

Oct. 1, 1977

I have always believed the Joseph Smith "story" since the first time I heard it. It really happened exactly the way he said it did. It wasn't a "vision" in the narrow sense of the word; God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, really did appear to Joseph Smith on that spring day in 1820 in the sacred grove. I also believe that the angel Moroni did appear to Joseph Smith in his father's house on the night of September 21, 1823 and told him there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates and with them were instruments which God had prepared to use in translating the plates.

I believe that Joseph saw the place where the plates were buried in vision so clearly that he went directly to it. Moroni forbade him to take the plates then but told Joseph to meet him there at the same place each year at the same time. He did this each September for four years, receiving instructions from Moroni in lengthy interviews, telling Joseph what the Lord was going to do and how the kingdom was going to be conducted in the last days. (What a marvelous higher education Joseph Smith had: these personal tutoring sessions with a messenger direct from God--better even than "Mark Hopkins on one end of a bench and a student on the other end.")

I believe that Joseph did obtain the gold plates and with them the Urim and Thummim by which he translated them exactly the way he describes it, Oliver Cowdery being his principle scribe. Oliver Cowdery describes these events thusly: "These were days never to be forgotten--to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of the bosom! Day after day I continued uninterrupted to write from his mouth, as he translated with the Urim and Thummim...the history or record called 'The Book of Mormon.'"¹

I remember our stake missionaries telling us, only briefly, something about the content of the Book of Mormon--that it was a history of people who used to live on this continent and gave us a copy of the Book of Mormon when we were baptized. What really made us decide to be baptized was the practical part of the Gospel--the emphasis on the family, eternal marriage, the Word of Wisdom, a new way of life, etc. Then, as we attended all our meetings and went through the Senior Aaronic program (we were 100 per centers our first year) everything began to fall into place. We bought the Doctrine and Covenants and began to read it aloud to each other and said, "Why, that was written just for us!" It has always been my favorite scripture.

We tried to read the Book of Mormon also, but couldn't seem to understand it. I asked my husband, "What does the Book of Mormon have to do with the rest of the Gospel? I don't see the connection." He couldn't answer but it really didn't bother him. Our then 13 year old daughter was reading First Nephi as an assignment

1. Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith 2, addenda

for Sunday School or Mutual. I tried to help her with it. We came to the part about the great and abominable Church and didn't know what it meant. I asked her Mutual teacher; she said it meant the Catholic Church; I asked her Sunday School teacher, he said it referred to communism. My daughter seemed satisfied but I was still puzzled.

We had firesides every Sunday night (a class, really) with the Senior Aaronic group: 6 or 8 of us newly baptized members, an excellent teacher and usually the Bishop and his wife. It was at our home on this particular Sunday I remember so well, more than 15 years ago. I finally got up the courage to ask about the Book of Mormon. "I don't understand what the Book of Mormon has to do with the rest of the Church." The Bishop's wife answered indignantly, "Why, it tells us that Jesus is the Christ." I replied, "But I believed that before I ever heard of the Book of Mormon." Someone else offered, "It tells us where the American Indians came from." I said, "But what difference does it make where the American Indians came from?" Someone else stated, "The Book of Mormon contains the fullness of the Gospel, makes it complete." I replied, "No, it won't be complete till we get the records of the Ten Lost Tribes." Our instructor said, "The Sacrament prayers are in the Book of Mormon, they are very important." I said, "But they're also in the Doctrine and Covenants." They soon ended the discussion without answering my question to my satisfaction. The person giving the closing prayer said, "Help the Malones that they might understand and accept the Book of Mormon." I thought, "Now, why do we need help, because I asked a question they couldn't answer?" Anyway, I was the one who asked it, not my husband. It really was an honest question; I wasn't just arguing.

