

ently bless the bread and water. Their more seasoned, often younger brethren practiced along with them the words of the sacramental prayers so they would feel confident in giving them. Then, together, all the brethren discussed the sacred nature of this important priesthood ordinance.

We've all had experiences where we've had to demonstrate our determination to serve others and our willingness to press forward in faith. When my husband telephoned to tell me that our mission call had been changed to a challenging assignment in Africa, I responded, "I can do that. I think I can do that." I demonstrated by my words my commitment to move forward in faith—trusting once again that the Lord would help me. I was showing my willingness "to grow up unto the Lord."

As that faithful bishop, those dedicated sisters, and I might attest, in this ongoing process of growing up unto the Lord, we will be asked to do all we can, in some cases even more than we know how to do. The challenges may be formidable

and the route sometimes unknown. But inevitable wrong turns notwithstanding, those who strive to be truly Christlike—with steadfast determination to serve others and a willingness to press forward in faith—can come to echo this grand spiritual truth shared by Nephi as he continued his shipbuilding: "And I did pray oft unto the Lord; wherefore the Lord showed unto me great things."¹⁰ To be shown "great things"—what a gift, what a blessing to those who have chosen "to grow up unto the Lord." May ours be lives of gentle, loving, steadfast spiritual maturity, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Helaman 3:21.
2. 1 Corinthians 13:11.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
4. Mosiah 5:15.
5. 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8; italics added.
6. Mosiah 18:21.
7. 2 Nephi 31:20; italics added.
8. 1 Nephi 17:8–9.
9. 1 Nephi 17:3.
10. 1 Nephi 18:3.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Benefits of reading the Book of Mormon

Last year, at the invitation of a prophet, millions read the Book of Mormon. Millions benefited. For each of us there were blessings of obedience, and most of us also grew in knowledge and testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom this book is a witness.

Many other things were learned, but what was learned depended on the reader. What we get from a book, especially a sacred text, is mostly dependent on what we take to its reading—in desire and readiness to learn, and in attunement to the light communicated by the Spirit of the Lord.

All men everywhere

One of the things I learned in this most recent reading of the Book of Mormon was how much God loves all of His children in every nation. In the first chapter Father Lehi praises the Lord, whose "power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth" (1 Nephi 1:14). Again and again the Book of Mormon teaches that the gospel of Jesus Christ is universal in its promise and effect, reaching out to all who ever live on the earth. Here are some examples, quoted directly from that book:

- “The atonement . . . was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, . . . or who ever shall be” (Mosiah 4:7).

- “And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, . . . all men are redeemed” (Mormon 9:13).

- “He suffereth the pains of all . . . , both men, women, and children. . . . And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men” (2 Nephi 9:21–22).

- “Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? . . . Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and . . . all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden” (2 Nephi 26:27–28).

We also read that “his blood atoneth for the sins of those . . . who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned” (Mosiah 3:11). Similarly, “the blood of Christ atoneth for [little children]” (Mosiah 3:16). These teachings that the resurrecting and cleansing power of the Atonement is for all contradict the assertion that the grace of God saves only a chosen few. His grace is for all. These teachings of the Book of Mormon expand our vision and enlarge our understanding of the all-encompassing love of God and the universal effect of His Atonement for all men everywhere.

“Bond and free”

The Book of Mormon teaches that our Savior “inviteth [all the children of men] to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33; see also Alma 5:49).

“He inviteth them all.” We understand “male and female.” We also understand “black and white,” which means all races.

But what about “bond and free”? *Bond*—the opposite of free—means more than slavery. It means being bound (in bondage) to anything from which it is difficult to escape. *Bond* includes those whose freedom is restricted by physical or emotional afflictions. *Bond* includes those who are addicted to some substance or practice. *Bond* surely refers to those who are imprisoned by sin—“encircled about” by what another teaching of the Book of Mormon calls “the chains of hell” (Alma 5:7). *Bond* includes those who are held down by traditions or customs contrary to the commandments of God (see Matthew 15:3–6; Mark 7:7–9; D&C 74:4–7; 93:39). Finally, *bond* also includes those who are confined within the boundaries of other erroneous ideas. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that we preach to “liberate the captives.”¹ Our Savior “inviteth . . . all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; . . . he denieth none that come unto him . . . ; and all are alike unto God.”

