

THE
WITNESS

A Quarterly Publication of



The Book of Mormon Foundation

**The Lord Will Roar From
Zion,
And Utter His Voice From
Jerusalem**



ISSUE 172/ 2020

THE
WITNESS

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Amos 1:2

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Dear Friends,

As we commemorate the glorious birth of the Messiah and approach the beginning of a new year, a question lingers in our minds, "What will the next twelve months bring us?" The uncertainty of the future is always with us, but Jesus offers us peace and hope. As we celebrate this Christmas season may we remember His gifts and promises to us. The future then loses its uncertainty and becomes an anticipated time when the Savior will return and reign in His Kingdom. May we be preparing our lives to receive His greatest gift, eternal life.

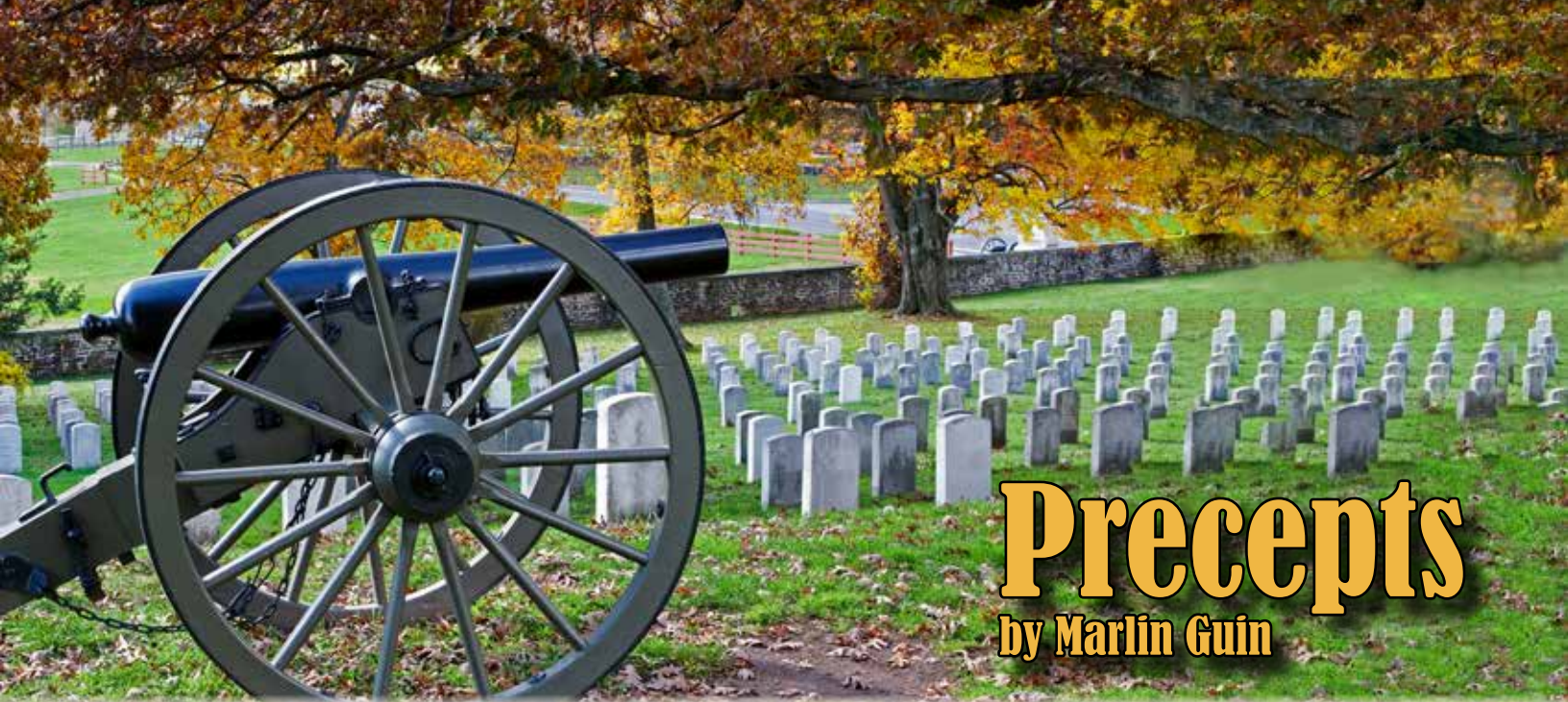
The Foundation has been the recipient of gifts of your time, talents, treasure and prayers. In sincere appreciation, our prayer is that God's blessings be yours abundantly.

