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## "FOR A WISE PURPOSE"

*Robert J. Matthews*

SOME FORTY YEARS AGO BRIGHAM YOUNG University inaugurated a "Last Lecture" series. The idea was that if a professor knew that he or she was giving the last lecture on a particular subject, the professor would present the most persuasive arguments and important concepts on that subject. I don't know that this will be my last lecture, but I have organized it on that premise. Although I have sought the help of the Holy Spirit, I alone am responsible for what I am about to say.

The title of this essay is "For a Wise Purpose," a phrase used several times in the Book of Mormon and in the Doctrine and Covenants (see 1 Nephi 9:3–6; Words of Mormon 1:3–5; Alma 37:2, 8, 14; D&C 5:9), and I will note in the discussion that the "wise purpose" has several applications and includes the entire message of the Book of Mormon. This wise purpose, the Lord has testified, is to bear witness of the Savior and to teach with purity the doctrines and

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prophecies that His ancient covenant people once had (see D&C 3:16–20).

### A DUAL RECORD

The Lord commanded Nephi to make two separate accounts of the history of his people on separate collections of gold plates. One record would be known as the large plates, the other as the small plates. Forging heavy gold plates by hand and engraving characters upon them is difficult work by itself and was increased by two records. Apparently the Lord did not tell Nephi all the reasons why double coverage was necessary but did tell him it was for a wise purpose known to God and would be made manifest to future generations (see 1 Nephi 9:5–6; 19:3; Alma 37:12, 14). A thousand years later, while editing a final version of the records, the prophet Mormon was inspired to include the original small plates of Nephi along with Mormon’s own abridged version of the large plates. Mormon said he acted by inspiration for a “wise purpose” that was known to God but not to him (Words of Mormon 1:7). When Mormon’s son, Moroni, hid the records in the Hill Cumorah, he preserved the double record for future use. Joseph Smith obtained those plates in September 1827 from the same Hill Cumorah.

### THE “LOST” MANUSCRIPT

Persons familiar with the translation and printing of the Book of Mormon know of the loss of 116 pages of manuscript in 1828, which involved the Prophet’s scribe, Martin Harris of Palmyra, New York. We call it the “lost manuscript,” but in truth it was the stolen manuscript, taken by persons attempting to destroy the holy work that God had called Joseph Smith to do. The 116 pages were Joseph Smith’s translation from the plates of Mormon, which began with a book of Lehi, and covered a period of approximately 470 years, from 600 B.C. to 130 B.C., a significant loss. These dates are determined by the length of the small plates from 1 Nephi 1 to the beginning of the book of Mosiah.

It was not the gold plates that were stolen, only the Prophet

Joseph's translation. He could have translated the record a second time, but the Lord counseled him not to do so and explained that a remedy had been provided centuries ago by the Lord in requiring the inclusion of the small plates. The remedy was to use a translation of the more spiritual small plates of Nephi in place of the translation of Mormon's more secular record. The small plates began with the book of Nephi, whereas the stolen portion began with a book of Lehi. As a result of this substitution, the book of Lehi does not occur in the printed Book of Mormon. Two revelations from the Lord giving the above directions to the Prophet Joseph are published in the Doctrine and Covenants as sections 3 and 10.

The first edition of the Book of Mormon, published in March 1830, in Palmyra, contained the following statement written by Joseph Smith as part of a preface:

“To the Reader—

“ . . . I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon; which said account, some person or persons have stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again—and being commanded of the Lord that I should not translate the same over again, for Satan had put it into their hearts to tempt the Lord their God, by altering the words, that they did read contrary from that which I translated and caused to be written; and if I should bring forth the same words again, or, in other words, if I should translate the same over again, they would publish that which they had stolen, and Satan would stir up the hearts of this generation, that they might not receive this work: but behold, the Lord said unto me, I will not suffer that Satan shall accomplish his evil design in this thing: therefore thou shalt translate from the plates of Nephi, until ye come to that which ye have translated, which ye have retained; and behold ye shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words. I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will shew unto them that my

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wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil. Wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, I have, through his grace and mercy, accomplished that which he hath commanded me respecting this thing. . . .

