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Book of Mormon Studies

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Abstract: This is a series of articles intended for Relief Society course study. It discusses the importance of the Book of Mormon, its coming forth (i.e., the translation, the witnesses, the publication, Joseph Smith), brief overview of its contents, and explains the text from 1 Nephi 1 through Alma 58. Each article features several questions that are helpful in synthesizing and applying the Book of Mormon to daily life.

BOOK OF MORMON STUDIES*

The Three Witnesses: Man may deceive others as well as himself. The Bible tells how one may be protected against deception: "At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established."† Again: "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."‡

When the translation of the Book of Mormon was completed, the Prophet sent a message to his father and mother requesting that they meet him at the house of Mr. Whitmer. The mother of the Prophet tells of this event in her own words:

As soon as the Book of Mormon was translated, Joseph despatched a messenger to Mr. Smith, bearing intelligence of the completion of the work, and a request that Mr. Smith and myself should come immediately to Waterloo.

The same evening we conveyed this intelligence to Martin Harris, for we loved the man, although his weakness had cost us much trouble. Hearing this, he greatly rejoiced, and determined to go straightway to Waterloo to congratulate Joseph upon his success. Accordingly, the next morning, we all set off together, and before sunset met Joseph and Oliver at Mr. Whitmer's.

The evening was spent in reading the manuscript, and it would be superfluous for me to say to one who had read the foregoing pages that we rejoiced exceedingly. It then appeared to those of us who did not realize the magnitude of the work, as if the greatest difficulty was then surmounted; but Joseph better understood the nature of the dispensation of the Gospel which was committed unto him.

The next morning, after attending to the usual services, namely, reading, singing and praying, Joseph arose from his knees, and approaching Martin Harris with a solemnity that thrills through my veins to this day when it occurs to my recollection, said: "Martin Harris, you have got to humble yourself before God this day, that you may obtain a forgiveness of your sins. If you do, it is the will of God that you should look upon the plates, in company with Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer."

In a few minutes after this, Joseph, Martin, Oliver and David repaired to the grove, a short distance from the house, where they commenced calling upon the Lord, and continued in earnest supplication until He permitted an angel to come down from His presence and declare to them that all which Joseph had testified of concerning the plates was true.

When they returned to the house it was between three and four o'clock p.m. Mrs. Whitmer, Mr. Smith and myself were sitting in a bedroom at the time. On coming in, Joseph threw himself down beside me and exclaimed: "Father, mother, you do not know how happy I am; the Lord

*Lesson 5 of the Relief Society Course of Study—for use on the first lesson night in March.

†Deuteronomy 19: 15.

‡Matthew 18: 16.

has now caused the plates to be shown to three more besides myself. They have seen an angel, who has testified to them, and they will have to bear witness to the truth of what I have said, for now they know for themselves that I do not go about to deceive the people, and I feel as if I was relieved of a burden which was almost too heavy for me to bear, and it rejoices my soul, that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world." Upon this, Martin Harris came in; he seemed almost overcome with joy, and testified boldly to what he had both seen and heard. And so did David and Oliver, adding, that no tongue could express the joy of their hearts and the greatness of the things which they had both seen and heard.*

This took place near the residence of the Whitmer family in Fayette, Seneca County, New York, in the latter part of June or early July, 1829. Read Doctrine and Covenants, Section 5, verses 3 to 15 inclusive.

The Eight Witnesses: The Prophet's mother continues the narrative:

The following day we returned, a cheerful, happy company. In a few days we were followed by Joseph, Oliver and the Whitmers, who came to make us a visit and to make some arrangements about getting the book printed. Soon after they came all the male part of the company, with my husband and Samuel and Hyrum, retired to a place where the family were in the habit of offering up their secret devotions to God. They went to this place because it had been revealed to Joseph that the plates would be carried thither by one of the ancient Nephites. Here it was that those eight witnesses, whose names are recorded in the Book of Mormon, looked upon them and handled them.†

They were shown the plates by the Prophet Joseph, and handled them—which the three did not, so far as we can judge from their testimony. The eight state that they "hefted" the plates, by which we understand that they lifted them in their hands to judge of their weight. They also testify that the plates had the appearance of gold, and the engravings thereon all had the appearance of ancient and curious workmanship. They finish their testimony by declaring that they lie not, God bearing witness of it.‡

Reliable and Unwavering Testimony: The prophets of old have declared that in the mouths of two or three witnesses shall all things be established, but in this modern scripture not three, but eleven men testify to the genuineness of the record, and three of them swear that they saw and heard the heavenly visitor declare that the translation was correct and was accomplished by the gift and power of God. Such testimony would stand in any court of the land if given upon any other subject. No one, if sincere, could fail to accept such testimony.

These men were all honest, reliable and respected citizens of

**History of the Prophet Joseph*, by Lucy Smith, pp. 138-9.

†*Ibid.* p. 140.

‡Deseret Sunday School Union Leaflets, September 1889.

their community. None of their associates ever questioned their word. All of them became members of the Church when it was organized in 1830, and some remained faithful to their death. Some of the witnesses later were severed for just cause from the Church. It is worthy of note that not one of the eleven men ever denied his testimony or that Joseph Smith had translated the plates by the gift and power of God. Many of them on their death-beds reiterated their testimony, which appears in the fore-part of every copy of the Book of Mormon.

The Plates Returned: After the completion of this hallowed work the plates had no more purpose on this earth for the time being, and, as the Prophet's mother writes:

After these witnesses returned to the house, the angel again made his appearance to Joseph, at which time Joseph delivered up the plates into the angel's hands. That evening we held a meeting, in which all the witnesses bore testimony to the facts as stated above: and all of our family, even to Don Carlos, who was but fourteen years of age, testified of the truth of the Latter-day Dispensation—that it was then ushered in.*

The Book is Published: "The translation of the ancient record finished, the next thing to be done was to obtain a publisher. This was no small task, considering the inexperience of Joseph and the state of public feeling in the neighbourhood concerning the probable contents of the proposed book. Joseph and Oliver finally made arrangements with Mr. Egbert Grandin, of Palmyra, to print an edition of five thousand copies for the sum of three thousand dollars."† Again Martin Harris proved himself a friend to the Prophet, for he assisted in the raising of the three thousand dollars necessary to print the book. Oliver Cowdery and Joseph secured the copyright, and one of the most precious books in existence was given to the world. It has since been issued in numerous editions and translated into twelve foreign languages.

QUESTIONS

1. Why was it necessary that other eyes than the Prophet's should see the plates and bear record of their origin?
2. Who were the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and how was the testimony given? How were these special witnesses chosen?
3. What kind of men were they, and why do you think their testimony is reliable?
4. Read to the class the testimony of the three witnesses.
5. Read to the class the testimony of the eight witnesses.
6. Learn during the next month all the words of the song "Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah", until each member of the society can sing it through by memory.

**History of the Prophet Joseph*, by Lucy Smith, p. 141.

†*One Hundred Years of Mormonism*, p. 67.