**Merry Christmas
&
Happy New Year**

And behold, an angel of the Lord hath declared it unto me, and he did bring glad tidings to my soul. And behold, I was sent unto you to declare it unto you also, that ye might have glad tidings;

Helaman 5:8-9





Precepts

by Marlin Guin

*Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war...
Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg, PA on November 19, 1863*

As a citizen of our country and a witness of recent events, these words seem to be true and self-evident today. President Lincoln was not only speaking about the physical sacrifices of war but also referring to the spiritual desires and goals of those engaged in battle. I'm reminded of the relevance of his words as they also match up with scriptures describing our time.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12)

Our nation is experiencing physical conflict in various degrees and places. Some would say more severe confrontation and violence are coming. Either way, one thing is certain. We are engaged in a great spiritual war. Echoing President Lincoln's words, we have met on the spiritual battlefield of that war. We have quickly learned it cannot be won without the power of God. Our own strength and wisdom are just not enough. Even when our pride tells us we can do it alone.

From a larger view, everything we see today is about this great spiritual war. It's simply a battle between good and evil. In the midst of so many distractions, it would be well for us to remember that simple truth. It's a fight to the death for the souls of men and women. This has been true from the beginning of time but culminates in intensity during the final battles of the last days. In the end, nothing will be held back in the final chapter of this world. The good news is God wins!

In this journey, as we experience this war first-hand, it's easy to ask these important questions: how did spiritual darkness and wickedness become so prevalent today? Where did the notion come from about calling good evil and evil good? Where did the persuasions come from that influences people to see dark as light and light as dark? Unfortunately, these beliefs are also found among some identifying themselves as Christians.

There are many aspects to these questions but the one we will focus on now is found in a unique phrase from the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 11, 12), Isaiah 29 (IV) and D&C 45. The phrase used to describe this powerful spiritual influence of rebellion against God is called the “precepts of men.”

Let’s first go to the dictionary definitions of the word “precept.” If we compare today’s dictionary definition of “precept” with the dictionary from 1828, we see how the definition of “precept” has changed over time. Remember, The Book of Mormon was published in March, 1830. In a sense, the difference between these definitions is a good example of how the “precepts of men” have crept into our society and redefined words.

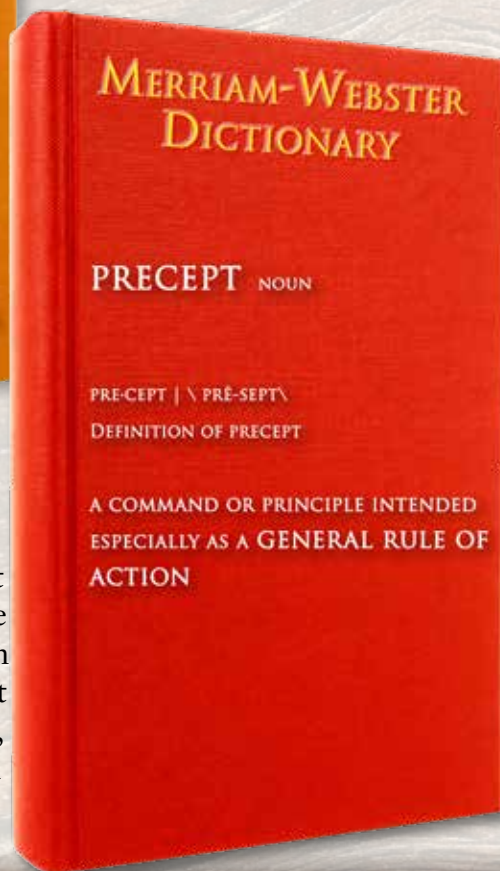
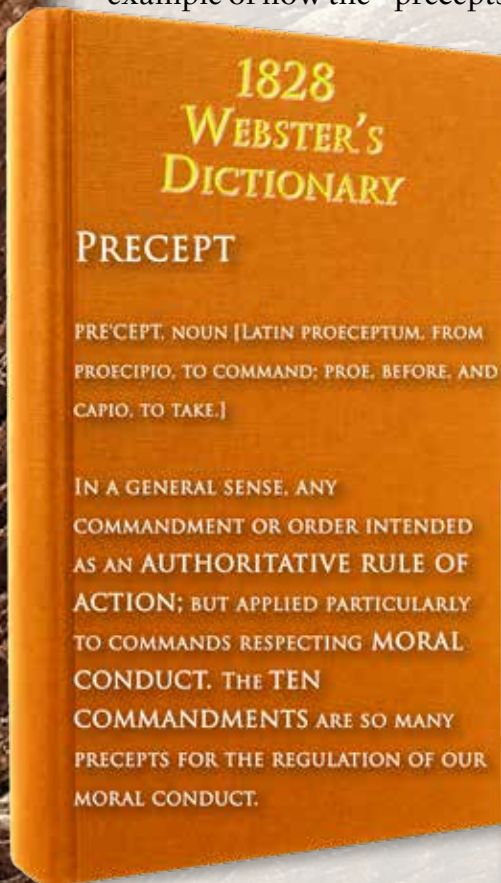
We can clearly see how these definitions have changed. A “precept” has evolved from being a command of

