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The Primary Purpose of the Book of Mormon

by Raymond C. Treat

If you were to ask several Book of Mormon believers the question, "What is the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon?" most, if not all, would answer, "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ." This is a purpose of the Book of Mormon but not the *primary* purpose.

The primary purpose of the Book of Mormon is to restore a knowledge of the covenants to the seed of Lehi—the Lamanites—who are a remnant of the house of Israel. (Lamanites in this sense is a term which includes other Book of Mormon tribes because they became Lamanites spiritually [D&C 3:10e]).

The title page of the Book of Mormon, which was written by Moroni, plainly reveals the primary purpose through the Hebrew style of writing in parallel thoughts.

- A written to the *Lamanites* which are a remnant of the house of Israel;
B and also to Jew and Gentile . . .
A' to show unto the *remnant* of the house of Israel . . . that they may know the covenants of the Lord . . .
B' and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ . . . [emphasis added]

This is a Hebrew poetry style

called alternating parallelism (see *Recent Book of Mormon Developments*, vol. 2, 1992:14). Once the poetry style has been identified, the structure of the poetry tells us how the parts fit together. A fits with A' to give us the primary purpose. Notice that A' says the remnant, referring to the Lamanites. B goes with B' to give us the secondary purpose.

The secondary purpose tells us that the Book of Mormon is for everyone, because everyone is either a Jew or a Gentile. The primary purpose tells us that the Book of Mormon is to restore a knowledge of the covenants to the Lamanites. This is the primary purpose not only because A comes before B but because the Book of Mormon is the Lamanites' history, and God covenanted with their fathers that their testimonies would come to their seed in the last days.

Suffice it to say, the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon is to restore a knowledge of the covenants to the Lamanites. Is it possible that the Restoration Movement has suffered because we have treated the Book of Mormon lightly (D&C 83:8) and that our eyes have therefore been blinded to the primary purpose because of the incorrect tradition (D&C 90:6c) of putting B before A?

Putting B before A takes our eyes

off two things, the covenants and the Lamanites.

The Covenants

There is abundant evidence in the Book of Mormon about the importance of the covenants. Not only did Moroni begin the Book of Mormon with this subject in the title page but he also ended the book with this subject. In the last verse of the Book of Mormon, Moroni 10:31, Moroni says farewell. Therefore, the verse just before that is the last verse with information other than that dealing with Moroni's farewell:

And again,
If ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ and deny not his power,
Then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God through the shedding of the blood of Christ,
Which is in the *covenant* of the Father unto the remission of your sins
That ye become holy without spot [emphasis added]. Moroni 10:30

An entire article could be written about how the contents of this verse center around the subject of our covenant. Perfection and sanctification in Christ are received as a result of our covenant relationship.

Just to show that ending the Book of Mormon with the subject of the

Cont'd on pg. 2

. . . that they (the remnant of the house of Israel) may know the covenants of the Lord . . .

covenant was not accidental, look at Moroni's first ending. Moroni's father Mormon wrote the first three chapters of his own book and after his death Moroni finished it by writing chapter four. It is obvious from the context of this chapter that Moroni thought this was the last he would be able to write:

... and may God the Father remember the *covenant* which he hath made with the house of Israel; And may he bless them for ever, through faith on the name of Jesus Christ. Amen [emphasis added].
Mormon 4:103

According to ancient Hebrew law two or three witnesses were necessary to establish evidence in a trial; therefore, Moroni gave us three witnesses that the Lord intended the Book of Mormon to begin and end with the same subject.

In Second Nephi 12:42-43 we find that the primary purpose of the Restoration Movement is associated with covenants:

But behold, there shall be many at that day when I shall proceed to do a *marvelous work* among them, That I may remember my *covenants* which I have made unto the children of men, That I may set my hand again the second time to recover my people which are of the house of Israel; And also that I may remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, And also unto thy father. . . [emphasis added]

From this reference we learn that the Lord is going to do a marvelous work that he may remember his covenants. As we see from these words of Nephi, the term "marvelous work" refers to the Restoration Movement:

And after that our seed is scattered, The Lord God will proceed to do a *marvelous work* among the Gentiles

which shall be of *great worth* unto our seed, And it shall also be of worth unto the Gentiles; And not only unto the Gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, Unto the *making known of the covenants* of the Father of heaven unto Abraham, saying, "In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" [emphasis added]. 1 Nephi 7:17, 19-20

Notice the similarity of this reference to the title page. Nephi says first that the marvelous work shall be of great worth unto our seed (who we now call Lamanites). Therefore the Lamanites are mentioned first. Then, as in the title page, he mentions everyone else, Gentiles and all the house of Israel.

The marvelous work will be of great worth because it will restore a knowledge of the covenants. So we see that not only is the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon to restore a knowledge of the covenants to the Lamanites but that this is also the primary purpose of the Restoration Movement.

Hebrews 9:14-17 establishes the importance of the covenant by telling us that Jesus Christ came to die so that we could have a covenant:

How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant They which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance; For where a covenant is, there must also of necessity be the death of the victim. For a covenant is of force after the victim is dead, Otherwise it is of no strength at all while the victim liveth.

If Jesus Christ is the most important figure in the word of God, and

he is, and if he came to die so we could have a covenant, and he did, then the covenant must be the most important subject in the word of God.

Once we understand this we can appreciate more fully how important it is to recognize the A part of the title page poetry as the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon and concentrate on the fulfillment of this purpose before trying to convince the rest of the world, which is the B part. To concentrate on the B part is to ignore the covenant, and to ignore the covenant is to be without the power of God, and without the power of God we will not be able to accomplish either purpose.

The covenant relationship, which is a relationship of total consecration in which you "die" to self and give all to the Lord, is the key to receiving the power of God, or in other words, the endowment.

