

CHAPTER SIX

THE BOOK OF MORMON AS AN INTERPRETIVE GUIDE TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Through President Ezra Taft Benson, the Lord caught our attention with repeated admonitions regarding the blessings of the Book of Mormon and our responsibilities toward it. In the October 1986 general conference, President Benson called God's gift of the Book of Mormon "more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions" and "of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances . . . in modern medicine."¹ He also made the charge that "every Latter-day Saint should make the study of [the Book of Mormon] a lifetime pursuit. Otherwise he is placing his soul in jeopardy and neglecting that which could give spiritual and intellectual unity to his whole life."²

In a First Presidency Christmas message, President Benson said that we should know the Book of Mormon better than any other text.³ In light of President Benson's statements and persistent charges to read the Book of Mormon, our challenge is to find where we can appropriately incorporate the message of the Book of Mormon into New Testament study. The intent is not to overshadow the first testament of Christ but to magnify it through providing inspired commentary.

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DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT NEED BOOK OF MORMON CLARIFICATION?

The eighth article of faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints states that “we believe the Bible as far as it is translated correctly.” The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote: “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.”⁴

In a vision, Nephi learned that when the biblical records would first go forth from the Jews to the Gentiles, they would be pure and would contain “the fulness of the gospel of the Lord.” However, after tampering by “the great and abominable church,” many plain and precious parts and also many covenants would be taken away. This deliberate effort would be to “pervert the right ways of the Lord” and “blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men.” Nephi then beheld that this incomplete record, missing precious parts and the plainness it once had, would cause an “exceedingly great many [to] stumble.” The angel then revealed God’s plan to alleviate the stumbling: Jesus would manifest Himself and minister to the seed of Nephi. The Nephites would write “many things” which would be “plain and precious,” and the record would be “hid up” and come forth unto the Gentiles by the gift and power of the Lamb. The second record (the Book of Mormon) would therefore restore plain and precious gospel truths which had been taken from the first record (the Bible; see 1 Nephi 13:24–40).

Nephi’s revelation has significant application for Latter-day Saints. Failure to incorporate the gospel plainness of the Book of Mormon into New Testament study is failure to understand one of the central purposes of the book’s existence.

It would be impossible within the scope of this paper to explore all the doctrinal contributions and insightful expansions available to those who read the New Testament by the light of the Book of Mormon. The intent, therefore, is to explore three areas which demonstrate the power of combining these two testaments. First, we will compare and contrast a study of the gospel with and without Book of Mormon commentary. Second, we will show, through selected examples, the corrective and explanatory contribution the Book of Mormon makes on various doctrines and issues, some of which are only briefly referred to in the New Testament. Third, we

will show how the Book of Mormon combines with the New Testament to confound false doctrine.

A STUDY OF GOSPEL DOCTRINE WITH BOOK OF MORMON SUPPORT

First and most important, the Bible and the Book of Mormon are testaments of Jesus Christ and the gospel He preached. The first four books of the New Testament bear the descriptive introduction: “The Gospel According to . . .” The word *gospel* is not defined in the New Testament in any detail. The resurrected Christ appeared to His Nephite disciples and in conversation with them gave us one of the most definitive statements concerning the gospel in all scripture: “Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” (3 Nephi 27:13–14).

According to Jesus, then, the foremost elements of His gospel center in His redemptive mission in rescuing mankind from both spiritual and temporal death. The Atonement—which enables repentance, remission of sin, resurrection, and universal judgment—constitutes the core of gospel truths. As stated, parts of that core were eliminated.

Contributions to Our Understanding of the Atonement

Searching from the Gospel of Matthew to the book of Revelation, one can find some sixty passages that make *direct* reference to Jesus’ sacrifice for the remission of sin. Of these passages, more than fifty refer to the Atonement or the effects of the Atonement but are not sustained with definitive explanation. In other words, no scriptural passage precedes or follows to explain the doctrine. Combining the content of New Testament scripture related to redemption from sin, we learn that justification, sanctification, propitiation, intercession, reconciliation, and mediation come through Jesus Christ who offered Himself, through the shedding of His blood, as a sacrifice for the sins of all those who believe. In contrast, the Book of Mormon expands and defines doctrine and terminology which the New Testament briefly mentions. For example, while the Apostle Paul refers to the intercessory role of Jesus in offering Himself, Abinadi adds

that the Resurrection empowered Jesus to make intercession, in that He “ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; . . . standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice” (Mosiah 15:9).