differently, if “it feels right it must be right” has become an accepted standard of truth for making the decisions of life. One could also make the analogy that these definitions illustrate how people have allowed the “precepts of God” to evolve into the “precepts of men.”

And blessed are those who hearken unto **my precepts**, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; (2 Nephi 12:37) (emphasis added)

It’s interesting to observe how the phrase “precepts of men” is emphasized and explained in specific scriptures uniquely given to our latter day dispensation. As previously mentioned, we see references to the “precepts of men” in The Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 11, 12), Isaiah 29 (IV) and latter day revelation (D&C 45). There must be an important reason. The Lord knew these insights would be needed to help us understand the things we are now seeing. With that purpose, they have come to us with a voice of warning that the “precepts of men” will be raging in the hearts of people in our day.

And again it shall come to pass, that the Lord shall say unto him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him, Forasmuch as this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the **precepts of men**, therefore I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people; yea, a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid. And woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord. And their works are in the dark; and they say, Who seeth us and who knoweth us? (Isaiah 29:26-27 IV) (2 Nephi 11) (emphasis added)



God, especially concerning moral conduct, into a general rule of action. This means that God’s commandments have been replaced with our own conclusions of what is right and wrong. In other words, the modern day definition of “precept” means to “do your own thing.” Stated

Nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err, because they are taught by the **precepts of men**. (2 Nephi 12:17) (emphasis added)

Wo be unto him that crieth, All is well; yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the **precepts of men**, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. (2 Nephi 12:31) (emphasis added)

Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the **precepts of men**, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost. (2 Nephi 12:39) (emphasis added)

But they receive it not, for they perceive not the light, and they turn their hearts from me because of the **precepts of men**; (D&C 45:4c) (emphasis added)

Perhaps the more detailed explanation of the “precepts of men” is found in The Book of Mormon. Especially in 2 Nephi 12 which is a chapter of prophetic explanations for chapter 11. It’s in chapter 11 the words of Isaiah 29 (IV) are quoted concerning the “precepts of men.” Chapter 12 then explains the meaning of the Isaiah quote. Here are some highlights from Chapter 12 as to how the “precepts of men” manifest themselves among us. We can also call them fruits coming from the “precepts of men.”

Churches are built up, not unto the Lord, who will say “I am the Lord’s and others will say I am the Lord’s.”

Priests will contend one with another and will teach with their learning and deny the Holy Ghost which gives utterance.

They will deny the power of God and tell the people to listen to their precepts.

They will say there is no God today for Christ has done His work and has already given His power unto men.

They will say hear my precepts and don’t believe in miracles, for God has done His work.

They will say eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die and everything will be fine.

They will say fear God but He will justify a little sin.

They will say take advantage of people and dig a pit for their neighbor. Not a problem.

They will say if we do all these things and die tomorrow, even if we are guilty, then God will only beat us with a few stripes and we will be saved in the Kingdom of God.

Many with pride will teach this way with false, vain and foolish doctrines.

Many will seek to hide their counsels from the Lord and be in darkness and the blood of the saints shall cry against them.

They have all gone out of the way and become corrupted. Their churches have corrupted.

Pride, false teaching and false doctrines abound.