One of the steps in making an ancient Hebrew covenant is the exchange of weapons belts, meaning you will defend the life of the other person even to the losing of your own life, if necessary. This is a type and shadow for the kind of covenant relationship the Lord wants to have with us spiritually. If we give the Lord our weapons belt, then he will give us his, and his weapons belt contains all the power we will need to accomplish the Lord's purposes.

The Lamanites

The Book of Mormon is an accurate history of real people with real descendants. Book of Mormon believers have been nurturing incorrect traditions about Book of Mormon geography for several generations. These have helped to cloud our vision concerning the location of the Lamanites. Certainly Book of Mormon descendants cover a large area, especially because of the extensive migrations made from the homeland. Nevertheless, most of the people stayed home. This is where we can expect to find the largest concentration of Book of Mormon descendants.

Cont'd on pg. 4

One day as I was running down the steps to the laundry room, Isaiah 53:4 ran swiftly through my mind:

Salvation: Not Just For the Life to Come

A Testimony
by Mary Lee Treat

Surely he hath borne our *sicknesses* and carried our *pains*,
Yet we did esteem him stricken,
smitten of God and afflicted
[emphasis added].

I stopped instantly because I recognized the Lord was speaking to me. As a rule, I have difficulty quoting scripture verbatim, so whenever an exact scripture quotation runs through my mind, I know the Lord is using his word to communicate with me.

This day I also recognized that the key words in the scripture were the literal Hebrew translation found in the Book of Mormon (Alma 5:20-21) and not the usual King James

I immediately thought the Lord was preparing me for a major illness or disaster in my family.

translation. We had just published the article on Hebraisms by Angela Crowell in which she gives this example (see *Recent Book of Mormon Developments*, vol. 2, 1992:9).

As the meaning of this scripture came to the front of my mind, I immediately thought the Lord was preparing me for a major illness or disaster in my family. But then these words came swiftly: "If you can trust me for your eternal salvation, why can't you trust me for your

physical salvation in this lifetime?"

This concept presented by the Lord seemed so logical and simple. Even though I didn't fully comprehend it, I resolved immediately to trust him for everything: finances, health, family relationships, etc.

I knew that Isaiah was using the prophetic perfect tense, as explained in the Hebraism article (see *Recent Book of Mormon Developments*, vol. 2, 1992:7-8). This means that although the event was several hundred years in the future, he spoke of it as though it had already come to pass.

I also knew that there is no past or future tense in Hebrew. An action is either complete or incomplete. In other words, our physical and spiritual salvation was provided from the foundation of the world and completed by Christ on the cross. Our work is to believe and receive that gift.

Most of us have no problem receiving the gift of eternal life but draw a line between life in the flesh and life after death. By doing so we incorrectly relegate the gift of salvation to the life in the next world. I believe this is what the Lord was trying to tell me that day.

I received another confirmation that salvation is for the now as well as the next life when I read *Our Father Abraham*, by Marvin Wilson:

The Hebrew verb *yasha* means "to save" or "to deliver," and the noun *yeshu'ah*, "salvation," derives from it. In the Hebrew Bible, this verb is not used in the sense of "escape to

I resolved immediately to trust him for everything: finances, health, family relationships, etc.

heaven." Rather, a careful study of its many occurrences reveals that the main idea is "to liberate," "to deliver from evil," or "to free from oppression." . . . God is frequently pictured saving his people from external evils [in the Old Testament] . . . The same Hebraic concept of salvation—one that embraces an earthly deliverance—is also found in the New Testament (Wilson 1989:179).

The author points out that the concept of salvation only for the next life came into existence in the middle or dark ages (Wilson 1989:178). Unfortunately this incorrect tradition is very much alive in the thinking of most of us today.

It has been several years since the Lord spoke to me about trusting him for the here and now. As my understanding of the true meaning of salvation has grown, so has my ability to trust him for my total salvation—now and in the life to come. ZRF

REFERENCE CITED

Wilson, Marvin R.
1989 *Our Father Abraham*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

There should be no doubt whatsoever in the minds of anyone conversant with Book of Mormon archaeology and geography that the Book of Mormon homeland is known today as Mesoamerica (see *Recent Book of Mormon Developments*, vol. 2, 1992: 121-124). Mesoamerica is an archaeological term for the area which includes southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize (formerly British Honduras) and the western parts of Honduras and El Salvador.

The largest Indian group in Mesoamerica, the Maya, has an estimated population of over four million. The Maya are located primarily in Guatemala, the Yucatan peninsula and Belize. This is the area inhabited by the Nephites, Lamanites, Mulekites and even some Jaredites during Book of Mormon times.

It is safe to say that the estimated 29 Mayan languages still spoken are spoken by the direct descendants of the Nephites, Lamanites and Mulekites (see *Recent Book of Mormon Developments*, vol. 2, 1992:133-136).

It is also safe to say that we as a people have ignored the main population of Lamanites until very recently. Although some work is being done, we are all under obligation to ask the Lord what he wants

each of us to do about our Book of Mormon stewardship in the work of restoring a knowledge of the covenants of the Lord to the Lamanites.

The idea that the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon is to restore a knowledge of the covenants to the remnant of the house of Israel, primarily Lamanites, is not new with this article but it is an idea that needs to be kept uppermost in our thinking.

We need to ponder, study and pray over the implications of the message of the Book of Mormon title page. We need first to insure that we have a personal covenant restored to us before we can assist in restoring it to others.

The message to restore the covenant is not going to go away. The title "Book of Mormon" symbolically means "Book of the Restoration of the Covenant" (see *Recent Book of Mormon Developments*, vol. 2, 1992:44-45). God's covenants are going to be fulfilled.

The success of our future, as Book of Mormon believers, will depend on our willingness to put first things first. A always comes before B. ZRF

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