While Paul stated that “Christ is the *end of the law* for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Romans 10:4; emphasis added), Lehi explained that “by the law no flesh is justified.” But the sacrifice of Christ answered the “*ends of the law,*” efficacious only for “those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Nephi 2:5, 7; emphasis added).

With clarity unparalleled, King Benjamin added that “his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned” (Mosiah 3:11).

While Paul taught that men are justified by the blood of Christ, which will save them from wrath, Amulek explained the doctrine of justification by teaching that the intent of Jesus’ sacrifice was to initiate a plan of mercy which would overpower justice and enable men to have faith and to repent. The result of this, Amulek continued, is that mercy can satisfy justice and encircle the repentant person in the arms of safety (thus saving him or her from the wrath Paul mentioned), “while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” (Alma 34:16; see Romans 5:9).

While the Apostle John spoke of Jesus as the propitiation for our sins, Alma discussed *propitiation* using the verb *appease*: “And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15; see also 1 John 4:10). Interestingly, the word *justice* is not mentioned in the New Testament, nor is the word *plan*, indicating a plan of salvation.

Luke recorded that the Master sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane (see Luke 22:44). King Benjamin added that the anguish that caused our Lord to bleed from every pore was due to His suffering for the wickedness and abominations of His people (see Mosiah 3:7). With only the New Testament as a guide, the Christian world looks predominantly to the cross for the remission of sins. Latter-day Saints, knowing the words

of King Benjamin and having a further witness of the Savior's suffering recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, believe the suffering began in the Garden of Gethsemane and was consummated on the cross (see 3 Nephi 27:13, 14).

Paul recorded that death and sin entered the world through Adam, and life through Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:16–22). Lehi enumerated conditions before and after the Fall: the necessity of opposition, the wisdom of Adam's fall, the freedom of man to choose between two enticing forces, the role of Satan, and Jesus' role as the great Mediator (see 2 Nephi 2).

Can one understand the redemption of man without the true doctrine in relation to the Fall of man? Other than the doctrine that Adam's Fall brought death and sin and Christ brought life, a study of the Atonement from the New Testament will be in isolation from the Fall. Lehi, Jacob, Abinadi, Alma, King Benjamin, Aaron, Amulek, and Ammon all either make reference to or offer doctrine and explanation concerning the Fall while teaching about the Atonement.

The New Testament message on the Atonement is largely descriptive of Christ's atoning mission but is not descriptive of the atoning doctrine. The New Testament tells us that there *was* an atonement for sin; the Nephite record explains with clarity and depth *why* it was necessary.

The Book of Mormon passages quoted are not isolated verses but are references embedded in masterful discourses which tie the doctrines of salvation together into what Amulek terms "the great plan of the Eternal God" (Alma 34:9).

Contributions to Our Understanding of the Resurrection

The Atonement of Jesus Christ offers redemption from physical death through the Resurrection. There are over one hundred references to the Resurrection in the New Testament. Of these references, nearly eighty are in context with either prophecy before the Resurrection, apostolic witness after the Resurrection, or the storyline of the New Testament. Therefore, there are about twenty-five references we look to for doctrinal explanation.

From these verses we learn the following: (1) Jesus would rise on the third day (see John 2:19) with a body of flesh and bone (see Luke 24:36–39); (2) His Resurrection would bring the Resurrection of all men (see 1 Corinthians 15:22); (3) Jesus was raised for our justification (see Romans 4:25); (4) each will be resurrected in his own order (see 1 Corinthians 15:23); (5) Jesus' Resurrection will bring about the

resurrection of the just and unjust (see Acts 24:15); (6) just as the sun, moon, and stars differ in glory, so will the resurrected bodies of men (see 1 Corinthians 15:39–42); (7) the second death will have no power over those worthy to come forth in the First Resurrection (see Revelation 20:6); and (8) the Resurrection brings a lively hope (see 1 Peter 1:3).

