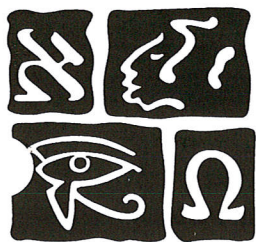




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Transcript

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Robert L. Millet

Lifting the Condemnation through the Book of Mormon

Summary:

In the spirit of President Ezra Taft Benson's plea to take the Book of Mormon more seriously, this discussion contains a sweeping review of Book of Mormon doctrines and the crucial role the book plays in the restoration. Robert Millet summarizes the highlights of the teachings of Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma the Younger, Samuel the Lamanite, Jesus Christ, Mormon, and Moroni, and delineates prominent themes throughout the Book of Mormon.

Transcript
Book of Mormon, Teachings

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Lifting the Condemnation through the Book of Mormon

Robert L. Millet

We come to the conclusion, now, of the series *The Prophets of the Book of Mormon and Their Messages*. Today we will look back, by way of summary, on what we have done. We will look at each of the prophets we've discussed, including the Savior, and consider what the overall message of this book seems to be. Then we will devote ourselves to the principle of what it means to put off the condemnation that seems to rest upon the Church as a result of our near neglect of the Book of Mormon for some 160-odd years.

Let's begin with Lehi. We started the series by talking about Lehi. We concluded, I think, that it is hard to tell from the text how much Lehi and his family knew about the gospel. Did they have the fulness? Did they know it before they left? How much of the Fall, the Atonement, and the doctrines of salvation did they understand? We just don't know. But there is no question that once Lehi received his mission and his commission, he taught solid and sound doctrine. If I were to go to a passage that for me represents a significant statement early in the Book of Mormon, it would be to 1 Nephi 10. Let's look at 1 Nephi 10:4. You will recall that the first eight chapters represent Nephi's abridgment of his father's experiences. Chapter 9 is a transition chapter. Chapter 10 begins Nephi's reign and ministry. But Nephi can't quite leave his father's teachings yet. There are a few more things he wants to remind us about Lehi. Look at verses 4 through 6:

Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.

And he also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world.

Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer.

If I were to choose what for me would be a take-off passage, this would be it, because what you have established early on in this the earliest reference to the Fall is that all of us are in a lost and fallen condition, unless and until we are redeemed in Christ. Interestingly, the language “lost and fallen” continues throughout the Book of Mormon. The word *redeemed* continues throughout the Book of Mormon; the teaching *rely on this Redeemer* continues throughout the Book of Mormon. And so, this one statement by Lehi, presumably quoted by Nephi, sets the tone for the whole book. The book is a book about redemption. Salvation is not an education. Salvation is not alone in refinement. Salvation is in regeneration and change in Christ. Salvation is a matter of merit—not our merit, but His. So, when I think of Lehi, I think of this passage, to begin with.

We could go to other places. We could think of Lehi’s teachings to his children. We could go to 2 Nephi 2. We could go to 2 Nephi 3, where he talks to Jacob and Joseph. But Lehi, again, is one of the great doctrinal preachers, the man who sets the stage for the whole book.

Nephi. What do you think of when you think of Nephi’s teachings? What comes to mind? What ideas? What doctrines? What did Nephi teach?

Student answer: That the tender mercies of the Lord shall be over all those who obey his commandments.

Good. That early message that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those who follow the Lord. And Nephi shows us, in incident after incident after incident, that that is the case. Writing on the small plates some thirty years after the fact, having thirty years of perspective before him, he is able to look back and realize how the tender mercies of the Lord have been over his children.

Consider Nephi’s contribution to understanding the doctrine of Christ. If you were to choose a “top ten list” on understanding the Savior, the role of the Savior, and on understanding what the gospel, or doctrine, of Christ is, where would you go? Well, you would go to 2 Nephi 31, one of the great chapters on what constitutes the gospel. If you wanted to know how it was that the Savior fulfilled all

righteousness, how he did everything that he asked us to do and never required anything of us that he wouldn't do (baptism was the illustration), we would go to 2 Nephi 31. And the straitness of the path, and so on?