They rob the poor because of their pride, fine sanctuaries, fine clothing and persecute the meek and poor in heart.

They participate in wickedness, abominations and whoredoms.

In these things they do err because they are taught by the “precepts of men.”

Now ask yourself, are these some of the things we see today! The consistent thread in this sequence of ungodly fruits is how they are caused by the “precepts of men.” As we go down the list, and perhaps think of others, we see the words of the prophets coming to pass more fully every day.

There was an article published by the Prophecy News Watch staff on June 9, 2020 titled: *US In Moral Freefall As Everyone Does What Is Right In Their Own Eyes*. It describes, from a different perspective, some of the things we just listed.

In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. (Judges 21:25)

The consequences of rejecting God’s truth are undeniable. We know that what we believe dictates how we behave. Today, we are seeing the moral breakdown permeating the culture around us, and it is playing out with devastating consequences in our culture.

This was the conclusion of Len Munsil, President of the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University who conducted a new poll in association with the Barna Group. The poll revealed 58 percent of respondents said they look to themselves or other people when making moral decisions. Less than one third said that they look to the Bible.

The Center surveyed 2,000 adults at random in January, long before the impact of the Coronavirus and rioting across the country. The American Worldview Inventory study, interviewed all ages, ethnicities, beliefs and political persuasions on the telephone or online.

A total of 58 percent of U.S. adults agreed that identifying moral truth is up to each individual; there are no moral absolutes that apply to everyone, all the time, according to the survey.

Sadly, 48 percent of adults who identified as born-again Christians agreed with the statement.

Perhaps most troubling, the findings regarding the moral views of the youngest generation indicate this downward moral trajectory is likely to continue. Americans age 18 to 29 are least likely—only 15%—to turn to the Bible for moral guidance and instead look to themselves (29%) or to family (25%).

The percentage of adults with a biblical worldview has been sliced in half since 1995, he remarked in a statement. As Americans embrace the consequences of unrestrained moral choices, we will see further rejections of traditional marriage, conventional child-rearing practices and objectives, millions more abortions, excessive substance abuse, and wider acceptance of suicide, polygamy, sexual perversion, and religious persecution.

Any society that substitutes humanity’s latest and greatest ideas for God’s truth and authority is on the fast track to ruin, Barna warned.

He said that much of the responsibility to change the trajectory of the nation lies in the hands of the Church and the family unit.

The restoration of biblical truth can facilitate the turnaround of a declining society, Barna stated. It starts with churches relentlessly and consistently teaching biblical truth principles for practical application within all dimensions of life. It requires churches equipping parents to teach those truth principles to their children.

It demands parents placing their young people in educational, relational, and entertainment environments where God’s truth principles are respected and practiced, he continued. It advances by electing public officials who pass civil laws in harmony with God’s religious Law.

Restoring our foundations will be neither easy nor quick, but such a turnaround can happen if a remnant of God’s people devotes themselves to such a process of cultural deliverance.

The Book of Mormon prophets mention how the “precepts of men” have been used to change our beliefs in such a cunning way.

O that **cunning plan** of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned, they **think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God**, for they set it aside, supposing they **know of themselves**; Wherefore, **their wisdom is foolishness**, and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good, if they hearken unto the counsels of God. (2 Nephi 6:57-61) (emphasis added)

How does the “precepts of men” become part of a cunning plan? One way, used quite extensively today, is by seeking to prove an ungodly belief or action by first connecting it with a statement of truth. This approach attempts to make it more convincing to our human logic. This introductory statement of truth often comes from the scriptures and is connected to a context outside the purpose for which God intended. Remember, when statements of truth are severed from the divine principles to which God has assigned them, they become the “precepts of men” and contribute to deceptions and lies. These are the most dangerous “precepts of men.” Why? Because they are camouflaged truths persuading people that white is black and black is white. Right is wrong and wrong is right. Light is dark and dark is light.

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20) (2 Nephi 8:90)

To make the point, let’s briefly look at three of the iniquities mentioned in the previous article that also brought God’s judgement upon ancient Israel. In so doing, we can determine if our own nation is on this same path.

Briefly, here are examples of a typical approach used to discuss these subjects, using the “precepts of men”:

Abortion (pro-choice)

Begin with a truth – God gives us the right to choose and will never take it away.

Attach it to a lie – Since I’ve been given the right to choose, any choice we make is fine with God, including killing our unborn children.