So the Book of Mormon lay on our shelf unused, as we read and re-read the Doctrine and Covenants, the Old and New Testament (the Bible took on new meaning for us) and I became totally involved in genealogy. I taught many classes in Mutual and Sunday School, usually teaching the Life of Christ, the Old Testament, Church History, genealogy, etc. but I never have had the occasion, in 15 years of Church membership to teach the content of the Book of Mormon and consequently, I still don't understand it. Our children all studied it in Seminary and most of them have a testimony of it.

I remember about 7 or 8 years ago our home teacher tried to teach us a lesson about the Book of Mormon (I seemed to be the only one home.) I asked him about the importance of it. He said, "It corrects all the mistakes in the Bible." I asked, "What mistakes are in the Bible?" His mouth dropped and he said, "Well, now, you have asked me a question I can't answer." He said, "The Book of Mormon helps people to believe that Jesus is the Christ where the Bible doesn't always convince them." I said, "You mean the Book of Mormon is just for people who don't believe the Bible?" Again, he had no answer for me.

About 3 years ago, early in December, a member of the Bishopric called to ask me to speak in Sacrament meeting on a Christmas theme. I said, "Of course, I'll be glad to." He said, "We want you to talk on Third Nephi." I said I would rather tell the Christmas story from Matthew or Luke." He stated that those were already assigned and I was to speak on Third Nephi. I replied, "I'm not familiar with that." I can still hear his gasp of incredulity, "You're not familiar with Third Nephi?" I said, "No, you'll have to get someone else."

I seemed to have a built-in resistance to the Book of Mormon. It was sort of an embarrassment to me; the only part of our religion that I felt uncomfortable about; ashamed, almost. I had always loved the Bible since a small child and knew it well. The Bible is classic literature, contains beautiful poetry, it is accurate history, and above all I believe the Bible to be the Word of God unequivocally. References to events of the Old and New Testament are found everywhere--in school texts, in encyclopedias, etc. We can read about Moses, Abraham, David, Solomon and Jesus in many places besides the Bible. But could we look up in an encyclopedia or textbook and find out about Lehi or Nephi? No! To me, that was proof they either never existed or weren't important.

Still, I had this testimony of Joseph Smith finding the golden plates and translating them by the Urim and Thummim. If he said he did, he did! I tried to "get it straight" in my own mind. I theorized that the people in Joseph Smith's day (mid-nineteenth century) would not be attracted to nor able to comprehend at first the higher but more abstract teachings of the Gospel, i.e. the plan of salvation, pre-existence, three degrees of glory, celestial marriage, eternal increase, etc, etc. I rationalized they would need something concrete to get their attention, something like gold plates. Now, I have always believed that the angel Moroni did show Joseph Smith where they were hidden (not that Joseph Smith put them there himself.) I know Moroni to be a messenger from God, so God Himself must have told Moroni to put the plates there for Joseph Smith to find and translate into the Book of Mormon thus having a concrete object to attract people's attention. I still couldn't believe that any such people as Lehi and Nephi ever existed.

We moved to Charter Oak Ward about a year and a half ago and about that time the Elders' Quorum started having firesides with Bishop Hess teaching about the Book of Mormon. I thought, "At last, I'm going to learn all about the Book of Mormon. It will be like having a real college professor, and I will be spoon-fed all the information I've wanted so long." But the Gospel isn't meant to be that way.

Bishop Hess started teaching from First Nephi, about Lehi's family. I, not ever having read the Book of Mormon, didn't know much and couldn't participate.

I didn't want him to know how ignorant I was about the Book of Mormon, so I kept my head down most of the time. Also, I knew if I looked at him, he would know that I didn't have a testimony of the Book of Mormon. (I learned soon after I met Bishop Hess that he has the gift and power of discernment.)

My husband and I had just finished reading aloud the other three standard works. (This was Easter of last year, 1976.) When we finished the New Testament I had this strong feeling of wanting to know more about what Christ did. So we tried to read Third Nephi, starting at Chapter 11, reading aloud one chapter apiece, as was our habit, for an hour or so. I tried to read when it was my turn and did read some but I had to stop. "It isn't scripture," I cried, "I can't read it." I would try again the next night, but give up with tears of frustration. My husband said, "Never mind, it will come to us," and he asked in our prayer those nights that we would be able to read and understand the Book of Mormon.