What about Jacob? What do we know about Jacob? I have often thought that Jacob was perhaps our great philosopher/theologian in the Book of Mormon. What do you remember in Jacob? Besides the book of Jacob, where does Jacob pop into our story? Maybe one of the most famous discourses of them all is in 2 Nephi 9. Remember that great chapter on Atonement? Remember the chapter on the allegory of the olive tree? The allegory of the olive tree is the longest chapter of all in the Book of Mormon. Jacob, coming to the end of his book, says something like this to us: "I am running out of space. I don't have much room." Those of us who know what is ahead are prone to say, "Jacob, we know how you could save some room. Leave that monster of an allegory off"—because sometimes we don't understand why it is there, and it causes you to ask the question, Why is it here? We know that the Nephite prophet writers were so careful to include only what was needed, what would one day meet future needs of the people. It is there for a reason. Yes, I suppose one of the highlights of Jacob would be Jacob's quotation of and commentary upon the allegory of Zenos. And what is the message? That God will not let Israel go. He just won't let her go. He stretches forth his hands to Israel all the day long.

Isaiah. We had a couple of sessions on Isaiah. Why Isaiah? Why did Nephi quote Isaiah?

Student answer: To teach us more about the Messiah.

To teach us more about the Messiah, yes. He said, "I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses [meaning, presumably, the Pentateuch]; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah" (1 Nephi 19:23). So, he taught about the Messiah. What is the other message of Isaiah? The destiny of Israel, right? Think about that. There is a sense in which, if

Isaiah's two messages are the Messiah and the destiny of Israel, that is only one message. Why? Because the gathering of Israel is first and foremost a gathering to Christ and to Christ's gospel. Thus, to gather Israel is to gather people to the Savior.

The prophets of the brass plates we have studied. Zenos, we've talked about, and Zenock, Ezias, and Neum. What do we know about them? Well, they sort of pop into our records sporadically here and there, Zenos being the most cited of them all. But he and Zenock, especially, and the other two are being cited to prove the importance of the Messiah, the coming of the Savior. In 1 Nephi 19, for example—let's look at that. As Nephi is trying to tell us about the coming of the Savior, notice what he does. Notice the reference he makes in 1 Nephi 19:10:

And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel.

Notice the specificity of the prophecy: it includes the nature of the death, how long he would be in the tomb, and so forth. What you find with the prophets of the brass plates is a very specific prophecy of the Savior. You find a message that is Christ-centered and gospel-centered, very unlike our Old Testament, which is very broad and sometimes unclear.

If we were to take the time to turn to Alma 33, we will see that when it is time for Alma to make a point concerning where and when it is appropriate to pray and why the Zoramites should not concern themselves just about praying in a synagogue, what does he do? "Have you not read the words of Zenos and the words of Zenock?" he asks, basically (see Alma 33:14–15). And what do they say? You can pray anywhere. But the other thing that comes through those two messages in Alma 33 is the importance of their understanding of the godhead—that God has blessed

his people because of the redemption of his son. The brass plates prophets were informed and knew very well the fulness of the gospel. The Nephites draw upon them heavily.

Benjamin. What is your favorite passage from Benjamin? What is the great message that comes to your mind as we look back at the marvelous prophet King Benjamin?

Student answer: Service.

Right, service. Of course, what is the great scripture? "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). But notice what Benjamin does, and this is important. He makes his presentation first by calling the people together and, in Mosiah 1 and 2, gives an accounting for his stewardship. In Mosiah 2 particularly, he teaches the doctrine of divine indebtedness. So, in Mosiah 1 and 2, he teaches to serve one another and love one another—divine indebtedness. Then what's in Mosiah 3? The words of an angel concerning putting off the natural man, putting on Christ, the Atonement, the message of redemption. Then what is Mosiah 4 about?

Student answer: The nature of God.

Yes, the nature of God. And then we move into this idea of service as a way of retaining a remission of sins. What is the structure? It is very interesting. We serve, and in between it, undergirding it all, is the atonement of Christ. Our ethics are always grounded in our theology, and our theology is the doctrine of Christ. And so, Benjamin is one of the great, great prophets and teachers. What more famous statement is there than the one you have mentioned, that the natural man is an enemy to God? Again, it's a message he learned from an angel.