Sexual perversions (homosexuality, gay marriage, whoredoms, etc.)

Begin with a truth – God is love and we are to love each other.

Attach it to a lie – Any sexual perversion is based on love so it’s fine with God.

Worship of Idols (other gods)

Begin with a truth – God wants me to be happy.

Attach it to a lie – Anything I do that makes me happy is fine with God.

Last July, I read the following article on the RestoredGospel.com website. It was titled *Re-Defining Definitions* and explained how the process of re-defining definitions contributes to the effectiveness of the “precepts of men” among the people. Here are a few excerpts:

A tactic used by the adversary is to redefine things that are true, causing questioning and doubt. Ideas that are/were standards become questionable. Satan challenged Eve’s understanding asking, “Did God really say you would die?”

By redefining definitions, for instance, some within our nation justified slavery long ago. African people were redefined (by those who desired slavery) not ‘humans’ but ‘property.’ Perhaps calling an African person ‘property’ appeased a slave holder’s conscience.

Likewise today, unborn babies are redefined (by those who want to have sex without consequence) from a human to a “fetus”.

They want us to believe it's not a baby whose life was robbed and body dismembered; after all, it was just a "blob of tissue." These methods, and others like them where truth becomes obscure by redefining words is a powerful tool of the adversary.

If Satan can convince the church to redefine truth with lies, Satan can defeat God's people.

Once the human begins to doubt God's words, they willfully disregard greater instruction until they are left without light and truth. They become robots of the culture rather than agents for its change.

Satan understands humans too well, he understands that:

First you abhor..., then you tolerate..., then you embrace.

He slowly attempts to erode your values with new definitions until you will believe anything. (I was born in the wrong body, for instance.)

Consider how the culture is trying to redefine "marriage" into 'partnership' or 'civil union.' You see, marriage was defined for man and woman alone, partnerships can be for anyone, a man and man, woman and woman, man and boy.

**First you abhor...,
then you tolerate...,
then you embrace.**

Conclusion

This past summer, I taught a class to the Book of Mormon Foundation interns. We talked about the standard of truth being used today and which standard of truth they use. I asked them if they followed the "precepts of God" or the "precepts of men?" One of the interns shared her testimony about a conversation with a friend that ended this way: "you have your truth and I have my truth." This is the usual ending between people using different standards of truth and summarizes well the effect of the "precepts of men" on our world.

In the midst of the battle, be not discouraged and have hope in Christ. We are all sinners. We must always remember that God loves all sinners and will save all who will hearken unto His voice. This is His single purpose for all His creation and the very reason Jesus came to redeem us. It's also the reason His people are called today to declare nothing but repentance unto this generation. God is love! God is mercy! God is forgiving!

We need to be diligent in prayer, study and fasting that we might know the word of God and receive the personal revelation promised to those who diligently seek Him. The admonition remains the same. Watch, therefore, and pray always! Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come!

Endnotes

https://www.prophecynewswatch.com/article.cfm?recent_news_id=4104

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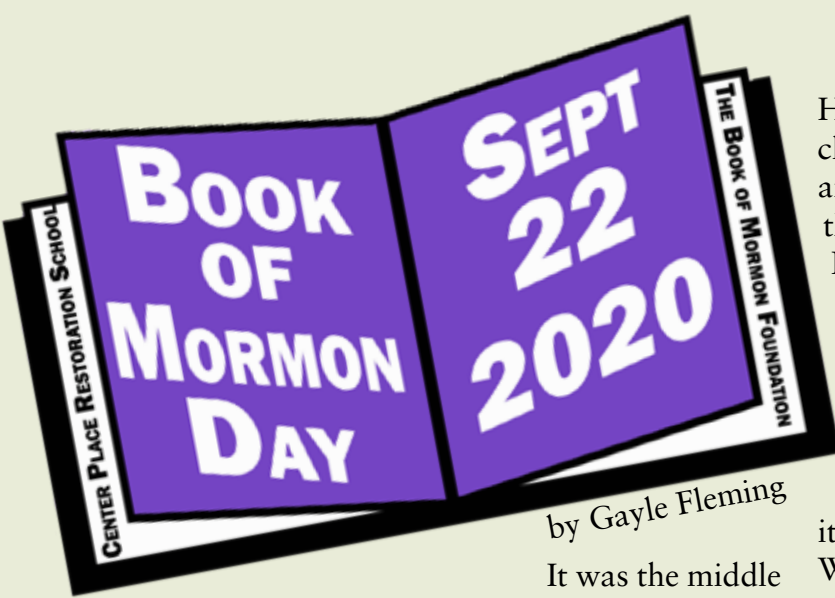
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His visit to the Nephites and how He blessed their children, as they were encircled about with fire and angels. He told the students how much He loves them and how much He wants them to follow Him all of their lives, so they can be with Him for eternity.

