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GETTING “NEARER TO GOD”:
A HISTORY OF JOSEPH SMITH’S
STATEMENT

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The Prophet Joseph Smith’s statement, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book,”¹ may be one of his most recognizable quotes. Millions of readers of the Book of Mormon find it in the sixth paragraph of the book’s introduction. Hundreds of thousands of general conference participants hear it cited repeatedly from the pulpit.² Books, articles, and even entire symposia use it as a theme. However, how many people familiar with the quote understand its context? For example, why did Joseph say what he did regarding the Book of Mormon? Who were “the brethren” to whom he made the statement? What sparked the declaration? How has it been used over time? Answers to these important historical questions help us better appreciate the power and application of Joseph’s prophetic statement in our modern day.

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR THE STATEMENT

Putting Joseph Smith's statement in its historical context includes examining the audience, the nature of the surrounding discussion, and the Prophet's original intent. Understanding these things helps the reader appreciate the breadth of the quote's application. Robert J. Matthews observed, "If we examine [the statement] in its historical context, our understanding and appreciation of this declaration will increase, we will be more able to defend it against critics and non-believers, and we will be in a better position to explore the reasons why the Book of Mormon is indeed the 'keystone of our religion.'"³

Audience and Setting

Looking first at its audience, the statement begins with "I told the brethren." Who were the brethren to whom Joseph made this declaration and what was the occasion for their gathering? Examining the context of the original statement reveals these answers. Before the Prophet made the declaration on November 28, 1841, Joseph's history records, "I spent the day in the council with the Twelve Apostles at the house of President [Brigham] Young, conversing with them upon a variety of subjects. Brother Joseph Fielding was present, having been absent four years on a mission to England."⁴

Though the Prophet clearly states where the occasion took place and who was present, some clarification may be necessary. For example, the Brigham Young home mentioned in the statement was not the brick home with which modern visitors to Nauvoo are familiar. That more spacious structure was not completed until 1843. Rather, it was what President Young called his "small unfinished log-cabin, situated on a low, wet lot."⁵ This original log home occupied the same block as the later brick structure.⁶

Joseph's statement further records that the assembled meeting was a council with the Twelve Apostles and Joseph Fielding. However, like the location of the Brigham Young home, the actual assemblage needs explanation. Not all of the Twelve Apostles were present. While an exact listing is problematic, we can be certain of a few who were absent from Nauvoo in 1841. For example, Parley P. Pratt was still in Great Britain after his fellow quorum members and mission companions left

him to preside over that mission until 1843.⁷ At the time of the council meeting, Orson Hyde was on a ship returning from Jerusalem, having fulfilled his mission to the Holy Land.⁸ The Prophet's brother William Smith was on a mission to Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, gathering funds for the construction of the Nauvoo Temple and Nauvoo House.⁹ Finally, John E. Page was presiding over a conference of the Church held in New York City the same weekend.¹⁰ The remaining eight members of the Quorum, namely Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, Orson Pratt, Lyman Wight, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and George A. Smith, were all living in Nauvoo and were likely present.¹¹ The journal entries of Brigham Young, Willard Richards, and Wilford Woodruff mention the meeting.

Regarding the discussion at this meeting, the Prophet's record simply indicates that they conversed upon "a variety of subjects."¹² Brigham Young adds little detail, merely recording, "Brother Joseph and the Twelve spent the day in council at my house."¹³ Willard Richards's daily journal adds the phrase, "law of tything [*sic*]," apparently one of the topics discussed.¹⁴ Wilford Woodruff gives the greatest detail, calling it an "interesting day."¹⁵ Like Joseph Smith, he also emphasizes the presence of Joseph Fielding, adding that they "saw a number of english [*sic*] Brethren."¹⁶ He also records nearly word for word Joseph Smith's statement about the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Fielding's Possible Influence

The presence of Joseph Fielding, as emphasized by both Wilford Woodruff and Joseph Smith, may hold a key to understanding the context of the statement. As noted in the Prophet's record, Elder Fielding had been absent four years preaching the gospel in England. In fact, he had only been in Nauvoo four days.¹⁷ This information immediately precedes Joseph's statement regarding the Book of Mormon, almost as if prompted. Possibly, Joseph Fielding and the British Mission had some tie to Joseph's statement regarding the power of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Fielding went to his native Great Britain as part of the original British Mission in 1837. Elders Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde assigned him to remain, and he presided over the mission from 1838 until the arrival of Brigham Young in April 1840. Though replaced as

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presiding officer, Elder Fielding continued his missionary labors in England until the Twelve left for Nauvoo in the summer of 1841. Joseph Fielding followed them later that fall, arriving four days before this council. The meeting was likely a missionary reunion of sorts for the group, much like modern missionaries reporting before their leaders. Joseph Fielding's missionary experiences may have been one of the "variety of subjects" discussed by the brethren. If so, it may explain the Prophet's statement regarding the Book of Mormon, especially because the book played a prominent role in Elder Fielding's mission.