“The Author”

It must have been a painful frustration to those Palmyra pirates when they opened their first copy of the Book of Mormon, only to find that they, as the servants of Satan, had been outmaneuvered by the God of Joseph Smith.

Marvelous as this Palmyra event is, the wise purpose of the Lord extends much further to include the entire message of the Book of Mormon, especially its witness of Jesus Christ. It is concerning some of the precise doctrines preserved in the Book of Mormon that I will speak in the remainder of this essay.

#### ANOTHER WITNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

The Book of Mormon affirms that God has a plan of happiness for mankind; that mortal life is a probation; that individual, intelligent life continues after the death of the mortal body; that every person’s spirit and body will be permanently reunited in a resurrection and receive a just judgment of God according to one’s works. This plan is operative only because of Jesus Christ.

The central theme of the Book of Mormon is that Jesus Christ is mankind’s only source for salvation. The book presents 101 name-titles, each of which defines Jesus’ character and redeeming mission. These 101 name-titles are repeated for a total of 3,925 times.<sup>1</sup> The witness for Christ flows continually throughout the entire book, and of 239 chapters, only six do not mention the Lord. These are Mosiah chapters 9 and 22; Alma chapters 51 and 52; and Helaman chapters 1 and 2, dealing with wars and civil government.

In the modern world there is growing rejection of Jesus Christ as the divine Redeemer. It is a sophisticated, intellectual, and sociological approach, generally denying Christ’s godhood, His miracles, and His physical resurrection from the tomb. Many persons of learning seriously question if Jesus Christ was a real person who

lived on this earth. They speak of the Jesus of history as being different from the Jesus of faith—in other words, the Jesus of the Bible did not actually exist, was not divine, performed no miracles, did not make an atonement with His precious blood, and did not rise from the dead in a resurrection nor conquer death and sin for mankind. Many of these faithless views are promoted by pastors and teachers in traditional Christian churches of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>2</sup> It appears that their doctrinal foundation has crumbled, even though they have a Bible in the pulpit. With many, the Bible no longer has divine authenticity. The Lord knew that this rejection of Jesus and of the Bible would occur, and therefore He sent the Book of Mormon as a fresh, second witness of the real Jesus Christ and the real Bible (see D&C 3:16–20; 10:57–63; 1 Nephi 13:32–36).

Because of the plain language of the Book of Mormon, it is in many ways a stronger, more revealing, and particular testament for Christ than the present New Testament is. It also shows that the prophets from the time of Adam were Christian prophets and that every dispensation was a Christian dispensation, with the same gospel, same ordinances, and same plan of salvation centered in Christ.

The following Book of Mormon statements about Jesus Christ are definitive, more so, I think, than the Bible. When Book of Mormon prophets spoke of Christ they often used superlatives, absolutes, and ultimates—the most, the greatest, the only, and so forth. They also set forth great contrasts, as you will notice.

#### THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

The prophet Alma said: “There be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—. . . the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people. . . . He shall be born of Mary, . . . she being a virgin, . . . [who shall] bring forth . . . the Son of God” (Alma 7:7, 10).

Centuries earlier, Nephi reported that he had seen in vision a most beautiful and fair virgin “in the city of Nazareth” and that an

angel told him the virgin “is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.” He also saw “the virgin . . . bearing a child in her arms.” The angel said, “Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the eternal Father!” (1 Nephi 11:13, 18, 20–21). Nephi also beheld that “the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men” is made manifest in the coming of the Son of God to earth and is possible only by the “condescension of God.” This love of God is described as “the most desirable above all things” and “the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:16, 22–23).

Why the emphasis on Jesus, above all others? It is because only Jesus can give that which mankind most desperately needs and which men are totally unable to provide for themselves. Only Jesus could conquer death and sin, because He alone, of all our Father’s spirit children, is a God. The wonderfully brave Abinadi said that all the prophets have taught that “God himself” (Mosiah 13:34) would come down among men and make the Atonement. Alma said that “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world” (Alma 42:15).

