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## The Book of Mormon is Relevant Today: Relevancy Plus Congruency

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# RELEVANCY PLUS CONGRUENCY

*by Neal A. Maxwell*

The compatibility of the Nephite scriptures with the Old and New Testaments on the core issues of Christianity has been well enough documented not to require elaboration here. But the conceptual compatibility exists at other levels too; prophets, regardless of their environment, draw the water of life from the same divine well, so it is little wonder that there are such striking similarities, such congruencies in their prescriptions for improving human behavior.

Lest men think there is something in the algebra of life that gives us an excuse for sin, either because the level of temptation and trial we experience is unavoidable or else is in excess of our ability to cope with it, we have the double assurance of Paul writing on one continent and Alma on another:

*... But God . . . will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13.)*

*... Pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear. . . . (Alma 13:28.)*

Prayerful people will not be pressed beyond their limits (though as C. S. Lewis observed, some of us quit or surrender just before the relief column comes into sight). We can, and often do, of course, dig pits for ourselves, and sometimes we also burn the escape ladder; but such irrationality is of our own willful doing—not God's!

For Course 12, lessons 6, 7, and 14 (October 18, 25; December 27), "An Example of Personal Courage and Obedience," "Strength in the Face of Adversity," and "The Importance of Righteous Desire"; for Course 16, lesson 14 (December 27), "Father's Concern for Man's Joy"; for Course 28, lessons 12 and 13 (December 6, 13), "A View of the Future" and "A Father's Teachings and Blessings"; and of general interest.

Closely allied with this basic ground-rule of life are the concepts which pertain to our ability to carry out God's commandments and his commitment to prepare the way for our task fulfillment. Most of us recall the well-known observation of Nephi:

*. . . I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. (1 Nephi 3:7.)*

But we do not link this insight with Paul's recitation of those Old Testament characters who believed and practiced this life principle—such as Abraham:

*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (Romans 4: 20, 21.)*

The assurance that our capacity to perform can rise to meet the promises and commandments given to us in life ought to be quietly contemplated—with the documented realization that we are partners with God in his work!

When ancient Israel was afflicted by fiery serpents, God had Moses make a brass serpent and put it upon a pole, so that one bitten had only to look upon the brass serpent and "he lived." (See Numbers 21:7-9.) Nephi elaborates on this very episode by observing of those bitten that the only labor they had to perform was to look; but "because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished." (1 Nephi 17:41.)

Often we overshoot the basic simplicity of the gospel; we seem determined to add our own intellectual and decorative embroidery. When we do not follow the basic counsel of our prophets by looking to them for counsel in order thereby "to live," we are repeating the ancient error. Those ancients—in real pain and facing certain death—were immobilized and would not do what was both obvious and required. Today many go on suffering the real, persistent pains of sin, dying spiritually, without doing what is both obvious and required—and simple!

Mormon, in a sunburst of spiritual insight, observed:

*. . . I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear. (Moroni 8:16.)*

Mormon sounds very much like his brother John in faraway Jerusalem, who also said in the sunset of his life:

*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18.)*

Only men tenderized by the spiritual experiences that flow from a life lived in basic accord with the commandments of Christ—only men free of fear—can focus so congruently, though continents and centuries apart, on the rewards of keeping the first and second great commandments.

The purity of the gospel as it is recorded in the Book of Mormon is underscored in three little words which appear in the Nephite record of Jesus' words about faith:

*And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you. (3 Nephi 18:20.)*

The New Testament reads:

*And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. (Matthew 21:22.)*

The prayers of the faithful are to be answered—so long as the faithful are believing and unwavering and are making a request of God "which is right." There is, therefore, an exception to this basic promise of God as recorded in Matthew—and what an enormously significant exception! For those of us who know God as our loving Father who wants what is best for us and who wants us to share "all" that he has, this is a welcome qualification, and it may explain why some prayers of the faithful are answered differently from what might have been expected.

Not only is there conceptual congruency between the Book of Mormon and the Bible, but there is also congruency with latter-day revelation. In his confrontation with Korihor, Alma testified:

*. . . And all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator. (Alma 30:44.)*

How like the marvelous revelation known as the 88th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants are Alma's words! In the latter-day revelation the Lord describes our universe and the kingdoms in it, the order in the cosmos, and then says:

*Unto what shall I liken these kingdoms, that ye may understand? Behold, all these are kingdoms, and any man who hath seen any or the least of these hath seen God moving in his majesty and power. (Doctrine and Covenants 88:46, 47.)*

In the many concepts of the Book of Mormon, in their relevancy for today and in their congruency, one also sees "God moving in his majesty and power!"

Library File Reference: BOOK OF MORMON—EVIDENCES; BOOK OF MORMON—STUDY.

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*If you spend all your time collecting money for fear of poverty, you are practicing poverty already.*

*Give me no more adversity than I can bear, and no more prosperity than I can stand.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson.\*

\*As quoted in *Sunshine Magazine*, January, 1970, page 22.