Promised manifestations of the Lord

The children of God in all nations have His promise that He will manifest Himself to them. The Book of Mormon tells us:

“He manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith” (2 Nephi 26:13).

Note that these promised manifestations of the Lord are to “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.” Today we are seeing the fulfillment of that promise in every nation where our missionaries are permitted to labor, even among peoples we have not previously associated with Christianity.

For example, we know of many cases where the Lord has been manifesting Himself to men and women in the nation of

Russia, so recently released from the long grip of godless communism. While reading critical or mocking articles about Mormons, two different Russian men felt a strong impression to search out our meeting places. Both met missionaries and joined the Church.²

A medical doctor in a village in Nigeria had a dream in which he saw his good friend speaking to a congregation. Intrigued, he traveled to his friend's village on a Sunday and was astonished to find exactly what he had seen in his dream—a congregation called a ward being taught by his friend, who was their bishop. Impressed with what he heard in repeated visits, he and his wife were taught and baptized. Two months later over 30 others in their village had also joined the Church, and their clinic had become the meeting place.

A man I met from northern India had never even heard the name of Jesus Christ until he saw it on a calendar in the shop of a shoemaker. The Spirit led him to conversion in a Protestant church. Later, during a visit to a distant college town, he saw an advertisement for an American group called “The BYU Young Ambassadors.” During their performance, an inner voice told him to go into the lobby after the program and a man in a blue blazer would tell him what to do. In this way he obtained a Book of Mormon, read it, and was converted to the restored gospel. He has since served as a missionary and as a bishop.

A little girl in Thailand felt a memory of a loving Father in Heaven. As she grew older, she would often pray and counsel with Him in her heart. In her early 20s she met our missionaries. Their teachings confirmed the loving personal feelings for God she remembered from her childhood. She was baptized and served a full-time mission in Thailand.

Only 5 percent of the people in Cambodia are Christians. A family in that country was searching for the truth. While

their 11-year-old son was riding his bicycle he saw some men in white shirts and ties showing someone a picture and asking who it was. He felt he should stop. As he watched, he was prompted to say, “That is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and He came to save man.” Then he rode away. It took the missionaries a month to find him and his family. Today, the father is a counselor in the mission presidency.

Last June, a family of five visited the open house for a new chapel in Mongolia. As the father walked through the door a powerful force went through his body, a feeling of peace he had never experienced before. Tears flowed. He asked the missionaries what that amazing feeling was and how he could feel it again. Soon, the entire family was baptized.³

These are only a few examples. There are thousands more.

Being subject to the Savior

The Book of Mormon also teaches that the great Creator died “for all men, that all men might become subject unto him” (2 Nephi 9:5). Being subject to our Savior means that if our sins are to be forgiven through His Atonement, we must comply with the conditions He has prescribed, including faith, repentance, and baptism. The fulfillment of these conditions depends on our desires, our choices, and our actions. “He cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice” (2 Nephi 9:21).

The Lord provides a way for all His children, and He desires that each of us come unto Him. In the closing chapter of the Book of Mormon, Moroni pleads, “Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32).

The Abrahamic covenant

The Bible tells us how God made a covenant with Abraham and promised him that through him all “families” or “nations” of the earth would be blessed (see Genesis 12:3; 22:18). What we call the Abrahamic covenant opens the door for God’s choicest blessings to all of His children everywhere. The Bible teaches that “if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29; see also Abraham 2:10). The Book of Mormon promises that all who receive and act upon the Lord’s invitation to “repent and believe in his Son” become “the covenant people of the Lord” (2 Nephi 30:2). This is a potent reminder that neither riches nor lineage nor any other privileges of birth should cause us to believe that we are “better one than another” (Alma 5:54; see also Jacob 3:9). Indeed, the Book of Mormon commands, “Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another” (Mosiah 23:7).