The missionary diary of Joseph Fielding emphasizes the importance he placed on the Book of Mormon and its power to bring men "nearer to God."¹⁸ It begins with detailing his own personal conversion with Elder Parley P. Pratt, who "laid before [him] the Ordinances of the Gospel, which were very plain, being perfectly in accordance with the Scriptures, being still more clearly expressed in the Book of Mormon."¹⁹ On his mission, Elder Fielding attempted to use the same pattern, teaching the gospel from the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon. Early in his preaching, he recorded, "On Sunday Evening I spoke in the Cock Pit on the coming forth of this Work, the first Ministration of the Angel, and of the truth of the Book of Mormon, and it appears that several of the members of the Church were hurt at my setting it on a Level with the Bible. It grieves me to see some of the Church so weak in the Faith of the Church. It is Difficult to bring them to believe in their hearts that God has spoken as in Days of old, and that his Word is as important as it was then."²⁰ Later, when preaching with John Taylor, Elder Fielding encountered people who wanted proof of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. He recorded, "One of them stayed after the others, and I told him about the Book of M [Mormon] & talked to him about their Pride & their Conduct in general, that they were casting away a precious Pearl before they had looked at it."²¹

Another especially poignant experience Joseph Fielding had in bringing men closer to God through the power of the Book of Mormon occurred after the Twelve left England. Before departing for Nauvoo himself, Elder Fielding went on a preaching tour on the Isle of Man. As in earlier missionary experiences, the Book of Mormon was a central part of his message. Following a day of preaching, he recorded,

“Preached in the Morning on ‘Beloved now are we the Sons of God,’ etc. Had liberty, and the People felt well. In the Eve on Joseph’s Dreams and the Book of Mormon. The Lord was with me today, but the Church here are dull.”²²

The inability to impress the people with the message of the Book of Mormon weighed on Elder Fielding. Two weeks later, he recorded in his journal his feelings, including a recommitment to the importance of the Book of Mormon:

In the Eve I took a Walk on the high Mountain, with a great desire to have some Blessing from Heaven. I have long desired to behold some heavenly Messenger or some Ray of the Glory of God, and have often prayed for it, and often laid and watched for it by night, or stopped on the Road to look for some thing from the Heavenly World. We read of the Saviour, after he had through the Day taught the People, at night [would] go to the Mountain and spend [the] whole Night in Prayer to his Heavenly Father. But I feared lest I should ask for things which were not right, and while seated on the Ground, I opened the Book of Doctrine and Covenants and began to read the Instructions there: to be diligent in the Work of God, to teach from the Book of Mormon, etc. I saw that I had not been giving due heed to that Book, and I felt that I was not prepared to hold that Converse with the Angels as I thought. I began to pray for the Church. I felt humbled before the Lord. I feel indeed a strong desire after him, for he is my God, and my chief Joy.²³

Recommitted to the converting power of the Book of Mormon, Elder Fielding wrote in his journal the following day: “Preached in the Even here in Douglas. Spoke of the Book of Mormon. Felt well, and the People, too.”²⁴

Importance of Abiding

Though the message of the Book of Mormon caused some people to rejoice, others were embittered by it. A portion of Joseph Smith’s statement may relate to this. The Prophet stressed that the Book of

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Mormon would bring men nearer to God "by abiding by its precepts." Merely hearing the message was not enough; to enjoy the full benefit of the book, the reader must apply it. The Savior taught a similar principle during His ministry in Jerusalem, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). Living the message of the gospel brings conversion. In the Book of Mormon, Alma taught the same idea. Comparing the word of God to a seed, he stressed that nourishing it with faith, diligence, and patience brought forth fruit (see Alma 32:38–43).