Abinadi. He is a man who happens onto the scene. We don't know who he is or where he came from. He is a man among the people. What are the significant doctrines we could attribute to Abinadi. Well, we learn the deepest doctrine, perhaps, of all those taught in the Book of Mormon. In chapter 15 of Mosiah, what do we learn? The role of Christ as Father and Son. What is the teaching? Because he

dwelleth in the flesh, he shall be called the Son of God, and because he inherits from his Father, Elohim, all of the attributes of godliness, including the powers of immortality, he is called the Father. Why this sermon? This is Abinadi's commentary, as it were, on the previous chapter, which is quoting Isaiah 53. How is it that the Messiah can be both conquering king, Lord God, and suffering servant at the same time? Answer: He is God, he is man, he is spirit, he is flesh, he is Father, he is Son. Abinadi is a master at teaching the Resurrection. In fact, he is one of the first to teach the doctrine of the first resurrection and who will come forth in the first resurrection, and with the discussion of resurrection is always the discussion of judgment. Resurrection and judgment are taught together.

There is a message from Abinadi that is always very touching. It is not anything he preached, but it is what he represents. If you and I had been waiting for Abinadi in the spirit world after he had died a martyr's death and had asked him, "How did it go?" what would he have said? "Well, I feel pretty good about what I preached, but I really only had one convert." Well, presumably that was right. He only had Alma, who had a son named Alma, and it occurs to me that in Abinadi, we learn the power of a single human testimony. Because of what Abinadi said and did and the impact it had upon one person, the story in the Book of Mormon was never the same. We learn the power of testimony.

Alma, meaning Alma the Younger. What comes to mind? Does anybody have a favorite doctrine from Alma the Younger? If I asked you to go to Alma 5, what do you think of in Alma 5?

Student answer: Change of heart.

Change of heart, rebirth, renewal, regeneration in Christ. What is the great question? "Have ye been spiritually born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances?" (Alma 5:14). Alma 5 is sort of Alma's spiritual checklist, containing some forty questions asked by Alma to ascertain our spiritual standing before God. What else comes from Alma? What else comes to mind.

Student answer: The significance and responsibilities of the leaders of the Church, and the organization of the Church, and how to deal with the members.

Good. Alma teaches how to organize the Christ's church, how to deal with new converts into the Church, and so on. Alma 13 is the only reference we know of on the premortal existence. It's a brief but very heavy statement on foreordination.

Alma 11 and 12 deal with what it means to come into the rest of the Lord and how we do that through the blessings of the Atonement and by the powers of the holy priesthood. I think I am particularly appreciative for what Alma does in chapters 39 through 42. Here, Alma is dealing with a son, Corianton, who has gone astray spiritually, who sinned. I remember years ago reading those chapters and thinking about Corianton's problem and wondering why Alma is doing what he is doing?

Alma 39, 40, 41, and 42 are four of the heaviest doctrinal chapters in all of the Book of Mormon, and he is preaching to a son who has some moral problems. He addresses morality in Alma 39, places immorality in its context of seriousness. Then why teach the spirit world? The resurrection? The judgment? Justice? Mercy? For the reason that modern prophets have given us: The teaching of doctrine will do far more to change behavior than the teaching or study of behavior will change behavior. That is why we place such stress on the teaching of doctrine. This boy had a doctrinal problem as well as a moral problem. So, that is what Alma teaches.

Samuel the Lamanite. What is he best known for?

Student answer: Prophesying of Christ.

Prophesying of Christ's coming and Christ's death, telling us that in five years particular signs will come to pass, telling us that at a certain point when Christ dies, certain things will come to pass. He is less known for his marvelous teachings on redemption. I think we should turn to that. Let's go to Helaman 14. He is less well known for these. Let's read Helaman 14:15-18:

For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass

the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.

Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.

But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord.

Yea, and it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness.

This is one of our clearest statements on the relationship of resurrection to judgment. We are taught here, as we are in other places, by Samuel and by others of the prophets, that there is a sense in which everyone, even the sons of Perdition, will for a short time overcome spiritual death. How? Because everyone that is resurrected will be brought back for a time into the presence of God to be judged. So, that is what we learn from Samuel the Lamanite.