Almost in every case the Book of Mormon acts as a second witness to the New Testament doctrine on the Resurrection and then goes beyond to offer additional insights. For example, if one wrote down all doctrine gleaned from the New Testament on the subject of resurrection, one could then add the following information from the Book of Mormon: details concerning the resurrection of the just and the unjust (see 2 Nephi 9:10–19), the fate of the spirit were it not for an infinite atonement (see 2 Nephi 9:7–9), a definition of the resurrection of damnation (see Mosiah 16:11), specific qualifications to achieve the First Resurrection (see Mosiah 15:21–24; 18:9), the necessary relationship of resurrection to universal judgment (see 3 Nephi 27:13–18), information on the space of time between death and resurrection (see Alma 40), the inseparability of the spirit from the body after resurrection (see Alma 11:45), and a clear definition of what resurrection is (see Alma 11:44; 40:23).

Contributions to Our Understanding of the Universal Judgment

Having discussed redemption from sin and death we now come to our third element of gospel study—the universal judgment.

From New Testament passages, we learn that God will judge all men through Jesus Christ (see John 5:22; Romans 2:16), according to their works (see Revelation 22:12), on the appointed day (see Acts 17:31), and when every knee shall bow and tongue confess to God (see Romans 14:11). Those who are worthy to be on the right hand of God will have right to the tree of life; they can enter the Holy City (see Revelation 22:14) and can sit down on the throne of Christ (see Revelation 3:21). Those found on His left hand will depart into a lake of unquenchable fire to be tormented day and night forever and ever (see Revelation 20:10), which is the second death (see Revelation 20:14).

Here the Book of Mormon again offers significant insight regarding a central gospel doctrine. Information unique to the Book of Mormon includes what the souls of men will confess at the judgment bar (see Mosiah 16:1; 27:31), the fact that we will be judged not only according to our works but also according to the desires of our hearts (see Alma

41:3, 5), that mankind will be judged from scriptural records (see 2 Nephi 29:11), a definitive statement concerning the second death (see Alma 12:16–18), and that hell is *as* a lake of fire and brimstone, in that the unjust are “consigned to an awful view of their own guilt . . . , which doth cause them to shrink . . . into a *state* of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return” (Mosiah 3:25; see also v. 27; emphasis added).

The purpose of this comparison is not to cast any disfavor upon the New Testament but to show how the records can and should work in concert. Ezekiel prophesied that the stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph are to become one (see Ezekiel 37:15–19). We have seen them become one under one cover in our editions of the scriptures. The challenge now is to use them as one. Nephi was told by an angel that “the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed, as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; wherefore they both shall be established in one; for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth” (1 Nephi 13:41).

The two testaments of Christ complement each other. The messages and sermons were given to different audiences for differing reasons, thus the varying content. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said: “Imagine, for a moment, where we would be without the New Testament’s matchless portrait of the Savior. . . . Granted, much doctrinal fulness came later in ‘other books,’ . . . but it remains for the New Testament to provide the portrait of the mortal Messiah.” Elder Maxwell then went on to say, “Wonderful as the New Testament is, it is even stronger when it is joined with the ‘other books’ of scripture.”⁵

Occasionally at lectures or forums, time is given at the end for questions and answers. Often during these sessions the most significant learning takes place. Here explanations are given, elaborations are made, and terms are defined. The New Testament constitutes some of the greatest literature known to our world, yet because of its brevity on important subjects, with the myriad misinterpretations, a question-and-answer session which elaborates concepts and defines terms would be of significant worth. The Bible contains many doctrinal statements that are pronounced but not sustained with further discussion. The Book of Mormon comes to support the Bible by providing the sustained discussion, as would a question-and-answer period. For example: “And Zeezrom began to inquire of them diligently, that he might know more concerning the kingdom of God. And he said

unto Alma: *What does this mean* which Amulek hath spoken concerning the resurrection of the dead, that all shall rise from the dead, both the just and the unjust, . . . to stand before God to be judged according to their works?" (Alma 12:8; emphasis added). Alma then gave not only a description of the elements of judgment but a chronological order of events (see Alma 12:9–37).

Consider the depth of the doctrine Abinadi offered the questioning priests of Noah, recorded in Mosiah 12–17. Amulek sought to answer the Zoramites' question, "Whether the word be in the Son of God" (Alma 34:5), and by so doing restored plain and precious truth (see Alma 34). Alma's answers to the concerns of his wayward son Corianton makes available information on the spirit world, the law of restoration, and the interaction between the justice of God and the plan of mercy that are unrivaled for clarity and plainness of language (see Alma 40–42).