Another monthly Fireside was held with Bishop Hess teaching more from First Nephi. Again I couldn't participate because I had never read it. He gave the group a reading list for reading the entire Book of Mormon. I was determined to read the Book of Mormon before the next class because I didn't want Bishop Hess to think me ignorant. What motivation, what a wrong reason for reading the scriptures!

So Jim and I started again to read aloud the Book of Mormon, starting at First Nephi. Again, I balked. "It isn't good literature," I said. I went through and marked out all the "and it came to pass" and all the "Lo" and "behold" and "therefore", etc. With more tears of frustration on my part and prayers on Jim's, we managed to get through First Nephi. By the time we got to 2nd Nephi, the "and it came to pass" no longer bothered me and I didn't have to mark them out any more. I was so happy to check off the chapters, as we read them, on the reading list Bishop Hess had given us. I wanted to be able to tell him, "See, I did my homework." Again, wrong motivation for reading the Scriptures--to impress the teacher. But it takes that kind of motivation for those of us on kindergarten level.

Well, we did read the entire Book of Mormon aloud in 32 days, reading an hour or more each night. We did at least learn to pronounce the names and when we got to Alma 42, I said, "Now that's good literature." Verses 13-26 reminded me of Portia's mercy speech in the Merchant of Venice. This time when we got to Third Nephi, it seemed like scripture. When we got to Moroni, I said, "That is the best of all, why didn't they put that part first?" It gave us a sense of accomplishment, but I don't know that I really gained a testimony of the Book of Mormon.

It was another monthly Book of Mormon fireside and I was eager to go and see if I could get more out of it this time and be able to participate some. I had a dozen questions to ask. The class was still on First Nephi, tho, so I didn't have a chance to ask my questions or share our readings. (Maybe I just wanted to brag about having read it all.) More disappointment, more frustration! The monthly firesides died out over the summer so we never did really learn much what the Book of Mormon was about. I'll quote from my journal now.

Sept. 2nd, 1976: "I read the new September Ensign from cover to cover, underlining and marking. It is all about the Book of Mormon which is the study course for the next two years in Church. I enjoyed most of the articles and was inspired by a few of them. I wish I could get as much out of the Book of Mormon as other people seem to."² Sun. Sept. 5th: "I went to the Gospel Doctrine class but the teacher wasted half the time asking the class and discussing whether they wanted to go ahead and finish the New Testament or start on the new course of study, the Book of Mormon. Then I became critical (I hope it didn't show) and suggested that the class start on time and keep up with the lessons. Others agreed with me."³

To quote from a letter to my missionary son dated Sept. 8, 1976: "I read the entire new (September) Ensign Thursday afternoon, all about the Book of Mormon. It was beautifully done. Dad got his new Priesthood manual Sunday; it is on the Book of Mormon, too, of course; the reading assignments are the same as for the Gospel Doctrine class. He read me part of the first lesson out of his Priesthood manual while I washed the dishes Monday and then we sat down and studied it together. We will be studying the Book of Mormon for the next two years and I hope that I can at last find the answers to my questions: Why is the Book of Mormon the keystone of our religion? Why is it the most correct of all books? Why couldn't the Gospel have been restored without it? Can a man (or woman) really get closer to God by reading it than any other book? And, most important, what is in it that I need to know????? I'll have to admit that when Dad and I were reading it in May I did feel very close to God and I felt very humble and repentant. I thought I had really gained a testimony of it; but I didn't have a chance to share that testimony with anyone and so I lost it."