Again, this may relate to Joseph Fielding and his experience in Britain. Undoubtedly some members of the Twelve, and possibly even Joseph Smith himself, were familiar with the opposition Elder Fielding experienced on his mission. Time and again, this opposition related to the Book of Mormon. On one occasion, he recorded, "A man named Giles is lecturing against us, the Book of Mormon, etc. He treats us all with great contempt and Ridicule, and often makes his hearers laugh."²⁵ Later, he continued, "Three different Priests of the Sects were lecturing against us last Sabbath Week. . . . One named Dent, of the Church of England, held up the Book of Mormon to his Congregation as an object of Scorn and laughter. Another named Worrell of the Methodists, did the same, calling us imposters."²⁶

The opposition was especially strong from Joseph Fielding's brother James. Initially friendly to the missionaries, the relationship soured as James's Primitive Episcopal congregation increasingly left to join the Saints.²⁷ In August 1838, James wrote his brother, forcefully accusing him of stealing his flock. Again, the Book of Mormon was central to the attack. "You were certainly the *aggressor*," James wrote. "Your business was not to tell me 'in plain terms that the Book of Mormon was the word of God'—this was *assuming* the thing—I want something to convince my judgment."²⁸ James further charged Joseph, "Now I do not believe at all that you were sent of God to rend my little Church to pieces—Were I to speak as 'plain' as you do I should boldly declare that it was not God but Satan as an angel of light sent you here—However, I do seriously declare that that is my sincere belief."²⁹

The attack from his brother hurt Elder Fielding significantly, but he stood by the message of the Restoration. In his journal, he recorded,

“[James] was very much opposed to us. In the Morning as we were sitting down to Breakfast he began to say very hard things of us and the Book of Mormon. I was much grieved and it appeared that I could not eat. I got up from the Table, took the Book in my Hand and declared to all, to him in particular, that what we had told them was the Truth, that that Book was of God, and that he would have to repent, and then left the House, from which time I have not been much in his Company. When I go to his house he will scarcely speak to me.”³⁰ These and other experiences undoubtedly influenced Joseph Fielding as a missionary. Though details of the meeting are scarce, it is possible that upon his return Elder Fielding shared some of these encounters, leading Joseph Smith to emphasize that a man comes nearer to God only by abiding by the Book of Mormon message.

“Most Correct”

Another part of the statement, that the Book of Mormon is “the most correct of any book on earth,” can also be better understood in its historical context. By “most correct,” did Joseph’s original intent mean “without error”? Hugh Nibley observed, “What is a ‘correct’ book? One with properly cut margins, appropriate binding, a useful index, accurately numbered pages? Not at all; these are mere mechanical details, as are also punctuation, spelling, and even grammar—those matters about which the critics of the Book of Mormon have made such a to-do. . . . The most correct book in the world is the one that will be found to contain the fewest untrue statements after all the books in the world have been checked and compared.”³¹

Book of Mormon prophets understood that “most correct” did not mean without error. Beginning the record, Nephi acknowledged that if he erred, it was “because of the weakness which [was] in [him]” (1 Nephi 19:6). Concluding his record, Mormon himself wrote, “And if there be faults they be the faults of a man” (Mormon 8:17). Later, Moroni lamented his own “weakness in writing” (Ether 12:23). In light of these disclaimers, it is apparent that Joseph Smith’s statement regarding the accuracy of the Book of Mormon likely referred to content and message rather than grammar and style. In fact, the reality that the Book of Mormon was not grammatically perfect was evident at the

time the statement was made. Joseph Smith himself had recently gone through the text, making changes for the third published edition. These corrections included editorial changes to improve grammar and the restoration of phrases lost when the printer's manuscript was produced.³² Though he called the book the "most correct," Joseph was apparently not satisfied with its typographical flaws.

Similarly, the Twelve had published a British edition of the Book of Mormon earlier in 1841. Done with the permission of Joseph Smith, it reproduced the earlier 1837 edition with British spellings.³³ This later version of the Book of Mormon was an important part of the Twelve's mission to Britain. Seeking permission to print it, Brigham Young even wrote Joseph Smith that "[the British saints] beg and plead for the Book of Mormon."³⁴ Similarly, Parley P. Pratt lobbied for its printing, observing that the book "was not to be had in this part of the vineyard for love or money. Hundreds are waiting in various parts here about but there is truly a famine in that respect."³⁵ Publishing the Book of Mormon in Britain, even though it didn't match the most recent Nauvoo edition, satisfied the need. Discussion regarding these recent editions of the Book of Mormon, especially as they differed in their slight grammatical corrections, may relate to why Joseph called it "the most correct of any book on earth."