Perhaps Mormon, aware of the Savior's definition of the gospel (see 3 Nephi 27:13–18) and knowing the stumbling that would take place as plain and precious parts of the gospel were extracted by the great and abominable church (see 1 Nephi 13), searched the records available to him and then incorporated into his abridgment sermons that taught the gospel so plainly that no one could possibly err.

Alma invited his Zoramite listeners to "cast about [their] eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works. And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith" (Alma 33:22–23).

The seed, identified by Alma as the redemptive act of Jesus Christ, permeates the pages of the Book of Mormon. It was an intentional act by the great and abominable church to take out plain and precious gospel truths (see 1 Nephi 13:27), and it was an intentional act to replace them through the Nephite record (see 1 Nephi 13:35).

CORRECTIVE AND EXPLANATORY CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Example 1: The Book of Mormon offers interpretive commentary on New Testament passages. When Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized,

John forbade him, saying, “I have need to be baptized of thee. . . . Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:14–15). The New Testament student might be left puzzled inasmuch as there is no explanation offered as to what it means to fulfill all righteousness.

The prophet Nephi was blessed with a vision of the ministry of Christ. In the vision, he was shown the prophet who would baptize the Savior. Years later, in one of his final sermons, Nephi discussed the baptism of Jesus and taught his people the meaning of Jesus’ words to John:

And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!

And now, I would ask you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water?

Know ye not that he was holy? But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father; and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments. . . .

And again, it showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them. (2 Nephi 31:5–7, 9)

Example 2: The Book of Mormon contains clarifying words and phrases not found in the New Testament text. Matthew 5–7 contains one of the most powerful sermons ever given—the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus repeated many of the same teachings to His people in the Americas. In comparing discourses, the Book of Mormon account contains additions which clarify to whom Jesus was speaking as He taught various segments of His sermon. The Beatitudes were for those who would come to Christ. To “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” the Book of Mormon adds “*who come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:3; 3 Nephi 12:3; emphasis added). In the New Testament, the clarifying phrase “*who come unto me*” is omitted. It is not a blessed condition to be poor in spirit, as the Matthew account portrays; however, if one finds oneself poor in spirit, and as a solution to that condition comes to Christ, as the Book of Mormon teaches, his is the kingdom of God.

The Matthew account has Jesus telling the multitude to take no thought

for their physical provisions. This seems in conflict with good sense and not in harmony with other words of the Master. In the Book of Mormon account, we read that Jesus turned from the multitude, or the general audience, before He gave these particular instructions and “looked upon the twelve whom he had chosen” (3 Nephi 13:25). The meaning then becomes clear: those who were to devote themselves to full-time service, as the presiding twelve, would have their daily needs taken care of by the Lord whom they served.

Example 3: The Book of Mormon expands upon doctrinal concepts briefly mentioned in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul described himself as “the apostle of the Gentiles” (see Romans 11:13). In his epistle to the Romans, he referred to the Gentiles as being a wild olive tree, to be grafted into the natural tree (i.e., Israel), to partake of the root. He told the Gentile audience that the natural branches were broken off because of unbelief and warned them that since “God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. . . . For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the *fulness* of the Gentiles be come in” (Romans 11:21, 25; emphasis added).

Again there is no sustained discussion concerning his reference to the fulness of the Gentiles. By way of commentary, in 1 Nephi 15:7 we read, “And they [Laman and Lemuel] said: Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles.” In reply, Nephi taught:

Behold, I say unto you, that the house of Israel was compared unto an olive-tree, by the Spirit of the Lord which was in our father; and behold are we not broken off from the house of Israel?

And now, the thing which our father meaneth concerning the grafting in of the natural branches through the *fulness of the Gentiles*, is, that in the latter days, when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief, yea, for the space of many years, and many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men, then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed. (1 Nephi 15:12–13; emphasis added)

Here Nephi not only answered his brothers’ questions but also gave a definitive statement of interpretation to Paul’s reference. In the latter days,

the fulness of the gospel would come to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles would then take it to the house of Israel. This would cure the blindness, for as Nephi further taught, “They shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is the Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:12).