We spent three class periods on Jesus Christ, the Savior, the risen Lord's visit to the Nephites. We talked about some of the things that he presented. Consider Christ's teaching under the following kinds of categories: his call to a higher righteousness; and the sermon that he delivered at Bountiful, which is very similar to the sermon delivered in Galilee, or a call to a higher righteousness. In the first chapter we discussed (3 Nephi 12), Christ teaches that "the law says this, but I now call you to a higher standard."

In the next chapter we discussed, Christ teaches that it is one thing to not do evil, but it's another thing to *desire* not to do evil. It's the call to higher motives. The Savior is teaching us about what it means to be tender and feeling. It occurs to me that one of the great themes of 3 Nephi is that religion is a thing of the heart. It is something to be felt.

It is not just something of the head. One of the things we can come to appreciate in 3 Nephi is that it is not just how much we learn and how much we know that is important, but what we are and what we are becoming or the degree to which we are feeling the Spirit of the Lord, the degree to which we are manifesting the love of Christ in our treatment of other people. That is what really matters. My gauge as to how I am doing spiritually is not so much how much I know, but the manner in which I am eager to bless the lives of other people.

The Savior is one who talked at great length about the destiny of Israel and the idea that God had a mysterious plan in store for the people of Israel. He would save His people. One of my favorite verses, and let's turn to this one, is 3 Nephi 20:25. This is a powerful and profound verse about how the Lord works with his people of Israel:

And behold, ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

The Father having raised me up unto you first, and sent me to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities; and this because ye are the children of the covenant. (3 Nephi 20:25–26)

Do you notice the language of that last verse? "The Father sent me to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." Why? Because you are children of the covenant. One day, when we are able to watch the video and see how the Lord has orchestrated things, we may understand the marvelous manner in which he brought to pass changes and events through his chosen people that we could never have understood at the time.

Mormon. What comes to mind when you think of Mormon? Mormon was the master editor, the master writer, one of the four great writers. Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni are the four great writers, but Mormon is especially. What comes to mind when you think of Mormon? The pervasive cycle of prosperity, humility, and war in the Book of Mormon. The way that Mormon organizes the text so as to convey the perils of this prosperity cycle, which would include the Lord

blessing the people, prospering the people; pride in their prosperity; destruction; pleading for deliverance and humility; deliverance; and prosperity. It is dizzying in some sections. I think of the statement of Joseph Smith's that the Book of Mormon will bring us nearer to God as we abide by its precepts.¹ Mormon is one of those who seems to feel the assignment to stress and emphasize those precepts. And how does he do it? Well, one of the ways is by using such phrases as *and thus we see* and *and thus we can clearly discern*. It is his way of saying, "In case you didn't get this, let me restate the message." After that lengthy chapter of confrontation with Korihor, in case we didn't get the message, he says, basically, "And thus we see that the devil does not stand by his people," and so on (see Alma 30:60).

I used to enjoy giving this question—I don't think the students enjoyed it, but on a final exam, I would ask this question: "Discuss the prophetic editorial role of Mormon and how he helped to achieve the undergirding and overarching purposes of the Book of Mormon." I think if we step back for a moment and think about the task that Mormon had before him—bringing together and sifting and sorting through tens of thousands of pages, as we would call them, choosing an hundredth part (see Words of Mormon 1:5), having enough seership and enough knowledge of the future to know what our challenges would be and what we would face—we come away from that experience sobered. We are a little more prone to read a passage and think, Why would he include that? Why include that? And then we look for reasons.

Moroni. To Moroni goes the responsibility and the credit for the work that was done in the abridgment of the Jaredite record, so we owe a great deal to Moroni for his preserving what he could preserve concerning the ministry of the brother of Jared in the book of Ether. As you come to the book of Moroni, it is as if Moroni looks back on what's there and says something like this: "You know, we haven't said much of anything about the church. We have to say something about the

¹ Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 194.

church. You know there's a church in the Book of Mormon; you know its important; you know it has officers. But you know precious little about its organization. You know that ordinances are essential, but you haven't the foggiest notion about how to perform them." So, what do we find in the first six chapters of Moroni? Church matters. How to give the Holy Ghost. How to ordain someone to the priesthood. How to bless the sacrament. How even to handle disciplinary councils of the church. We also find in Moroni, as you know, great messages from Mormon concerning faith, hope, and charity, and Mormon's messages about accountability and the salvation of little children.