Preserving the Statement

A final observation regarding the context of Joseph Smith's statement is its recording itself. Though presented in the *History of the Church* as if it were recorded by Joseph Smith, the statement was likely not personally preserved by him. In reality, no personal journal entry for the Prophet exists for November 28, 1841. In fact, more than two years separate Joseph's 1839 Illinois journal and his later December 1841 writings.³⁶ This period was marked by the untimely death of one scribe, Robert B. Thompson, and the appointment of Willard Richards as his replacement. Summarizing these record-keeping difficulties, Joseph observed:

Since I have been engaged in laying the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have been

prevented in various ways from continuing my journal and history in a manner satisfactory to myself or in justice to the cause. Long imprisonments, vexatious and long-continued law-suits, the treachery of some of my clerks, the death of others, and the poverty of myself and brethren from continued plunder and driving, have prevented my handing down to posterity a connected memorandum of events desirable to all lovers of truth; yet I have continued to keep up a journal in the best manner my circumstances would allow, and dictate for my history from time to time, as I have had opportunity so that the labors and suffering of the first Elders and Saints of this last kingdom might not wholly be lost to the world.³⁷

How, then, was Joseph Smith's statement preserved? The answer lies in the compilation of the manuscript version of *History of the Church*, where the statement initially appeared. This document was begun in 1839 and continued sporadically throughout Joseph Smith's lifetime. Nauvoo's newspaper, the *Times and Seasons*, began publishing it in serial form in March 1842. By the time of Joseph's death, the manuscript was complete through August 5, 1838, and published through December 1831.³⁸ Under the direction of Willard Richards, work continued on the document even as the Saints prepared to leave Nauvoo in 1846. By the time of their departure, the manuscript was complete through March 1, 1843, including the famous 1841 statement by Joseph Smith calling the Book of Mormon the keystone of our religion.

Without the aid of Joseph Smith himself or a personal journal to fill in missing details, Willard Richards was forced to rely on other records to craft the history. In 1845, he pled with the Saints, "All those who have letters, or documents of any kind in their possession, which in any way relate to the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are requested to leave them with the historian."³⁹ The Joseph Smith statement, as we have it today, likely comes from individuals who heard the Prophet say it and submitted their record as requested. In fact, Wilford Woodruff's journal itself may be the statement's source, since it nearly identically matches the statement found in *History of the Church*. The authors of *History of the Church* likely changed Wilford Woodruff's third-person account to sound like Joseph's first-person

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record. Regarding this process, historian Dean C. Jessee observed, "To further complicate the question of authorship, since Joseph Smith's diary did not provide an unbroken narrative of his life, gaps were bridged by using other sources, changing indirect discourse to direct as if Joseph had done the writing himself. Not uncommon according to the editorial practices of the day, this method of supplying missing detail had the effect of providing a smooth-flowing, connected narrative of events."⁴⁰ Joseph Smith's keystone statement regarding the Book of Mormon likely comes to us this way.

MODERN USE OF JOSEPH SMITH'S STATEMENT

Though Joseph Smith's statement is well known today, it has not always been so recognized. Probably due to the small audience who first heard it and the inaccessibility of Joseph's history to the early Church, the statement was rarely quoted during the first hundred years of the Church. The earliest print version of the statement likely appeared in Salt Lake City in the *Deseret News* as part of the serialized printing of "Joseph Smith's History."⁴¹ In Great Britain, the *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* likewise published it as part of their series "History of Joseph Smith."⁴² In the early twentieth century, B. H. Roberts first included the statement in book form in the multivolume *History of the Church*. However, the sheer size of this work may have deterred readers from finding the statement, since isolating one paragraph buried in six volumes spanning 3,285 pages is problematic. Edwin F. Parry may have helped bring the statement to light by including it in his 1912 work, *Joseph Smith's Teachings*, a brief collection of statements by the Prophet culled from *History of the Church*. Undoubtedly Joseph Fielding Smith's 1938 publication, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, which included the statement under the title, "Perfection of the Book of Mormon," aided in its dissemination.⁴³

General Authority Use of the Quotation

With its increased publication, General Authorities began using the keystone statement in their addresses and writings. One early authority to use the statement was Elder John A. Widtsoe, who used it in articles in the *Improvement Era* in 1937 and again in 1952.⁴⁴ The statement was also included as part of a lesson in the official 1942 Melchizedek