While the New Testament refers to the house of Israel and the Gentiles, the Book of Mormon expands upon the importance of the distinctions and shows their interrelationship in the gospel plan. For example, the Book of Mormon uses the term *gentile* 110 times. Some 64 percent of the time the context of the passage concerns Gentiles living at or after the time of the Restoration. Chief among the latter-day Gentiles was to be a man who would be named after Joseph of old (see 2 Nephi 3:15). Joseph Smith opened the dispensation of which Paul spoke to the Ephesians: “In the dispensation of the fulness of times he [will] gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him” (Ephesians 1:10).

Example 4: The Book of Mormon serves as a corrective lens in reading difficult passages. A good example of how the Book of Mormon helps in understanding difficult passages can be seen from a passage in Hebrews:

For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;

To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;

Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually. (Hebrews 7:1–3)

Here we are left with the impression that there was a man, a king, with no father, mother, genealogy, beginning, or end. In Alma 13, we have an expanded discourse on Melchizedek and the clarification that Paul was not referring to a man but to the high priesthood: “This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, *being without beginning of days or end of years*, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things” (Alma 13:7; emphasis added).

Example 5: The Book of Mormon contributes key insights concerning the Jews who crucified Christ as well as the spiritual destiny of the Jewish nation. The Nephite prophets offer us insight into the character of those who crucified their king. Nephi said, "The world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught" (1 Nephi 19:9). Jacob taught that it was expedient that He come among the Jews, "among those who are the more wicked part of the world, . . . and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God." Priestcraft and iniquity would be the causal factors, that they at Jerusalem would "stiffen their necks . . . that he be crucified" (2 Nephi 10:3, 5). King Benjamin added, "They shall consider him a man, and say he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him" (Mosiah 3:9).

Nephi prophesied that because the Jews would turn their hearts aside, they would "become a hiss and a byword, and be hated among all nations." The cure would be to turn their hearts back to their Messiah, and then would the covenant the Holy One made with Israel be remembered; that is, that all the people of the house of Israel would be gathered in (see 1 Nephi 19:14–16).

How would Judah return to Christ? After giving the parable of the wicked husbandmen, Jesus alluded to Psalms (see 118:22–23) as an interpretation for His listeners, which consisted of the chief priests and scribes: "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner." He added, "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." After He quoted this prophecy, the chief priests and scribes "sought to lay hands on him" (Luke 20:17–19). They supposed that the parable had been spoken against them.

The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob also used these verses and related them to the Jews:

And now I, Jacob, am led on by the Spirit unto prophesying; for I perceive by the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that by the stumbling of the Jews they will reject the stone upon which they might build and have safe foundation.

But behold, according to the scriptures, this stone shall become the great, and the last, and the only sure foundation, upon which the Jews can build.

And now my beloved, *how is it possible that these*, after having

rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner? (Jacob 4:15–17; emphasis added)

In answering the question of how the Jews will return to Christ after rejecting Him, Jacob restored to us the allegory of the ancient prophet Zenos. The allegory not only concerns itself with the Jewish remnant but portrays God's dealings with all the house of Israel in gathering them after apostasy (see Jacob 5).

The Book of Mormon provides commentary on Judah's past and also its future. The Savior stated, "The fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them; and they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name" (3 Nephi 20:30–31).

THE BOOK OF MORMON CONFOUNDS FALSE DOCTRINE

The last item in this examination is yet another role the Book of Mormon plays. Joseph Smith, in his search for a true church, resorted to the admonition of James to "ask of God" (James 1:5) because the ministers in his area "understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy [his] confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible" (Joseph Smith–History 1:12). Without additional light, gospel truths taught in the New Testament were intermingled with the precepts of men, doctrines differed, priests contended, and confusion reigned.

Lehi, in blessing his son Joseph, restored to us a prophecy made by his progenitor Joseph who was sold into Egypt: "Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines" (2 Nephi 3:12). It was to be the combined effort of two records that would counteract the wresting of scripture.

Mormon's reading of the small plates "greatly influenced" his abridgment of the large plates.⁶ He would have known the prophetic commission of combining testaments to confound false doctrine. He would also have read Nephi's vision in which Nephi beheld that the record that would proceed forth from the mouth of a Jew had been altered from its purity, causing confusion among the Gentiles (see 1 Nephi 13:29).