To Moroni, of course, is left the challenge of writing the last chapter and the title page of the Book of Mormon. To Moroni goes the appreciation we feel as we hear him say, "Deny not the gifts of God" (Moroni 10:8). As you discuss at great length the gifts of the Spirit, to Moroni goes the responsibility for initializing that challenge about praying and pondering the Book of Mormon that we have in Moroni 10: 3-5.

Now, putting it all together, we have well over a thousand years of book. What are the central messages? What stands out? Let's just pick out two or three. If you had to choose what the two or three significant messages of all the prophets of all the Book of Mormon are, what do you think? Name one.

Student answer: The lives themselves of the prophets teach of Jesus Christ.

Okay, Christ has to be the central character. He is the author, the central character, the center of it all, isn't he?

What is another central message?

Student answer: Keep the commandments and you will prosper in the land.

Keep the commandments and you prosper in the land. That is a refrain that makes its way all the way through the book, isn't it? What is another?

Student answer: The destiny of the house of Israel.

Yes, the destiny of the house of Israel. You know, as you look at those kinds of messages, and we could choose others, those are found in certain places. Where do you go to find the comprehensive picture? Well, one of those places is the title page

of the Book of Mormon. Remember that on the title page it tells us why it is written. Why is it written?

Student answer: To testify that Jesus is the Christ.

Student answer: To show unto the house of Israel what great things the Lord has done for their fathers.

Right. Let's turn to Mormon 7. I am not sure where this fits in Mormon's life. I would suppose it's late. It seems to me that it is late, but it is as though Mormon, now looking back upon his life and upon the Nephite record, wants to give a parting message. This is Mormon's last lecture, so to speak. Mormon 7:1: "And now, behold, I would speak somewhat unto the remnant of this people who are spared, if it so be that God may give unto them my words, that they may know of the things of their fathers; yea, I speak unto you, ye remnant of the house of Israel; and these are the words which I speak." Now, it seems to me that with this much perspective before him, we have just got to pay close attention to what he thinks are critical issues. What is the first thing? "Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel" (Mormon 7:2). Second, "know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved" (Mormon 7:3). Third, "know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you" (Mormon 7:4). Fourth, "know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, and that he was slain by the Jews, and by the power of the Father he hath risen again, whereby he hath gained the victory over the grave; and also in him is the sting of death swallowed up" (Mormon 7:5). As we go on, in verse 8, Mormon says, "Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus," and so forth.

We could pick out three or four major messages. I often ask classes of returned missionaries—it seems a little cruel to ask freshman students, but returned missionaries is different—I often ask, as one of their class requirements, to get them a softback edition of the Book of Mormon and to read the book in three weeks. I tell

them it is worth one hundred points. They groan and moan and complain, and then when three weeks are over, we sit and have profound discussions. There are things you can see in three weeks that you don't see quite as well when you study it for a year, because in three weeks, they saw those refrains, those doctrinal refrains. They saw the fall of man. They saw redemption in Christ. They saw the redemption of Israel. They saw the prosperity cycle. And they saw it all in ways they couldn't have seen it if we had talked about it for a year. So, I think it is important for us to focus on messages, and in this case, central messages.

There are so many ways we could study the Book of Mormon. We could study it archaeologically; we could study it anthropologically; we could study it geographically—we could study it from many perspectives, but I hope that if there is anything that has come through this whole series, it is the importance of focusing on the doctrine. The strength of the Book of Mormon is its message.

I brought a few statements that are some of my favorites. These were written by people who have thought about this a lot. The first by Brother Hugh Nibley. This is one of my favorite statements:

The words of the prophets cannot be held to the tentative and defective tests that men have devised for them. Science, philosophy, and common sense all have a right to their day in court. But the last word does not lie with them. Every time men in their wisdom have come forth with the last word, other words have promptly followed. The last word is a testimony of the gospel that comes only by direct revelation. Our Father in Heaven speaks it, and if it were in perfect agreement with the science of today, it would surely be out of line with the science tomorrow. Let us not, therefore, seek to hold God to the learned opinions of the moment when he speaks the language of eternity."²