#### AN INFINITE GOD

Book of Mormon prophets repeatedly use the word *infinite* when speaking of Jesus. Nephi said that the Atonement “is infinite for all mankind” (2 Nephi 25:16). The perceptive Amulek said: “For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

“Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. . . . therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world” (Alma 34:10–12).

And the inspired theologian Jacob explained that “it must needs be an infinite atonement” or it could not redeem either man’s body or his spirit (2 Nephi 9:7). All of the foregoing passages place Jesus in the most preeminent status of any person ever to live on this earth.

What would the consequences be for the human family if no atonement were made? Nephi and Amulek both said that without the Atonement all mankind would “perish” (2 Nephi 11:6; Alma 34:9). But what does “perish” mean in this context? Jacob, the great doctrinarian, explained that in such a case, bodies would be “laid down to rot and to crumble to . . . mother earth, to rise no more,” and our spirits would “become devils . . . to be shut out from the presence of our God . . . in misery” forever. In gratitude, Jacob cries out, “O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster . . . death and hell” (2 Nephi 9:7, 9–10).

#### THE ONLY SAVIOR

Just how dependent are we upon Jesus? Was there an alternate plan? A backup redeemer? The New Testament seems to answer these questions with Peter’s eloquent words spoken a few weeks after Jesus’ death and resurrection: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Likewise, Paul said there is no other foundation but Christ (see 1 Corinthians 3:11). I once quoted Peter’s words to some friends who were wondering if there might have been an alternate emergency plan and a backup savior. I thought Peter’s words would convince them that Jesus is the One and Only, but I discovered that neither Peter’s nor Paul’s words were convincing to them. Their response was that since Peter’s and Paul’s statements were made after Christ’s atoning sacrifice, they had no bearing on whether or not there had been an alternate plan beforehand. I came to appreciate the greater clarity and definition of the Book of Mormon on this matter. For example, Nephi wrote almost the identical thought as Peter, but he did it more than five hundred years before Peter said it and therefore before Jesus came to earth (see 2 Nephi 31:21).

King Benjamin left no wiggle room in his definition of the plan, and he said it 124 years before Jesus was born: “And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way

nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17). And “the atonement . . . was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world. And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you” (Mosiah 4:7–8).

#### THE FALL AND THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

Another essential doctrine in the Book of Mormon is the inseparable connection between the fall of Adam and the atonement of Jesus Christ. The severe, intense, and necessary consequences of the Fall are explained in much greater detail in the Book of Mormon than in the Bible. Genesis has a brief account of the transgression of Adam and Eve (chapter 3) but develops no clear doctrine of the Fall. After the fifth chapter of Genesis, Adam is seldom mentioned in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, only Paul discusses the doctrine of the Fall and its relation to the Atonement, and even he does it briefly. Beyond Genesis the Bible mentions Adam only twelve times, and some of these are one-word entries in genealogical lists. In sharp contrast, the Book of Mormon abounds in passages about Adam and the Fall, and Adam is mentioned by name twenty-five times, mostly in doctrinal discussions about the Fall and the Atonement.

Who in the Book of Mormon taught the doctrine of the Fall? No less than Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, King Benjamin, Abinadi, both Almas, Ammon, Aaron, Amulek, Samuel the Lamanite, Mormon, Moroni, and the brother of Jared. These prophets also cite Zenock, Zenos, and Neum. The following passages illustrate the particular clarity of the Book of Mormon. The great visionary Lehi explained that without the Fall, Adam and Eve would have had no children, which is a major doctrinal statement because it testifies that the Fall was a necessary action (see 2 Nephi 2:23). Lehi also said that



without the Fall “all things . . . must have remained forever” without death (2 Nephi 2:22), which is another major doctrinal declaration.

Lehi continued: “But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:24–26). These three statements by Lehi place the Fall as an essential step in the plan of salvation, and they also stand against the theory of organic evolution as man’s origin.

King Benjamin explained: “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19).

And Moroni gave this tidy summary: “Behold, [God] created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man” (Mormon 9:12).

