers to see the rise and fall of empires, and the difference between statesmanship and demagoguery. They will see nations born in war, live in war, deteriorate in war, and die in war through the centuries. They may find answers to problems of capital and labor, of dishonesty, graft and fraud, of dissensions, internal rupture, and civil wars. . . .

This single volume records for historians about twenty-six centuries of stirring life, not generally known even to the most highly trained professors of history. It tells of the ancestries of those whose spectacular monuments are now observed in South and Central America and in the Mexican jungles.

In this wondrous book, ministers and priests can find texts for sermons, and men generally can find final and authoritative answers to difficult questions. . . .

It is the word of God. It is a powerful second witness of Christ. And, certainly, all true believers who love the Redeemer will welcome additional evidence of his divinity.

This inspiring book was never tampered with by unauthorized translators or biased theologians but comes to the world pure and directly from the historians and abridgers. The book is not on trial—its readers are.

Here is a scripture as old as creation and as new and vibrant as tomorrow, bridging time and eternity; it is a book of revelations and is a companion to the Bible . . . and agrees in surprising harmony with [the] Bible in tradition, history, doctrine, and prophecy; . . . the two were written simultaneously on two hemispheres under diverse conditions. . . .

In the final chapter of the book is the never-failing promise that every person who will read the book with a sincere, prayerful desire to know of its divinity shall have the assurance.

The book of which I speak is the keystone of true religion, the ladder by which one may get near to God by abiding its precepts. It has been named "the most correct of any book on earth."

My beloved friends, I give to you the Book of Mormon. May you read it prayerfully, study it carefully, and receive for your-

selves the testimony of its divinity (Conference Report, April 1963, pp. 63-68; cf. *Faith Precedes the Miracle* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1972], pp. 329-37).

This would be my prayer, and is also my testimony. I honestly believe, my dear brothers and sisters, that at the final judgment we will give our accountability as to what we have done with the Book of Mormon and its teachings. I believe the questions will be asked of us in about the following order, and the first time we have to answer “no” will be the point of our judgment.

1. Did you have opportunity to read the Book of Mormon while you lived on the earth? (All of us reading this would have to answer this question “Yes”).
2. Did you read the Book of Mormon?
3. Did you learn the great principles of righteousness contained in the Book of Mormon?
4. Did you apply these principles in your life?
5. Did you teach these principles to your children and to others?

It may be that if we can honestly answer “yes” to all of these questions, we might then hear those gladsome words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:21).

The Book of Mormon is the word of God, Another Testament of Jesus Christ. May we learn it, and love it—and live it.