Alma the Younger told the children how he used to be a very wicked man, until the Lord stopped him and showed him how to repent and turn his life around to become a valiant servant of the King. When we carry our sins around, it's like rocks and heavy objects in a backpack. We can really be weighed down by the load! But when we repent and stop that sin, Jesus forgives us and takes those heavy things out of the backpack, making our load light instead.

The Brother of Jared told about the Lord confusing the languages of the people around them. While leading his family and friends into the wilderness to a "choice land." They had to cross the great ocean. The Brother of Jared molten 16 stones and asked the Lord to touch each stone with his finger to light them up, so they could see inside their barges as they crossed the great deep. He even made the stones light up in our classrooms! But the most wonderful part was that the Brother of Jared had so much faith that he was able to actually see the Lord! We must grow our faith that strong, too!

It was the middle of the summer and I was driving through the streets of Independence, when all of a sudden, the words "Book of Mormon" caught my eye. There they were on a billboard larger than life! "Take your Book of Mormon to Work or School, September 22, 2020." I was so excited!

I work at Center Place Restoration School, just the place where we can do that every day. And we do! We even have two Book of Mormon classes taught in high school. But this was different. I imagined spending the entire day celebrating the Book of Mormon as an entire school. I talked to the school administrator, Dan Schoenemann, to tell him my idea. He laughed and said, "It's already scheduled." I was so glad to hear that, but I felt like I needed to be part of it. I volunteered to help and soon got a call from Sue Manning from The Book of Mormon Foundation, asking me to coordinate the elementary part of the day. I readily agreed. I remember helping one year with the "Book of Mormon Day for Kids" when my children were little and greatly enjoyed it.

We chose the theme, "Visitors from the Book of Mormon." Most of the "visitors" came to the children in their classrooms.

We began the day in the gym where we had the most special visitor of all, Jesus! He told the students about



Captain Moroni told the children that we must be brave and stand up for what is right in our lives. Our families, our freedom, our right to worship, are all very important and worth fighting for. The children made their own Titles of Liberty so they could remember to be courageous and stand for the right.

Mormon told the students how he made plates of gold and recorded the history of his people in a shortened form. It is so important to have knowledge of how the Lord has worked in the lives of all His people. We can learn from the experiences of those that have gone before us and leave our testimonies for those who come after. We can also read our scriptures so that we know the truth and we won't be deceived by the world around us.

Nephi showed a video about the Tree of Life and talked about how important it was to ask the Lord, if we want to know His mysteries. He said we need to listen and obey the commandments of our parents and the Lord, so we can make it to the tree and eat of the fruit.

Then the children traveled to the Tree of Life. They saw the great and spacious building, the mists of darkness, and the river of filthy water. They held on to the rod of iron as they made their way to the tree, where Lehi and Sariah were waiting to give them the exceeding white and delicious fruit taken from the tree.

The students had recreation with Helaman and one of his stripling warriors, followed by a picnic lunch on the playground.