Priesthood study outline, a course which used *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* as its text. In April 1949, Elder Bruce R. McConkie became the first to quote it in general conference.⁴⁵

With the statement's increased familiarity, more and more individuals began citing it. In the April 1961 general conference, Elder McConkie delivered a powerful address on the Book of Mormon and its ability to bring men and women to Christ. Citing the "keystone statement," he declared, "The Book of Mormon is the means, the tool, the way which has been ordained and given so that men can get their hearts and souls in a frame of mind, in a condition where they can hearken to the testimony of the Spirit."⁴⁶

Ironically, Elder Marion G. Romney apparently intended to speak on the same topic. In the closing session of the same conference, he declared:

I have a prepared talk in my pocket, which took me five months to prepare, titled "The Book of Mormon—The Keystone of Our Religion." You, of course, know what Brother McConkie did to it. He has made me feel towards it as the player on a boys' baseball team felt towards left field. This player was taken out of a game to give Jimmy from the second string a chance to play. As luck would have it, Jimmy dropped the first two balls hit into left field. He was therefore taken out, and the left fielder put back in. The next two balls hit also went to left field, and the regular player dropped them. When he came off the field at the end of the inning, the coach said, "I wasn't surprised when Jimmy fumbled the ball, but I was surprised at you." "Well, Coach," said the player, "I'll tell you, Jimmy messed up left field so badly that no one can play it."

Though he changed his address, Elder Romney still urged all members, and especially Melchizedek Priesthood holders studying it that year, to read the Book of Mormon, promising that "the Prophet knew what he was talking about when he said that ' . . . a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.'⁴⁷ A year later, Elder Romney happily reported that 59,740 bearers of the Melchizedek Priesthood had accepted the challenge.⁴⁸

President Benson's Use of the Statement

While General Authorities like Elder McConkie and Elder Romney used Joseph Smith's statement in their addresses, President Ezra Taft Benson seems to be the quote's chief advocate. Over a period of nearly thirty years, he repeatedly returned to the statement in his addresses. Quoting it as early as the October 1963 general conference, President Benson famously emphasized the importance of the Book of Mormon and its power to bring Church members closer to Christ. In fact, in conference President Benson used Joseph Smith's quote regarding the Book of Mormon ten different times from 1984 to 1988 alone, including twice in his first conference as Church President (April 1986) and three more times in his second (October 1986). After quoting the Joseph Smith statement, President Benson declared, "[The Book of Mormon] is the keystone of our religion. It is the keystone of our doctrine. It is the keystone of our testimony. It is a keystone in the witness of Jesus Christ. It is a keystone in helping us avoid the deceptions of the evil one in these latter days. . . . The Book of Mormon must be reenthroned in the minds and hearts of our people. We must honor it by reading it, by studying it, by taking its precepts into our lives and transforming them into lives required of the true followers of Christ."⁴⁹

The final step in bringing Joseph Smith's statement to the general recognition of Church membership was its inclusion in the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon. "One of the significant additions of the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon," observed Robert J. Matthews, "is a one-page introduction that briefly explains what the Book of Mormon is."⁵⁰ A complete revision from earlier introductory pages to the Book of Mormon, the text was apparently drafted by Elder McConkie, a member of the Scriptures Publication Committee.⁵¹ As shown, Elder McConkie was an advocate of Joseph Smith's statement and thus was instrumental in including it for the first time in the book's introduction. Since 1981, Book of Mormon readers have been introduced to Joseph Smith's famous statement early in their reading of its inspired pages.

CONCLUSION

The story of Joseph Smith's keystone statement regarding the Book of Mormon is a fascinating case study in the use of his teachings.

Though delivered to a small audience of Church leaders, its preservation, publication, and citation have helped the statement become one of the Prophet's most easily recognizable declarations. Understanding the historical context of the statement, including the individuals present at its delivery, the possible nature of their discussion, and the Prophet's original intent, helps the reader appreciate its significance. These men and others early in this dispensation were brought closer to God through the message of the Book of Mormon. Responding to the call of their Lord, they traveled the world, seeking a similar blessing for others. Today, millions of readers worldwide apply the message these early brethren received from the Prophet, likewise relying on his promise that abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon will bring them closer to God.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1957), 4:461.
2. A simple search of general conference reports from 1971 to 2006 shows that Joseph Smith's "keystone" statement has been quoted in one form or another thirty-one times. Nearly as well known, his statement that "happiness is the object and design of our existence" was used twenty-three times in general conference over a similar period. The Prophet's statement, "I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves" has appeared thirteen times in general conference, while the declaration "A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation" has been used ten times.
3. Robert J. Matthews, *A Bible, A Bible!* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 69.
4. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:461.
5. Elden Jay Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801–1844* (Salt Lake City: Smith Secretarial Service, 1968), 109.
6. Craig J. Ostler, "Brigham Young Lot," *Virtual Historian: Doctrine and Covenants*, CD-ROM.
7. See Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 276; see also James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, *Men with a Mission: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles, 1837–1841* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 307–8.
8. See Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:454–59.
9. William Smith was likely in New Jersey in November 1841. Early in August of the same year, he wrote Joseph, informing him he was leaving Pennsylvania for New Jersey within the week (see *History of the Church*, 4:391). On January 1, 1842,