#### RESURRECTION: THE GREATEST MIRACLE

Jesus convincingly demonstrated his physical resurrection by showing His body to about 2,500 persons and asking them to touch it. In a dramatic scene, the Father spoke from the sky and introduced Jesus as His Beloved Son as Jesus came down and stood before the people. Jesus declared that He was the Christ and then said:

“Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

“And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one

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until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.

“And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

“Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him” (3 Nephi 11:14–17).

Other men could teach doctrine and administer ordinances, but only Jesus could atone and conquer death. He came in person to assure the people that the Resurrection was real and that He was real. Who taught the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon? Nearly every prophet that is quoted in it, the same prophets who taught about the Fall (see Mosiah 13:33–35).

#### SAVED ONLY THROUGH THE MERITS OF CHRIST

Lehi declared: “There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). Nephi taught that man must rely “wholly upon the merits” of Christ (2 Nephi 31:19). Ammon said that our great God has “taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son” (Alma 24:10). Samuel the Lamanite testified that remission of sins comes “through his merits” (Helaman 14:13). And Moroni said that we must rely “alone upon the merits of Christ” (Moroni 6:4).

#### IMMEDIATE BLESSINGS

Salvation is set in motion, and as soon as a person believes in Jesus and repents of sin, the blessings of the gospel begin to be felt. King Benjamin’s people immediately felt great joy, peace of conscience, remission of sins, and a mighty change of heart because of their exceeding faith in Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 4:3, 26; 5:1–4; see also Alma 34:31). When Alma was racked with spiritual pain because of his many sins, he remembered what his father had said about Jesus’ atonement (note Alma’s use of contrast):

“Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

“And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

“And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

“Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:18–21).

Alma testified that the Lord supported him through trials of every kind and also gave him joy in his labors (see Alma 36:37). All these are examples of the love of God that comes through Jesus Christ.

### THE KEystone OF DOCTRINE

We see how forcefully the Book of Mormon teaches the points of Christ’s doctrine, not in competition to the Bible but as a witness for the truth of the Bible. If a person believes one record, he should believe both records (see Mormon 7:8–9). This witness in support of the Bible is one of the Lord’s wise purposes in making the Book of Mormon available.

The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke of the Book of Mormon as the “keystone of our religion.”<sup>3</sup> I suppose it is the keystone because it is definite, it sets the standard, and it holds the fundamental doctrines in place, not allowing multiple interpretations or room to hedge. Without it, the blind lead the blind, or we might say, the bland lead the bland. Elder Orson Pratt described it perfectly: “The nature of the message in the Book of Mormon is such, that if true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it.”<sup>4</sup>

## PRECISE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

By divine direction, Father Lehi declared that wicked Jerusalem would be destroyed, many Jews would be slain, and others would be taken captive to Babylon. Before the destruction, the Lord led Lehi and his family out of Jerusalem to the Western Hemisphere, where he learned by vision that the word of the Lord was verified and Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians (see 1 Nephi 1:12–14, 18–20; 2 Nephi 1:4; 6:8; see also 2 Nephi 25:9).

One of Mormon’s inspired editorial accomplishments was to show that the word of the Lord spoken by His chosen prophets is always fulfilled to the letter. Mormon makes certain that the reader knows that the prophecies of Alma and Amulek concerning the destruction of the wicked city Ammonihah were completely fulfilled (see Alma 9:12, 19; 10:22–23; 16:1–3, 9–12). Likewise, with much detail, Mormon rehearses Abinadi’s fiery prophecies that wicked King Noah would be killed, that the priests of Noah would put people to death by fire, and that a curse would come upon the land, which would be infested with sorceries, witchcrafts, and magics. Mormon shows that all of these pronouncements were categorically fulfilled (see Mosiah 13:10; 17:13–20; Alma 25:7–12; Mormon 1:18–19). So readers will not fail to get the point, Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni use literary devices such as “behold, I will show unto you that” or “thus we see that.”<sup>55</sup>

