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Why the Book of Mormon?

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Abstract: Discusses the purpose and coming forth of the Book of Mormon, presents personal testimony regarding the truthfulness of the book, and speaks about how it helps humanity in their “search for happiness.”



Why the Book of Mormon?

(Its purpose and need in our world of science and technology.)

BY FRANCIS W. KIRKHAM*

A visit of seven days at the New York World's Fair included considerable time at the Mormon Pavilion. I was deeply impressed with its message of the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by means of the art, the printed and spoken word, and the movie, "Man's Search for Happiness."

The Fair tells of the marvelous advances made in science and technology for man's happiness in mortal life. The Book of Mormon is a revelation from God, through holy prophets and by Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, to the people on the American continent. It not only proclaims the way to peace and happiness in mortal life by searching for truth and by obedience to the laws of life; it also declares greater joys in mortal life, and eternal progression by obedience to the truths of eternity.

(For Course 11, lesson of February 7, "Purpose and Mission of the Book of Mormon"; for Course 15, lesson of January 24, "Structure and Purpose of the Book of Mormon"; for Course 29, lessons of January 31 and February 7, "A Marvelous Work and a Wonder" and "Coming of the Book of Mormon"; and of general interest.)

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As early as April, 1829, near the beginning of the translation of the ancient records which are contained in the Book of Mormon, a revelation from God our Eternal Father was given to Joseph Smith. The first verse states: "A great and marvelous work is about to come forth unto the children of men." (Doctrine and Covenants 6:1.) This revelation, directed to Oliver Cowdery, who had volunteered to write the Book of Mormon as it was translated by Joseph Smith from the ancient records by the gift and power of God, contained wonderful directions to this devoted volunteer helper. The revelation states:

Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is called of God. Therefore, if you will ask of me you shall receive; if you will knock it shall be opened unto you. Now, as you have asked, behold, I say unto you, keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion; Seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich. (Doctrine and Covenants 6:4-7.)

The summary of the physical, historical facts of the "coming forth" of the Book of Mormon by divine power, which have been written for over 125 years in hundreds of volumes, will not be accepted as possible or true by persons who deny that supernatural events are possible. These skeptics assert that throughout the ages of man's existence such claims have been made to satisfy his inability to explain the powers of the universe and his own origin, and the purpose of his life on earth.

More and more today, as shown in the world of science and technology displayed at the New York World's Fair, our great scientists are realizing and declaring that there must be a creator in the universe. There must be a cause and a plan.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints positively and definitely declares to an eager, searching world that God, our Eternal Father, has revealed for all men the truth regarding our premortal existence, the present purpose of our life, and our eternal life hereafter. The revealed and restored Gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer to "Man's Search for Happiness," as pictured in part and explained by the narrator, Elder Richard L. Evans, in the movie at the World's Fair.

What then is the purpose of the Book of Mormon? It can have no value if it is only the reasoning of mortals.

When this book appeared, many people said that Joseph Smith produced it. Since he claimed it was divine, he was declared a fraud, a fanatic; and it was thought that, like other such persons, he and his book would soon fade into oblivion. Consider for a

moment the place and influence of the Book of Mormon in the literature of the world today. It is probably the widest published book today, next to the Bible. In 1963, over 100,000 persons accepted this record as divine and became baptized members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Before discussing the purpose and need of the Book of Mormon in this age of science and technology, let us consider this declaration of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

*The Book of Mormon Published—
The Church Organized.*

I wish to mention here that the title-page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated, the language of the whole running the same as all Hebrew writing in general; (that is, from right to left) and that said title page is not by any means a modern composition, either of mine or of any other man who has lived or does live in this generation.¹

Never before in the history of printed literature has such a statement been made. Joseph Smith did not know the purpose of the Book of Mormon until after he had dictated its contents.

The title page in the Book of Mormon reads:

“The *Book of Mormon*, An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon Upon Plates Taken From the Plates of Nephi.” It also states that the records were “. . . Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God. . . . And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations—And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.”

Reduced to one sentence this says that the Book of Mormon was written by revelation from God, preserved by divine power, to come forth and be translated by divine power, to convince all men of all nations that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, who will manifest Himself to all nations.

In all the literature of all the world no person has ever made a similar claim for a book. As Orson Pratt, an early convert, declared:

“This book must be either *true* or *false*. If true, it is one of the most important messages ever sent

from God to man . . . If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever palmed upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions who will sincerely receive it as the word of God. . . .”²

Through the century this challenge, accepted by the unbeliever, has resulted in more than a thousand books, pamphlets, and magazine articles declaring that this book is not a revelation from God. (The New York Public Library has a catalogue of more than one thousand publications on “Mormons and Mormonism.”)

What, then, is the purpose of the Book of Mormon? The answer is—to declare to all men in all nations, that God, our Eternal Father, has revealed His Gospel for the joy, happiness, and peace of His children in this life and for eternal progress in the world to come.

What is the need of the Book of Mormon? The World’s Fair portrays the great and almost unbelievable advance of the human race in science, technology, art, education, religion, and all human activities, since the time when the immortal messenger told Joseph Smith that the time had come when the Spirit of God would be poured out upon all flesh. (See Doctrine and Covenants 95:4.)

The expectancy of man’s life has increased from about forty years to more than seventy years, and many years may not pass until it will be 85 years.

By the turn of a button, we hear and see voices thousands of miles away. In a few hours we travel across our continent. We are obtaining knowledge from satellites in space.

But, as the narrator of the World’s Fair at Seattle declared after the state of Washington had shown by television the progress of science and technology in our modern world and predicted the future: “*The insatiable hunger of the soul remains.*”

Man remains the world’s greatest mystery. Only by revelation from God and by evidence we can understand, can we know the facts of man’s destiny.

The greatest need of man is to know who he is, why he is here, and where he goes when life ends, that he may live for his greatest happiness both in earth life and for eternity.

The Book of Mormon, and the Restored Church of Jesus Christ is the answer today to man’s search for happiness. However, “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.” (Ninth Article of Faith, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

¹Joseph Smith, Jun., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Vol. 1; Deseret News, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1902; page 71.

²“Doctrines of the Gospel” by Orson Pratt, *The Juvenile Instructor*, 1884, page 124.
Library File Reference: Book of Mormon—Authenticity.