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Joseph recorded that William was still in New Jersey (see *History of the Church*, 4:490). William's whereabouts are complicated somewhat by his name appearing with those of eight other Apostles in epistles written from Nauvoo on November 15, 1841, and December 13, 1841 (see *History of the Church*, 4:453, 475). However, it is doubtful William returned to Nauvoo between August and January. More likely, his name was included by the other members of the Twelve in his absence, much like the Apostolic letter of December 1, 1841, also written from Nauvoo with all twelve names appended (see *History of the Church*, 4:466). Clearly, Parley P. Pratt and Orson Hyde could not have signed the letter, as they were assigned overseas.

10. See Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:462.

11. A similar council of the Twelve Apostles held at Brigham Young's home two days later lists seven apostles present (see *History of the Church*, 4:463). George A. Smith was absent for this later meeting but did record in his journal being in Nauvoo during this time (see "Memoirs of George A. Smith," December 12, 1841, George A. Smith Papers, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City).

12. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:461.

13. Watson, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 112.

14. Willard Richards Journal, November 28, 1841, Willard Richards Papers, Church Archives.

15. Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 2:139.

16. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:139.

17. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:460.

18. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:461.

19. Joseph Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, book 1:7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

20. Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, book 1:73-74.

21. Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, book 2:117.

22. Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, book 4:33.

23. Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, book 4:38-39. It is unclear which passage in the Doctrine and Covenants inspired this recommitment on the part of Elder Fielding. Both Doctrine and Covenants 42:12 and 84:57 instruct the elders to preach from the Book of Mormon.

24. Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, book 4:39.

25. Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, book 1:50-51.

26. Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, book 1:54.

27. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 31-33, 329.

28. James Fielding to Joseph Fielding, August 27, 1838, in Joseph Fielding Correspondence, 1837-1842, MSS 670, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

29. James Fielding to Joseph Fielding, August 27, 1838, in Joseph Fielding Correspondence, 1837-1842, MSS 670, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

30. Joseph Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, book 1:25, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

31. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 8.

32. Dennis L. Largey, ed., *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), s.v. "Book of Mormon, editions of."
33. Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), s.v. "Book of Mormon Editions (1830–1981)."
34. Brigham Young to Joseph Smith, May 7, 1840, cited in Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 250.
35. Parley P. Pratt to Joseph Smith, November 22, 1839, cited in Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 249n53.
36. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 2:334.
37. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:470.
38. Dean C. Jessee, "The Reliability of Joseph Smith's History," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 34.
39. Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:526.
40. Jessee, "The Reliability of Joseph Smith's History," 37.
41. Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen, *Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 8.
42. "History of Joseph Smith," *Millennial Star*, December 13, 1856, 790.
43. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 194.
44. See John A. Widtsoe, "The Articles of Faith," *Improvement Era*, September 1937, 535; see also Widtsoe, "May God's Word Be Interpreted?" *Improvement Era*, August 1952, 567.
45. Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, April 1949, 91.
46. Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, April 1961, 38.
47. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, April 1961, 116–17.
48. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, April 1962, 19.
49. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Gift of Modern Revelation," *Ensign*, November 1986, 80. Of the emphasis President Benson placed on the Book of Mormon during his early presidency, his biographer observed, "During his first year as president, he delivered some twenty major addresses on the Book of Mormon. In a temple meeting of the General Authorities in early February 1986, President Hinckley told the Brethren that President Benson would become the Church's greatest proponent of the Book of Mormon" (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987], 491).
50. Robert J. Matthews, "The New Publications of the Standard Works—1979, 1981," *BYU Studies* 22, no. 4 (Fall 1982): 393.
51. Robert J. Matthews, interview with author, January 8, 2007.