Father Lehi’s prophecies of prosperous times for his posterity when they were righteous, but also terrible troubles if they became wicked, were literally fulfilled several times, as Mormon is careful to remind the reader (see 2 Nephi 1:5–12; Alma 9:13–22; 50:19–23). Mormon also records the fulfillment of the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite of a night without darkness at Christ’s birth and three days with nothing but darkness at his death, accompanied by earthquakes, storms, and tumults, and also of tools and weapons becoming “slippery” and hard to maintain (see Helaman 13:17–31; 14:2–28; Mormon 1:18–19; 2:10). The marvelously persistent Samuel also prophesied that many Saints would be resurrected after Jesus’ resurrection. This was literally fulfilled. When Jesus visited the people, knowing that the fulfillment was not recorded in the

sacred, official record, He commanded that the exact fulfillment be entered into the books (see 3 Nephi 23:7–13).

### PROPHECIES CONCERNING CHRIST

The most significant prophecies fulfilled were the birth of Jesus Christ and His miracles, the Atonement, Resurrection, and His visit to the Western Hemisphere. Many vocal unbelievers said it “was not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come,” and they planned to put to death those who believed in the prophecies. It was Satan who planted these doubts in their minds (see Helaman 16:17–23). Mormon shows that the prophecies were literally fulfilled and tells us that the voice of the Lord Jesus came to Nephi, saying: “On the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets . . . from the foundation of the world” (3 Nephi 1:13–14). The sign of Christ’s birth was given, and the unbelievers were frustrated. Thirty-four years later, the special signs of Christ’s death were given; darkness, earthquakes, storms, and tumult occurred, and many people were slain. Faithful and industrious Mormon is careful to record all these things in detail and then gives this explanation and warning: “And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions by fire, and by smoke, and by tempests, and by whirlwinds, and by the opening of the earth to receive them, and all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets” (3 Nephi 10:14).

Other passages attesting to the exact fulfillment of prophecy are found in the Words of Mormon 1:4; Mormon 8:22; Moroni 10:28; and 3 Nephi 23:1–3. I believe that one of the wise purposes of the Book of Mormon is its witness to the fulfillment of prophecy.

### AN INSPIRED PRONOUNCEMENT CONCERNING THE BIBLE

By heavenly visions and the guidance of a holy angel, Nephi was shown what would happen to the record of the Jews, consisting of

the writings of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament Apostles. This inspired pronouncement about the Bible is recorded in 1 Nephi 13:21–42 and 14:23–27, with these declarations:

1. The Bible, containing the covenants of the Lord and the fullness of the gospel, was originally plain and easy to understand (see 1 Nephi 13:21–24; 14:23–27).
2. This Jewish Bible was deliberately altered by the great and abominable Gentile church, which took “many parts which are plain and most precious,” “many covenants,” and much of the gospel out of “the book” (1 Nephi 13:26, 28; see Mormon 8:33).
3. Alterations to the text were made deliberately to “pervert the right ways of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:27).
4. The alterations were made early, for it was after the Bible was altered that it went to “all the nations of the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:29).
5. Because many precious parts are “kept back” and taken out of the Bible and out of the gospel, many persons “stumble” and are in an “awful state of blindness” (1 Nephi 13:29, 32).
6. To rescue the world from this spiritual blindness, the Lord will bring the Book of Mormon and “other books” to “make known the plain and precious things that have been taken away” from the Bible (1 Nephi 13:39–40).
7. The Book of Mormon and the “other books” will establish the truth of the original Bible (see 1 Nephi 13:39–42).

Deliberate alterations can be done quickly and early and are more destructive than accidental changes because they target doctrinal passages and are cleverly done so that the loss to the passage is not abruptly noticeable.