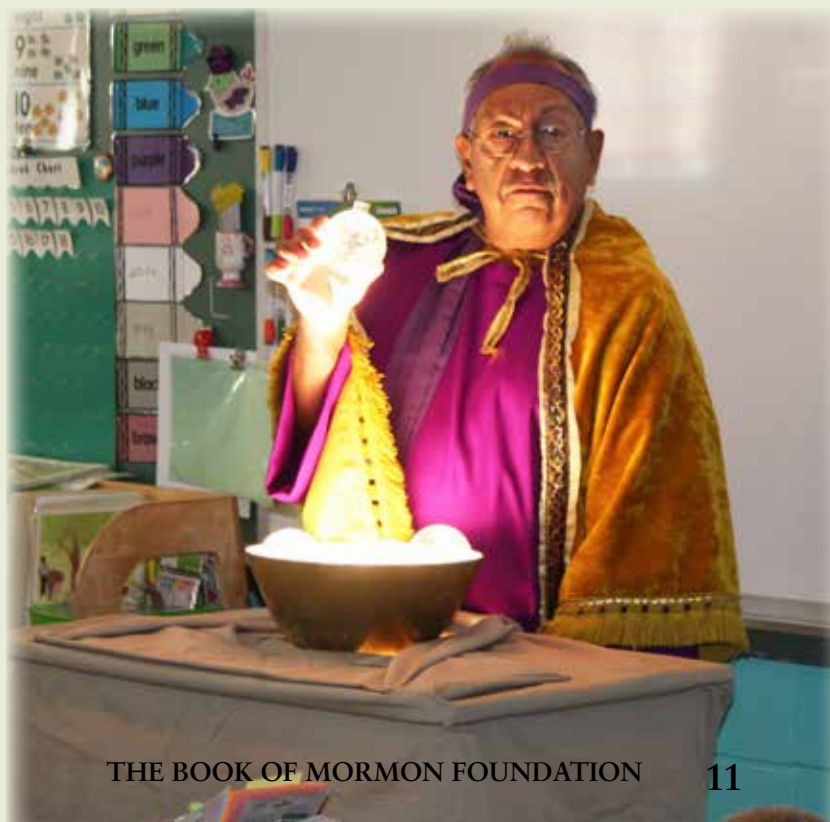
We ended the day watching a video about Mormon and Moroni and the final battle between the Nephites and the Lamanites. We saw Moroni put the plates into the ground, marking the end of the Nephites. Then the stone was pushed away and we



saw the angel Moroni give the plates to Joseph Smith. Joseph translated the plates, by the gift and power of God, into what we now know as the Book of Mormon. The children were given their own pocket-sized Book of Mormon. It really brought home to the children where the book came from!

When asked how they liked the day, one kindergartener replied, "Best Day Ever!" I agree!

There were many glitches that came up during the two weeks preceding this special day, but almost immediately, in every circumstance, the Lord provided the solution to the problem. I honestly felt like I was put in the position of elementary coordinator so that I could sit back and be a first-hand witness of the Lord orchestrating the whole thing. What a blessing the day was! What a blessing the Book of Mormon is to our church and to the entire world. Let us all proclaim the truth of the Book of Mormon to everyone!







For more photos go to:
bomf.org/2020-bom-day or our Facebook page.

Photographers: Lynn Baumgart, Dale Godfrey,
Sue Manning and Mindy Smith

One Last Time

by Naomi Alaniz

In years past, The Book of Mormon Foundation (BMF) has put on a Book of Mormon Day for elementary age kids. I used to get so excited when I got to go and remember how much fun I always had. I loved it so much, when I got a little older, I volunteered to help out in any way I could.

Because of current issues in the world today, BMF was unable to put it on the same way they had done in the past. This created an opportunity for me to have the privilege of experiencing the Book of Mormon Day for Kids one last time, but this time a little differently.

The Book of Mormon Day for Kids was brought to the student body at Center Place Restoration School. As a senior at CPRS, I was blessed to take part in the wonderful opportunity the Book of Mormon Day provided. To begin the day, we were each given a t-shirt, a brand new Book of Mormon, and a binder for our classes we attended throughout the day.

The high schoolers met first in the cafeteria, where we had a class by Rich Rowland about the gift of Atonement. As the day continued, we had other classes by Michael Barrett, Jason Anderson, Dale Gilmore, Bob Bobbitt, and Larry Scofield. Each class was based on scriptures found in The Book of Mormon and helped us to build our spiritual “toolbox.” In between some of the classes, we participated in a team building activity with Jenna Shepherd about the distractions of the world, and how important it is to listen to God’s voice. We later got to eat pizza and ice cream provided by BMF.

We all enjoyed the day so much and had lots of fun while growing spiritually. I’m so grateful for the generosity of The Book of Mormon Foundation and all of the people who took time out of their schedules to make it possible.



Spiritual Tools

by Larry Scofield

The Book of Mormon Foundation (BMF) planned a special day for all the students and staff at CPRS. We set aside all the usual classes for a day of classes aimed at enriching the students' understanding and appreciation for the Book of Mormon. The events for the day were differentiated for elementary and secondary students.