More from my journal: Sunday, Sept. 19th: "Jim and I went to the Gospel Doctrine class. The teacher called on different ones to share their feelings about the Book of Mormon. Bishop Hess (at the teacher's request) talked for some time about how he introduces the Book of Mormon to his classes. He talked to us like he was talking to his students. I was disappointed. There is so much I want to learn and can't seem to get any answers to my questions."⁴

Soon after I was called to teach in Sunday School. I taught Course 13 for 5 months, the Family Relations class for 4 months and have been substituting in other classes all summer and am now teaching Course 15 until my Family Relations class starts again. I have taught many, many lessons recently to our Adult Home Evening group, to Young Adults and occasionally in Relief Society but I still have never taught a lesson on the Book of Mormon (or out of it, I should say.)

But at last, I am on the road to really gaining a testimony of the Book of Mormon in your classes. To quote from my journal:

Sept. 20th, 1977: "Alex, Dorothy and I went to Bro. Frank's class in Claremont. It was so good to be there. Such a beautiful lesson, so inspiring! While he was teaching and telling about Lehi's family, the four sons: Laman, Lemuel, Nephi and Sam, Rick related it to his own family: he has two older brothers who are inactive and he and his younger brother are both active. I thought about my children: the ones who are active and the ones who aren't and related it to Lehi's family. As Rick was teaching, I was thinking, "Why, they are real people! Lehi, Nephi and all the rest. They did really exist once--just like it says and I never would believe it because I couldn't find them in an encyclopedia. I was also thinking when my missionary son and I used to have discussions (arguments, maybe) and he told me once, "Mother, I can't answer your questions but someday, someone will answer all your questions." I had the best feeling. Then Rick talked about how we feel the manifestation of the love of God and I wanted to say, "I'm feeling it right now!" but I shared an experience from last Sunday. I came home and re-read the articles from the Sept. 1976 Ensign: "Some Major Teachings in the First Half of the Book of Mormon: It Begins With a Family" and "Father Lehi, Prophet and Patriarch" and "Nephi, a Universal Man" and really enjoyed them. Last year when I read them, they hadn't meant much to me, but after Rick's lesson they are so much more meaningful."5

"The next week at our adult Home Evening, the lesson (I wasn't giving it) was on the Book of Mormon being the most correct book and containing the fullness of the Gospel. I asked, "How could it contain the fullness of the Gospel when it has nothing about the three degrees of glory, celestial marriage, baptism for the dead, etc.???" I said, "All the doctrine of our Church is in the Doctrine and Covenants." They couldn't answer my questions and they made me feel like I shouldn't have asked. Then Tues. Sept. 27th in Bro. Frank's class, we got to the passage about the great and abominable church, toward the end of the class and Rick had to rush so it still seemed puzzling to me. (After I played the tape over it was a little clearer.) I asked about the Book of Mormon containing the fullness of the Gospel when all the above mentioned things aren't in it. Rick said we would get to that. I'll have to be patient because I know he can answer all my questions."6

Continuing with "How I gained a testimony of the Book of Mormon" I will quote from my journal. Sat. October 8: I read and studied from the Book of Mormon for two hours, 1st Nephi, Chapters 19, 20, 21, 22. Read them about three times each and the two corresponding chapters from Isaiah 48 and 49. I still didn't understand them but I will when Rick teaches about them.

Mon. Oct 10th: In the Book of Mormon day class Rick taught about the great and abominable church and it is all so clear to me now. The great and abominable church is anything that stops our eternal progression. While I was a Presbyterian, my progression was stopped because I knew nothing about celestial marriage, eternal increase, genealogy or temple work, etc. etc. Glad I have that straight now; all these years no one could explain it to me, until now.

Tues. Oct. 11th: Alex, Dorothy and I went to Bro. Frank's class. He gave a tremendous lesson on 1 Nephi 19, 20, 21, 22. He made those Isaiah chapters so plain, they really came to life. I knew he would do just that.