That is an important statement. This next statement is from Elder Maxwell:

It is the author's opinion that all of the scriptures, including the Book of Mormon, will remain in the realm of faith. Science will not be able to prove or disprove holy writ. However, enough plausible evidence will come forth to prevent scoffers from having a field day,

² Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, vol. 3 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 134.

but not enough to remove the requirement of faith. Believers must be patient during such unfolding.³

Two statements from President Benson:

The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

We do not have to prove that the Book of Mormon is true. The book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not in trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ.⁴

We are not required to prove that the Book of Mormon is true or is an authentic record through external evidences—though there are many. It never has been the case, nor is it so now, that the studies of the learned will prove the Book of Mormon true or false. The origin, preparation, translation, and verification of the truth of the Book of Mormon have all been retained in the hands of the Lord, and the Lord makes no mistakes. You can be assured of that.⁵

Finally, let me read this statement from President Gordon B. Hinckley. He is talking about the different cornerstones of our faith, and he says that one of those cornerstones is the Book of Mormon:

I can hold it [the Book of Mormon] in my hand. It is real. It has weight and substance that can be physically measured. I can open its pages and read, and it has language both beautiful and uplifting. The ancient record from which it was translated came out of the earth as a voice speaking from the dust. It came as the testimony of generations of men and women who lived upon the earth, who struggled with adversity, who quarreled and fought, who at various times lived the divine law and prospered and at other times forsook God and went down to destruction. It contains what has been described as the fifth Gospel, a moving testament of the new world concerning the visit of the resurrected Redeemer on the soil of the Western Hemisphere.

³ Neal A. Maxwell, *Plain and Precious Things* (Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 1983), 4.

⁴ Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 63, quoted from *ENSIGN* (November 1984): 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

The evidence for its truth, for its validity in a world that is prone to demand evidence, lies not in archaeology or anthropology, though these may be helpful to some. It lies not in word research or historical analysis, though these may be confirmatory. The evidence for its truth and validity lies within the covers of the book itself. The test of its truth lies in reading it. It is a book of God. Reasonable individuals may sincerely question its origin, but those who read it prayerfully may come to know by a power beyond their natural senses that it is true, that it contains the word of God, that it outlines saving truths of the everlasting gospel, that it came forth by the gift and power of God "to the convincing of Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ." (Book of Mormon title page.)

The Book of Mormon is here. It must be explained. It can be explained only as the translator himself explained its origin. Hand in hand with the Bible, whose companion volume it is, it stands as another witness to a doubting generation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. It is an unassailable cornerstone of our faith.⁶

President Benson, on several occasions during the time he was president of the Church, read from that haunting passage in the 84th section of the Doctrine and Covenants where the Lord says that a condemnation, a scourge, a judgment, rests upon the Latter-day Saints because we have taken lightly the things we have received, and that condemnation would not be lifted until we took seriously the Book of Mormon in modern revelation (see D&C 84:54–58). I have wondered for years, What is the condemnation? I have often thought to myself that I don't feel condemned, but are we condemned somehow?

In the spring of 1984, as a part of a preservice training for those who would be teaching the Book of Mormon at BYU (that is, for persons who are not on the full-time religion faculty), we asked different people to come and speak and teach. We had different general authorities come down and speak. In June we asked Elder Bruce R. McConkie to come. I will never forget the way he began. He reached down and unzipped his little briefcase and pulled out a computer print-out. He said, "I have here something that, when I first looked at it, about bowled me over. It is a computer print-out that represents the results of a survey that was conducted at the Missionary Training Center among elders, sisters, and couples. It is a testimony

⁶ Gordon B. Hinckley, *Faith, the Essence of True Religion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 10–11.

survey." He then explained that individuals were asked to respond to certain things anonymously—no one had to put his or her name on it. He asked them to tell their true feelings. The persons who took it—the elders, the sisters, and the couples—were to respond to ten simple statements of fact, statements like this: "God is my Father, the Father of my spirit"; "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"; "Joseph Smith was a prophet of God"; "The Book of Mormon is the word of God"; "Spencer W. Kimball is a prophet of God"; and so forth—ten statements just like those. The elders, the sisters, and the couples who took the test were to respond in one of four ways:

- (A) I know this to be true, because I have received a spiritual witness of it.
- (B) I believe this to be true, but I have not received a witness.
- (C) I do not know whether this is true.
- (D) I doubt whether this is true.