I've heard a lot of good things about the programs for elementary students, but my involvement was with the secondary students. A highlight of the day was the gifts BMF gave to all the students and adults. Everyone received a specially designed t-shirt, a Restored Covenant Edition of the Book of Mormon, a Book of Mormon Overview and a three-ring binder for our Spiritual Toolbox of notes and inspirations.

The day began with classes on a variety of topics, each related to the "toolbox." For the middle school and high school, those classes and presenters were:

- Study Essentials, Mike Barrett
- The Plan of Redemption, Rich Rowland
- Gadianton Robbers & Spiritual Warfare, Jason Anderson
- The Tool of Intelligence, Larry Scofield
- Spiritual Warfare, Jenna Shepherd
- Prophecy in the Book of Mormon, Dale Gilmore
- Witnessing, Bob Bobbitt

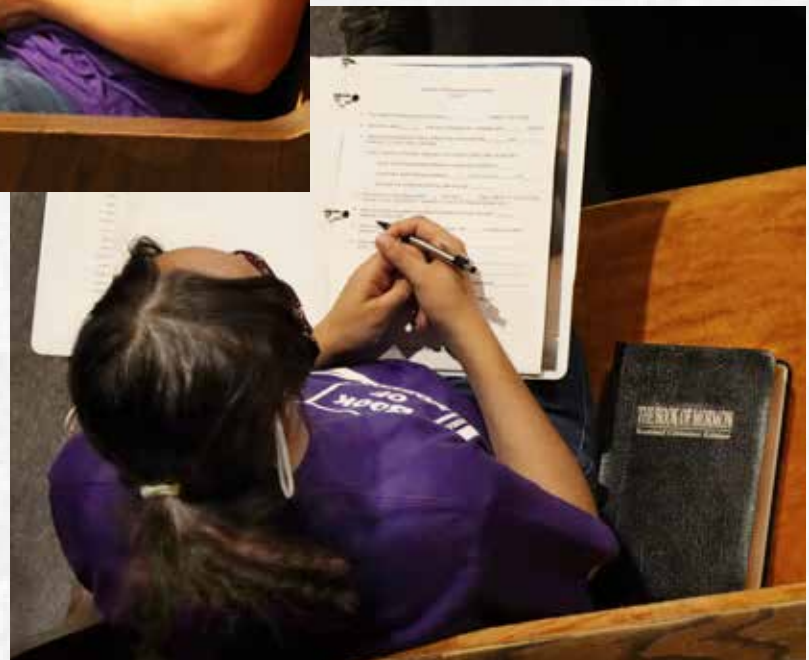
BMF also provided a surprise lunch of pizza, soda and ice cream; and don't think that wasn't a highlight for the students. There was a wrap up

session at the end to get reaction and feedback from the students, and a game of sinball (dodgeball) to unwind after a long day of focused attention.

The classes used references and stories from the Book of Mormon, and got students involved using their Restored Covenant Editions, the Overview and other materials. As the middle school religion teacher, I have followed up with lessons in my classes using the handouts from the Book of Mormon Day, and the notes students took that day and since.

The RCE and the Overview are being used as valuable resources for lessons and the ongoing work of increasing familiarity and knowledge about the Book of Mormon. One example is a game I developed using our Restored Covenant Editions to

practice recognizing characters and stories from the Book of Mormon; since all of us now have Book of Mormons that are identical, we sometimes play a game I call scavenger hunt, where the students have to hunt for and find a passage of scripture as I read it to them. The goal is to be the first to identify what page I'm on. The infusion of ideas and the spotlight shined on the Book of Mormon for Book of Mormon Day has been a tremendous boost for interest in learning about the Book of Mormon.



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I asked a few of my students to share their thoughts and memories about Book of Mormon Day, and here is a sampling of quotes.

There was not too much work, but there was work. The work was not challenging, but not easy either.

One thing I liked about Book of Mormon Day was there was never a dull moment. No matter what we did, it was always fun.

Book of Mormon Day was great. I had a spiritual connection with God. I loved the classes. They were well presented and easy to understand. I learned a lot about the Book of Mormon stories. I hope we can do this again so other people can learn more next year.

The classes were quite intriguing.

In all of the classes the speakers made ways to keep us listening, but also giving us vital knowledge.

The lunch they supplied was very nice.