How would he fulfill his responsibility so that the last record (the Book of Mormon) would powerfully establish the truth of the first record (the Bible), confound false doctrine, and restore what was lost? Within the enormous library of plates, of which Mormon states he could not write a

“hundredth part” (Words of Mormon 1:5), how would he know what was needed or what to include? A statement made by his son Moroni indicates a principle upon which Book of Mormon abridgers must surely have relied in their selection process. After describing the corruption of latter-day churches, Moroni spoke directly to his latter-day audience: “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35).

The implication is that those responsible for the major work of compilation saw our day and, thus aided, selected what was needed based upon what they saw. With this thought in mind, it is interesting to ask ourselves why certain parts of the Book of Mormon were included. For example, why would the abridger give us Alma 31, a story about an apostate people who would go to a particular spot once a week to offer up a repetitious credal prayer which proclaimed God to be a spirit forever? The Zoramites believed they were “elected” to be saved, while others were “elected” to be damned. The Zoramites’ belief in predestination to heaven or hell predates Calvin and exposes this belief as a false doctrine.

Through story, prophecy, and sermon, the Book of Mormon denounces those who preach only for money (see Alma 1:3, 20; 2 Nephi 26:31); infant baptism (see Moroni 8); systems of religion that deny miracles, revelation, and prophecy (see 2 Nephi 28:4–6; 3 Nephi 29:5–6); systems that preach that salvation comes exclusively through obedience to the law (see Mosiah 13:27–32); being saved by grace alone and supposing that discipleship is not necessary (see 2 Nephi 25:23); and the philosophy that mercy can rob justice (see 2 Nephi 28:7–8). The Book of Mormon also offers a sober warning to those who refuse to receive additional revelation and scripture to that which they have already received (see 2 Nephi 28:27–29; 29).

SUMMARY

Numerous additional points could be made. Paul spoke of charity (see 1 Corinthians 13); Mormon gave us a formula on how to obtain it (see Moroni 7, 8). While the New Testament tells of an Apostle who would tarry until Jesus returns in His glory (see John 21:20–23), the Book of Mormon contains a whole chapter on the nature of translated beings (see 3 Nephi 28). Again this information comes to us as an answer to a question. Mormon inquired of the Lord, the Lord responded, and Mormon recorded the answer for all to be enlightened. While Paul taught about election and predestination, doctrines which cause many to stumble (see

Romans 8–9), Alma taught that men were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling” (Alma 13:3).

In Acts 8, we read about Philip and his meeting with the eunuch. The Ethiopian was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah. The Spirit told Philip to approach him, and Philip responded by running to the chariot. As he heard the man read from the book of Isaiah, he asked, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” The eunuch answered, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Acts 8:29–31). He then asked Philip to join him. The particular passage was from Isaiah 53: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. . . . Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:32–33, 35).

The dialogue between Philip and the eunuch ended at this point. Philip identified the suffering servant as Jesus, but what else he said concerning this precious chapter is not told us. In Mosiah 14, Abinadi, in defense of his preaching concerning the condescension of God, quoted the entire fifty-third chapter of Isaiah to the wicked priests. Abinadi then offered an interpretation of his quote. In his commentary, he revealed who constitutes the seed of Jesus Christ and who it is that will declare his generation (see Mosiah 15:10–13).

In short, as Philip in this story was to the eunuch, the Book of Mormon prophets are to us. We have a host of men to guide us in the interpretation of the sacred scripture. To the reader of the New Testament aided by the Book of Mormon, the gospel drama unfolds prior to Matthew’s declaration of the genealogy of Jesus. In approximately 550 BC, Nephi taught the doctrine of Christ and proclaimed His name as the only name whereby man can be saved (see 2 Nephi 31:21). About 124 BC, King Benjamin gave his people a new name, the name of Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 5:8–12). Jesus is the God of Israel; His doctrine was taught before His birth. The characters in the messianic drama were known hundreds of years before their mortal births. King Benjamin taught that the Creator of all things would be called Jesus Christ and that His mother’s name would be Mary (see Mosiah 3:8). Nephi was told by an angel not to write a portion of his

vision concerning the end of the world because that stewardship belonged to an Apostle whose name would be John (see 1 Nephi 14:18–22, 24–25, 27).

The scriptural story of Jesus is a two-continent story—as Mary and Joseph were making preparations for the advent of Jesus’ birth in the manger at Bethlehem, Jesus was speaking to Nephi, giving comfort and instruction, “Lift up your head and be of good cheer; . . . 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” (3 Nephi 1:13). The Lord said to Nephi, “I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also” (2 Nephi 29:8).