Brother McConkie asked if we would like to know the results? We nodded. He said the two lowest areas of testimony, by far, were the following: "Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God" and "The Book of Mormon is the word of God." Kind of a gasp went through the audience. I remember him standing up, with loud tones, and with that large hand, saying, "Something's wrong. Something's terribly wrong. Maybe it is something I have done wrong. Maybe it is something the president of the Twelve, a man named Benson, has done wrong. Maybe it is something all of the Twelve have done wrong, or maybe it is something we have done wrong here at BYU. Maybe it is something we have done wrong in the Church Educational System, but something is wrong."

And then the most valuable part of this whole discussion took place when he began to free associate, as it were, as to what has gone wrong. He said, "Maybe we have tried too hard as a people to be just like everybody else. You know, a few years ago we changed our missionary discussions to make our first discussion a discussion on Christ. Remember that?" He said, "It seemed like an appropriate thing to do. My goodness. He is the head of the Church. Let's start there and establish early on that

we are Christians, just like you. What was the result? Just this: convert baptisms dropped, and the number of copies of the Book of Mormon placed by full-time missionaries decreased from one million copies per year to 500,000. In other words, we weren't teaching the Restoration.

"Maybe we have tried too hard," he said, "to say we are just like you." And then he said this, and I think I will never forget it: "Well, my feelings are these: We will never achieve the quality and quantity of converts that our prophet, President Kimball, and the Lord have foreseen as long as we continue to stress the similarities between us and the rest of the world." He went on to say, "We are not out to make enemies. That is not our job. But we will only achieve what the Lord has in store for us as we stress the differences and begin to appreciate that. Otherwise, we have nothing to offer. If our message is that we are just like you are, why should they come to us?"

That experience was importance to me, because it began to cause me to realize that perhaps part of the condemnation is that we had not, as a people, at least until that time, been as possessed of witness and testimony and the spirit of conversion to the Restoration that we should have been. We are often prone to seek for common ground with the world, but there is nothing common about the Restoration. As my colleague, Joseph McConkie, has written, "It is not common ground we seek . . . , but holy ground."⁷ The Restoration, beginning with that vision in the spring of 1820, is sacred, and we treat it lightly to our eternal detriment.

I think, for example, of what the Lord said in an early revelation to Thomas B. Marsh. Let's turn to Doctrine and Covenants 31 and read verses 3 and 4 (the Church is just underway):

Lift up your heart and rejoice, for the hour of your mission is come;
and your tongue shall be loosed, and you shall declare glad tidings of
great joy unto this generation.

⁷ Joseph F. McConkie, *Here We Stand* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 195; see also chaps. 1 and 10.

You shall declare the things which have been revealed to my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun. You shall begin to preach from this time forth, yea, to reap in the field which is white already to be burned.

If we had stopped at the end of verse 3 with Thomas Marsh's commission to declare glad tidings, what might we have concluded? Was he to teach Christ? The gospel is the glad tidings. Was he to teach the Sermon on the Mount? Was he to deliver the bread of life sermon? What was he to do? Notice, it says, "You shall declare the things which have been revealed to my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun."

You may recall the story that was taught by President McKay of his father, who served a mission in Scotland. He encountered a great deal of opposition from people in the area as they sought to teach the Restoration. He and his companion made a decision. They said, "Why don't we just get along with these people and just teach Jesus and virtue and goodness and Christianity in general?" They decided to do so, and immediately there was a change in the people. They were nice to them. They were kind. They were well received in the community. It was wonderful! There was only one problem: President McKay's father was overwhelmed by a feeling of gloom and darkness. It just filled his soul and continued for days. He pleaded for it to be taken away. It was not. It stayed. Early one morning, concluding that if he did not remove the spirit of darkness and gloom, he would go home, he left his apartment, ran down to a cave near the shore, and knelt to pray.