#### A LESSON FROM THE LOST MANUSCRIPT

It is my experience that many members of the Church do not realize how severely the Bible has been altered. Some have said to me that they do not think that the Lord would permit sacred

scripture to be altered by evil and designing people. They should look to the Book of Mormon for help on this point. Not only does it say that the early Bible manuscripts were deliberately altered by abominable persons, but it provides us a parallel by the theft, changing, and loss of the 116 pages of the book of Lehi. Believers in the Book of Mormon and the history of Joseph Smith should have no difficulty accepting that early manuscripts of the Bible were severely changed and reduced in content, since our Book of Mormon went through the same type of attack. If 116 pages can be lost in less than a year, what could happen to a Bible in three or four centuries? Thieves altering scripture in Palmyra were typical of other thieves, at other times, in other lands, tampering with sacred biblical scripture. Judging from the many repeated warnings from the Lord not to “add to” or “take from” the scriptures, mankind seems to have a strong tendency to do just that. I have noted seventeen such references.<sup>6</sup> Satan hates good scripture, and it is part of his long war against Christ to attack the scriptures that testify of Christ in an attempt to destroy His divinity, mock His miracles, and rescind His resurrection. The Great Apostasy of the past nineteen centuries left the world without an adequate church, without an adequate Bible, and without an adequate body of doctrine. In all these cases, new revelation was necessary to recover what was lost. In my own opinion, the Bible has been ravaged much more than most of us realize, yet it still conveys the basic truth that Jesus is the Messiah, although many necessary details are missing.

The Book of Mormon repeatedly speaks of the gold plates being hidden in the earth for safekeeping (see 1 Nephi 13:35; 2 Nephi 27:22; 4 Nephi 1:48–49; Mormon 2:17; 5:12; 6:6; 8:4, 14; Ether 4:3; 5:11; title page, first paragraph). Thus hidden, no human could alter or destroy the records, and they were preserved in the original sense in which they were written. The Book of Mormon had to be protected from the loss of clarity that the Bible has gone through so it could do what the Lord in His wisdom purposed it to do—to be a witness for the real Christ and for the real Bible.

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To faithful Nephi, the Lord declared that He speaks “the same words to one nation like unto another” and “they shall write it” (2 Nephi 29:8, 12). Unless the Bible and the Book of Mormon had the same points of doctrine, one could not be a valid witness for the other. Thus, we conclude that originally the Bible was as doctrinally precise as the Book of Mormon is. The Bible is still wonderful but less clear or complete than it once was. I think it an insult to the biblical prophets and Apostles if we suppose that they did not explain the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel with greater precision than appears in present-day Bibles. As a divinely revealed original record, the Book of Mormon deserves to be used by scholars and laymen alike as a major documentary source for understanding the original doctrine of the Bible. Surely the Lord expects us to do this. Surely it is one of His wise purposes.

CONCLUSION

The message of the Book of Mormon is weightier than the gold plates on which it was engraved and is the keystone of doctrine in the Church. The wise purpose of the Lord in causing the book to be written thousands of years ago, then hidden in the earth to be given to the world in the last days, is declared by the Lord Himself in Doctrine and Covenants 3:16–20:

“Inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—

“And to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—

“And this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites. . . .

“And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

“And that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their



fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved.”

According to this declaration from the Lord, salvation would not come to our generation without the Book of Mormon.

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#### NOTES

1. Susan Easton Black, *Finding Christ through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 16.

2. The following is a sampling of the many publications that demonstrate the current abandonment of the Bible as an authentic record. The authors are for the most part ministers of religion, scholars, and seminarians: George Herbert Betts, *Beliefs of Seven Hundred Ministers and Their Meaning for Religious Education* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929); Walter Russell Bowie, *The Story of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1934); John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977); Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); C. F. Rehnborg, *Jesus and the New Age of Faith* (Buena Park, Calif.: C. F. Rehnborg Literary Foundation, 1955).

3. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 194.

4. Orson Pratt, “Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon,” in *Orson Pratt’s Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1945), 107.

5. See 1 Nephi 16:29; 17:3; Mosiah 23:23; Alma 3:19; 24:19, 27, 30; 26:37; 28:13, 14; 46:8; Ether 2:9; 14:25.

6. See Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5–6; Jeremiah 36:1–32; Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 11:53; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 2 Peter 3:15–16; 3 John 1:9–10; Revelation 22:18–19; 1 Nephi 13:20–41; 14:20–27; Mormon 8:33; D&C 10:1–45; 6:27; 20:35; 68:34; Moses 1:23, 40–41.