Thur. Oct. 13th: I started working on my Life of Christ manual and worked on it all day and evening, completing the first section. I like the way it cross-references scriptures from the Bible, with the D & C and the Book of Mormon. It does take all four of the standard works to make things clear and understandable. For instance, none of the Old Testament prophecies concerning a coming Messiah ever say that He is to be Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. They allude to it but I can see why people would miss it. Whereas in the Book of Mormon it states it very plainly as early as 1 Nephi 11:18, Alma 7:10, Mosiah 3:8. I am beginning to see many things in the Book of Mormon that are not in the Bible. I hope I am gaining a testimony of it at last! A good feeling! I replayed the tape of Rick's Sept. 20th class when he was reading 1 Nephi 11:18, "Behold, the Virgin whom thou seest is the Mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh." I said, "It couldn't be plainer than that. It is much plainer than in the New Testament." Did I really say that? I, who thought the Bible was so perfect and had no mistakes in it? Yes, I did say it, because I have it on the tape.

Tues. Oct. 18th: I studied all afternoon for my Book of Mormon class. I started filling in my other workbook, Eldin Ricks' Study Guide. I did the first page about the Bible and the Book of Mormon. It is becoming so clear to me now; I am discovering the Book of Mormon for myself and it is an exciting discovery. Wed. Oct. 19th: I worked all afternoon and evening, 9 hours, on my Book of Mormon student manual, all the Isaiah chapters. What a sense of accomplishment! I feel like I understand them a little better now.

Sunday, Oct. 23rd: I studied all morning for my Sunday School class on the Book of Mormon. I really do like studying the Book of Mormon now and am anxious to teach it. Only two boys in my class had found answers to the

questions and they weren't really answers, but at least they did try. I like Bro. Frank's answer better about "you can't put new wine in old wine skins."

That was in answer to the question in my Sunday School manual, "Why did the Book of Mormon require the organization of a new church? Could it not have come more easily to one of the churches already in existence? You explained it with the parable (similitude) of putting new wine in old bottles (or skins.) It wouldn't work; you can't take something that is corrupt (all the sectarian churches of Joseph Smith's day) and put something new in it. Of course, the Book of Mormon wasn't really new but it was new to the people of that day. The new (yet old) doctrine and truths of the Book of Mormon could not have come forth through the apostate churches and therefore it required the organization of a new Church.

Here is my answer to my own question, "Why couldn't the Church have been restored without the Book of Mormon?" The truths contained in the Book of Mormon are what the Church is built on, for example the correct form of baptism. No where in the New Testament does it say baptism is to be by immersion and that is why there are so many different modes of baptism in so-called Christian churches today. Yet how plain it is in 3 Nephi 11:23-26; Christ tells the Nephites: "Ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them. And these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying: 'Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen' And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water." The Church certainly couldn't be restored without the correct form of baptism.

Mon. Oct. 24th: In the Book of Mormon class Rick taught about Lehi blessing his children--patriarchal blessings. I was so glad to hear it again. I realize that patriarchal blessings are something we wouldn't know about or wouldn't have if it weren't for the Book of Mormon. In the Bible Jacob blessed all of his children and Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh before he died. But I never realized they were Patriarchal blessings. How grateful I am for my patriarchal blessing I received from an ordained Patriarch.

Wed. Nov. 2nd: I studied for 3 hours in the library in my Ricks' Study Guide to the Book of Mormon, all from 2 Nephi Chapters 2 through 9, all about the atonement. It says in the notebook "In Lehi's inspired and profound discourse in Chapter 2 we find the theological and philosophical core of the Book of Mormon," meaning the fall and the atonement. I showed it to Rick before class and I said, "So the Book of Mormon really does contain the fullness of the Gospel." He said, "You have found the answer to your question." He gave another absolutely beautiful lesson on the atonement. I just love the Book of Mormon since I have been taking classes from him.

Sunday Nov. 6th: A good day! Got up at 5:00 a.m. and started studying and working in my Book of Mormon notebook. I read the short chapter on the Words of Mormon and filled in the questions. I also studied the charts in the 'Way to Happiness' and Book of Mormon Digest, trying to get straight in my mind about the different sets of plates and the lost 116 pages of manuscript. In my Sunday School class we had the first part of the film "The Lost Manuscript" and I taught them some of what I had just learned.