He essentially asked what the problem was. He poured his soul. "What must I do," he asked, "to have this darkness taken from me?" The Spirit of the Lord said to him, "You declare Joseph Smith." He said, "It is enough. I will." He went back and told his companion what they must do. They did it, and immediately there was a division among the people. There were those who hated them and those who joined the Church. Our task, our assignment, as set forth in the revelation, is to declare "the things that have been revealed to [his] servant, Joseph Smith, Jun." That is why, in the 84th section, the Lord, speaking about how to get rid of the condemnation, concludes by saying, "I will forgive you of your sins with this

commandment—that you remain steadfast . . . in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you” (D&C 84:61).

There is an incident in the history of the Church that I think really illustrates this. Parley P. Pratt explains that the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon addressed a congregation in Philadelphia on one occasion.

While visiting with brother Joseph in Philadelphia, a very large church was opened for him to preach in, and about three thousand people assembled to hear him. Brother Rigdon spoke first, and dwelt on the Gospel, illustrating his doctrine by the Bible. When he was through, brother Joseph arose like a lion about to roar; and being full of the Holy Ghost, spoke in great power, bearing testimony of the visions he had seen, the ministering of angels that he had enjoyed; and how he had found the plates of the Book of Mormon, and translated them by the gift and power of God. He [the prophet] commenced by saying: “If nobody else had the courage to testify of so glorious a message from Heaven, and of the finding of so glorious a record, he felt to do it in justice to the people, and to leave the event with God.”

[Now, that is an important message. What happened?] The entire congregation were astounded; electrified, as it were, and overwhelmed with the sense of the truth and power by which he spoke, and the wonders which he related. A lasting impression was made; many souls were gathered into the fold. And I bear witness that he, by his faithful and powerful testimony, cleared his garments of their blood.

Multitudes were baptized in Philadelphia and in the regions around.⁸

The other issue that I would like to put forward is this: The Book of Mormon is not just another book on religion. I would like to suggest that salvation itself is at stake. The book clearly testifies, if we read it carefully, that those who accept it will be blessed and that those who reject it will be damned.

We mentioned the four major writers: Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni. They have some things in common, don't they? They all saw the Lord. They all beheld angels. They all said, “I will see you at the judgment bar.” Nephi is bold enough to say, “I bid farewell to this group, and I bid farewell to that group” (see 2 Nephi 33:13). And then he says, to those who reject the words of the Lamb of God and who reject his words, “I bid you an everlasting farewell” (2 Nephi 33:14).

⁸ Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 260–1.

Moroni does the same thing. Moroni, both in Ether 12 and Moroni 10, says, "The day will come when you and I will stand before the judgment bar and the Lord will say, 'Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man?'" (Moroni 10:27; see Ether 12:38). Salvation itself is at stake.

The Book of Mormon is not like any other book of scripture. I am not aware of any other book that we study, any other ancient records, where the writers speak specifically to us. Oh, they saw our day and spoke of our time, but I don't remember reading anything in the Old Testament, anything in the New Testament, where the prophetic writers say something like this: "I have seen your day. 'Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing,'" as Moroni said, in Mormon 8:35.

Let me give just this final thought about the prophetic destiny of the Book of Mormon: President Benson gave what I think is a remarkable prophecy when he said:

I have a vision of homes alerted, of classes alive, and of pulpits aflame with the spirit of Book of Mormon messages.

I have a vision of home teachers and visiting teachers, ward and branch officers, and stake and mission leaders counseling our people out of the most correct of any book on earth—the Book of Mormon.

I have a vision of artists putting into film, drama, literature, music, and paintings great themes and great characters from the Book of Mormon.

I have a vision of thousands of missionaries going into the mission field with hundreds of passages memorized from the Book of Mormon so that they might feed the needs of a spiritually famished world.

I have a vision of the whole Church getting nearer to God by abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon.

Indeed, I have a vision of flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon.⁹

That phrase, *flooding the earth*, is very interesting. It seems to be drawn from a very ancient prophecy. Through Enoch, the Lord said this:

Righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men;

⁹ Ezra Taft Benson, "Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon," *ENSIGN* (November 1988): 6.

and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem.
(Moses 7:62)

I think we as a people have not yet begun to envision the great and marvelous and miraculous things that are yet to come to this earth and to the people on the earth as a result of the witness that the Book of Mormon contains. That we will consider carefully its central themes, that we will come unto Christ and be perfected in him, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.