

Introduction

With other latter-day prophets,” President Thomas S. Monson said, “I testify of the truthfulness of this ‘most correct of any book on earth,’ even the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ. Its message spans the earth and brings its readers to a knowledge of the truth. It is my testimony that the Book of Mormon changes lives.”¹ Over the years many prophets have spoken of the book’s importance. For example, President Ezra Taft Benson spoke of the Book of Mormon as a gift “more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel.”² Although this book has blessed many lives from its publication to the present, it was not an easy gift to obtain. The chapters in this volume tell the story of how this remarkable gift came to pass.

This volume tells the story of a modern miracle, sharing details behind the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon, which the Prophet

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Joseph Smith described as “the keystone of our religion.”³ This remarkable book has been a critical element of the Church since its inception, but not every member realizes the challenges faced by those who worked so hard to bring it forth. While many of us are familiar with the narratives and doctrines the book contains, we often disregard the importance of its history. We hope that this volume will be an invaluable resource to those seeking to understand the importance of the Book of Mormon’s background, whether for individual study or for teaching purposes.

In the opening chapter, President Merrill J. Bateman, Emeritus Seventy, addresses a major purpose of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: to restore plain and precious truths. The doctrines and principles contained in the book augment, clarify, and complement those taught in the Bible and testify of the reality and divinity of Christ. The accounts written by ancient prophets in the Americas have been critical to the restoration and understanding of plain and precious truths contained within the book.

Other chapters discuss the experiences of Joseph Smith and those closest to him in obtaining and protecting the gold plates and other objects associated with the Book of Mormon translation. The witnesses provided evidence, both for their contemporaries and for us today, that Joseph Smith did obtain the physical objects associated with the book’s emergence. These chapters draw on primary accounts from the period of Joseph’s life during which he grew from a teenage boy who saw God the Father and His Son to a chosen seer who was entrusted by the angel Moroni with the care and protection of the sacred record that would become the Book of Mormon.

We next move to the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon. Chapters in this section discuss the translation process (which many Latter-day Saints may not have an accurate knowledge of), as well as the arduous journey of getting the book published. From seer stones to lost pages, readers can learn of the trials endured, miracles witnessed, and prophecies fulfilled during this pivotal period of the Book of Mormon’s life story. These essays include excerpts from primary accounts as well as scriptural texts that describe and confirm the miraculous reality of the Book of Mormon’s translation. Many accounts include testimonies of various witnesses of the book—the Eleven Witnesses and others who simply had the faith to believe in Joseph’s prophetic calling and his role in bringing forth an inspired and true record.

The next chapters evaluate how the Book of Mormon has gained prominence and acceptance as a testimony of Jesus Christ from its publication to the present day. Both within and without the Church, the Book of Mormon has endured times of scorn and doubt, but it has also gained unfaltering support by those who have sought their own witness of the book's truth. And as the Church has grown, the book has become available to millions of members who would not have been able to read the original English manuscripts. Since its original printing of five thousand copies, the Book of Mormon has been able to serve as a missionary tool both in America and dozens of other nations, being translated into nearly one hundred languages.

This volume concludes with two chapters highlighting two central purposes of the Book of Mormon. Besides containing inspiring stories and comforting messages, the Book of Mormon plays a critical role in spreading the gospel to all the world. The Lord's purpose in bringing forth this record was not simply to educate and inspire, but to "show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations."⁴ The Book of Mormon repeatedly invites readers to "come unto Christ" (Moroni 10:30, 32; see also 1 Nephi 6:4).

In addition, the Lord brought forth this book for other purposes. For example, President Benson declared, "The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention. (See 2 Ne. 3:12.) It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day."⁵

Whether we are seeking tangible evidence of the Book of Mormon or spiritual witnesses of the book's divinity, this volume will provide insightful and educational information that will aid us in our search. The chapters in this volume testify of the reality of the book's origin and history, as well as the reality of the testimonies and doctrines it provides. While some articles provide historical evidence of the book's existence and translation process, others testify of the inspired messages contained within the book's text. Both forms of evidence will be useful to us as we seek to develop our knowledge and testimony of the book and as we seek to share that light with others.

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Finally, we emphasize that while this volume does provide significant evidence of the book's truth, gaining a witness that the Book of Mormon is true is an individual and lifelong process. As Moroni has promised, those who seek their own confirmation of the Book of Mormon will receive a personal answer from the Lord (see Moroni 10:4). The Book of Mormon supports biblical testimonies of Christ and provides additional messages of his divine sonship. We encourage all readers of this volume to build on their current testimonies of the Book of Mormon by learning of its incredible history and origins. We hope this volume will be a valuable supplement to your Book of Mormon study and provide an additional source of the book's light and truth. As editors of this volume, we add our personal testimony that the Book of Mormon is true. It is an ancient record brought forth in our day, translated by the gift and power of God through Joseph Smith, the Lord's prophet.

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