Wed. Nov. 9th: I studied for 3 hours in the library in my Ricks' Book of Mormon notebook. Then to the 11:00 Book of Mormon class. Everything gets much clearer as I hear it for the 2nd or 3rd time. Tonight I had a long prayer by myself--really talked to my Heavenly Father about some of the things I have been learning and how my testimony of the Book of Mormon is growing.

The great and abominable church which used to bother me, I understand very well now and know for a certainty that all other churches are great and abominable because of the false concepts they teach. In my journal notation of Oct. 10th I suddenly realized that my progression was stopped (I mean eternal progression) when I was a Presbyterian because I knew nothing about celestial marriage, eternal increase, genealogy or temple work. But I now know my progression (learning and spiritual progression) in this life and in the true Church have been stopped because of all the false concepts I was taught in the Presbyterian Church--things I have enumerated in my Life of Christ paper (which see.) For 35 years I was taught and believed that God the Father was the God of the Old Testament; when in reality Jesus Christ is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In the Book of Mormon it makes it much plainer and calls Him the Holy One of Israel. Christ states plainly and emphatically in 3 Nephi 15:5, "Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel."

That answers my question, "Why is the Book of Mormon the most correct of any book on earth? I don't know of any other book on earth that says Christ is He who gave the law to Israel and He who covenanted with Israel. I don't know of any other book of scripture that states plainly that the Son of God would be born of the Virgin Mary in Jerusalem, after the manner of the flesh. All the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament are couched.

In answer to my question, "How does the Book of Mormon contain the fullness of the Gospel: it is replete with the Gospel principles of faith, repentance, baptism and the Holy Ghost. It also contains the beautiful teachings of Christ's atonement in 2 Nephi. In the New Testament the word atonement is used only once (in Romans 5:11) and in that single instance it is misused, according to Talmage and other Biblical authorities.

October 1, 1977

Rick--

This is the first half of my paper. I hope to be able to title it "How I Gained a Testimony of the Book of Mormon." I really do want to know

1. Why the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion?
2. Why the Gospel couldn't have been restored without it?
3. What are its precepts I need to abide by?
4. Why it is the most correct of any book on earth?
5. How does it contain the fullness of the Gospel? (I know it does, because it says so in D & C 20:9, 27:5, 35:17, 42:14 and Joseph Smith 2:34.)

I'll be looking for the answers to these and other questions in your classes. I don't necessarily want you to answer them specifically; I really want to find out the answers myself.

November 25, 1977

Perhaps I did put Moroni 10:3 & 4 to the test. I did want to know if the Book of Mormon was "true" and why it is important. I guess, before, I was like Nicodemus, asking, but not really wanting to know. But since Oct. 1 (above) I asked with real intent and sincerely. I read and studied the Book of Mormon (as much as we have covered so far) many hours as you can see from my journal notations. Then I received your teachings of the Book of Mormon and pondered them, many hours. So the truth and importance of them have been made manifest unto me. As I said, all it took was a good teacher! plus a strong desire on my part, a real intent, hours of study, time to ponder and sincere prayer.

I am just really beginning to learn about the Book of Mormon. In my Sunday School Course 15 manual the assignment recently was for the class to divide into buzz groups and after 10 minutes to report on these things;

1. List the kinds of information you can find in the Book of Mormon. For each item on the list give a fact or example to illustrate.
2. Choose a favorite story from the Book of Mormon and be able to tell it to the class. Include significant scriptures and also a modern application or lesson that can be learned from the story you choose.
3. Choose some of the most significant gospel principles found in the Book of Mormon. Explain the circumstances in which each principle was given, including who gave the principle and to whom it was given, if and how this principle is given in the Bible, and today's application.

Needless to say, the class couldn't do that in 10 minutes nor in several class sessions. Those topics, especially #3 could well be the subject of a term paper. I plan to do that for my next quarter's term paper and I would also like to make a booklet (perhaps illustrated) of "Literary Gems from the Book of Mormon." I'm finding it does have much good literature in it.

Roybeta Malone