The Bible teaches that some of Abraham’s descendants would be scattered “into all the kingdoms of the earth,” “among all nations,” and from “one end of the earth even unto the other” (Deuteronomy 28:25, 37, 64). The Book of Mormon affirms this teaching, declaring that the descendants of Abraham would be “scattered upon all the face of the earth, and . . . among all nations” (1 Nephi 22:3).

The Book of Mormon adds to our knowledge of how our Savior’s earthly ministry reached out to all of His scattered flock. In addition to His ministry in what we now call the Middle East, the Book of Mormon records His appearance and teachings to the Nephites on the American continent (see 3 Nephi 11–28). There He repeated that the Father had commanded Him to visit the other sheep which were not of the land of Jerusalem (see 3 Nephi 16:1; John 10:16). He also said that He would visit others “who [had] not as yet

heard [His] voice” (see 3 Nephi 16:2–3). As prophesied centuries earlier (see 2 Nephi 29:12), the Savior told His followers in the Americas that He was going “to show [Himself]” to these “lost tribes of Israel, for they are not lost unto the Father, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them” (3 Nephi 17:4).

The Book of Mormon is a great witness that the Lord loves all people everywhere. It declares that “he shall manifest himself unto all nations” (1 Nephi 13:42).

“Know ye not that there are more nations than one?” the Lord said through the prophet Nephi. “Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?” (2 Nephi 29:7).

Similarly, the prophet Alma taught that “the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8).

Nations commanded to write Lord’s words

The Lord not only manifests Himself to all nations; He also commands that they write His words:

“Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. . . .

“For I command all men . . . that they shall write the words which I speak unto them. . . .

“For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of

the earth and they shall write it” (2 Nephi 29:8, 11–12; see also 1 Nephi 13:38–39).

Furthermore, the Book of Mormon teaches that all of these groups will have the writings of the others (see 2 Nephi 29:13).

We conclude from this that the Lord will eventually cause the inspired teachings He has given to His children in various nations to be brought forth for the benefit of all people. This will include accounts of the visit of the resurrected Lord to what we call the lost tribes of Israel and His revelations to all the seed of Abraham. The finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls shows one way this can occur.

When new writings come forth—and according to prophecy they will—we hope they will not be treated with the rejection some applied to the Book of Mormon because they already had a Bible (see 2 Nephi 29:3–10). As the Lord said through a prophet in that book, “And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man” (2 Nephi 29:9).

Truly, the gospel is for all men everywhere—every nation, every people. All are invited.

We live in the day foretold when righteousness is sent down out of heaven and truth out of the earth “to sweep the earth as with a flood,” and to gather out the elect “from the four quarters of the earth” (Moses 7:62). The Book of Mormon has

come forth to remind us of the covenants of the Lord, to the convincing of all “that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations” (Book of Mormon title page). I add this, my testimony of Him and His mission, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *History of the Church*, 2:229.
2. See Gary Browning, *Russia and the Restored Gospel* (1997), 200–201, 220–21.
3. Examples from Nigeria, Thailand, Cambodia, and Mongolia as related by mission presidents who have served in those countries.

The choir sang “O Lord Most Holy.”

President Monson

We express our thanks to the Tabernacle Choir for the beautiful music they have provided this morning and to all who have participated in any way.

It will now be our privilege to hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, who will be the concluding speaker at this session. Following President Hinckley’s remarks, the choir will sing “My Redeemer Lives.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Seventy. The concluding session of this conference will begin at 2:00 this afternoon.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Gratitude for the Lord’s blessings

My beloved brothers and sisters, I thank you for your prayers in my behalf. I now pray for your sustaining faith.

When a man reaches my age, he pauses now and again to reflect on what has led him to his present status in life.

I feel to indulge upon your time in what might be regarded as a selfish manner. I do so because the life of the President of the Church really belongs to the entire Church. He has very little privacy and no secrets. My talk this morning will be different from any, I think, previously