In view of what has been presented, the following suggestions are made concerning study of the New Testament in conjunction with the Book of Mormon. First, we should seek to fulfill President Ezra Taft Benson’s directive and know the Book of Mormon better than any other text. If we do so, we will always have available to us the magnifying and corrective lens of the Book of Mormon as we read the Bible. Many of the plain and precious parts of the biblical text have been restored. However, that restoration is of no effect unless we personally restore those precious truths in our own study. Perhaps the command and understanding Joseph Smith had of the Bible can be attributed to the fact that he *first* translated the Book of Mormon.

Second, when reading and studying a particular standard work, either personally or in one of our Church classes, we should incorporate the contribution of the other standard works where appropriate. The depth of our knowledge comes from the depth of our witness. With the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, we are three-deep in backup testimony and clarification when studying the Bible. As teachers of the New Testament, we keep waiting witnesses on the wings of our teaching stage to strengthen the concepts presented. Thus, the five hundred who saw Jesus after His Resurrection in the Old World (see 1 Corinthians 15:6) are joined with twenty-five hundred who both saw, heard, and touched the Master in the land Bountiful (see 3 Nephi 11). The raising of Tabitha by Peter (see Acts 9:40) is joined by the raising of Timothy by Nephi (see 3 Nephi 19:4), and so forth. Is it not common in the work of the Lord to call forth as many witnesses as possible to prove the truth of a righteous claim? Witnesses express themselves differently,

even though they are speaking about the same events. Some have seen more, or were present longer, or were present in a different capacity. The people in Ammonihah rejected and ridiculed Alma and his message *but became astonished* at the words of Amulek, “seeing there was *more than one witness* who testified of the things whereof they were accused” (Alma 10:12; emphasis added). It was the *second* witness that astonished the people.

Third, consider our Bible-believing brothers and sisters across the congregations of Christendom who have inherited the creeds and doctrines passed down over the centuries by those disadvantaged by the loss of revelation, prophets, and priesthood. Many doctrines of men have been incorporated with Jesus’ teachings forming the various sects of our day. We should be ambassadors of the plain and precious parts of the gospel. By knowing how to use the Book of Mormon as a missionary tool, we can disperse the darkness of false doctrine and restore to our investigating friends precious truth not available from any other source.

TESTIMONY

Many who know the gospel and then become less-active do not, for the most part, join other churches. Perhaps one reason is that scripturally they know too much. Stop and think how much understanding of the gospel comes from the Restoration. It would be difficult to listen to a sermon about Jesus’ “other sheep” in which the one preaching identifies the other sheep as Gentiles. It would be difficult indeed, especially knowing that the Savior visited the Nephites in America and personally said to them, “Ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring” (3 Nephi 15:21).

In a published sermon entitled *What Think Ye of Christ*, my father-in-law, B. West Belnap, told the following story: “Once I was in a far city, far from home, on Mother’s Day, and I was alone. I went into a church . . . in town, as there was no Latter-day Saint Church nearby. The minister gave a very fine sermon, and in the course of his address he said, ‘Adam fell that men might be, and men are that they might have joy’ (2 Ne. 2:25). My ears pricked up at this. Afterward I went up to him and said, ‘I’m interested in that statement ‘Adam fell that men might be.’ He looked at me and said, ‘Are you a Mormon?’ I said, ‘Yes, I am.’ He said, ‘come with me.’ He took me back to his office and pulled down a Book of Mormon and said, ‘there is a lot of good stuff in here; I just don’t tell them where it comes from.’”

There is a lot of good “stuff” in the Book of Mormon, and Latter-day Saints are most fortunate to know where it comes from. Having God’s gift of the Book of Mormon and knowing of its truthfulness bestows upon every member of the Church a responsibility, for, as Lehi said, “Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth” (2 Nephi 2:8).

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God,” *Ensign*, May 1975, 63.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 4–7.
3. First Presidency Christmas message, satellite broadcast, December 1986.
4. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 327.
5. Neal A. Maxwell, “The New Testament—A Matchless Portrait of the Savior,” *Ensign*, December 1986, 21–24.
6. Boyd K. Packer, *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 276.
7. B. West Belnap, *What Think Ye of Christ?* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, Extension Publications, 1965), 17.