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Brian M. Hauglid

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Title

Author(s) Brian M. Hauglid

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Abstract Review of *The Most Correct Book: Why the Book of Mormon Is the Keystone Scripture* (1991), by Monte S. Nyman.

Monte S. Nyman. *The Most Correct Book: Why the Book of Mormon Is the Keystone Scripture.* Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991. vii + 152 pp., subject index. \$10.95.

Reviewed by Brian M. Hauglid

This small book takes an innovative approach to Joseph Smith's well-known statement: "I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."¹ The author divides the statement (and the volume) into three component parts: (1) "the most correct of any book on earth"; (2) "the keystone of our religion"; and (3) "precepts to bring one nearer to God." With the statement as the main premise, the author then extracts from D&C 20:8-16 a unique core of evidences in support of the three themes. Arbitrarily, these nine verses are separated into three distinct parts and classified under one of the above-mentioned headings. For example, verses 8-10 are placed under the section "the most correct of any book"; the author then highlights from those verses the concepts of "translation," "record of a fallen people," "fulness of the gospel," "scripture," and "ministering of angels" to substantiate the "correctness" of the Book of Mormon. The same technique is used in applying verses 11-12 to the "keystone" concept and verses 13-16 as precepts to help one get nearer to God.

Primarily, the aim of this work is to "show how the Book of Mormon verifies what the Lord said on that occasion [referring to the organization of the Church] and to support the Prophet Joseph's statement." It is also to "motivate both members of the Church and those who are not yet members to study the Book of Mormon and learn its inspired message" (p. 2).

The author demonstrates a skillful use of sources and research ability. Every point made is carefully considered and arranged to complement the author's primary objectives. Also, a flexibility exists in which newer ideas and concepts are explored. On the one hand, the author painstakingly and cautiously analyzes key words, verses of scripture, and important principles and concepts, using significant quotes from

¹ DHC 4:461; also TPJS, 194.

the General Authorities of the Church, numerous scriptural citations, and statistical information; then, on the other hand, the author seems to throw caution to the wind and explores his own insights on various subjects. Most of the volume, however, is written with the beginner in mind.

Those unfamiliar with the fundamental teachings about the Book of Mormon will find this book very helpful in clarifying subjects such as the process of translation, how revelation works, what scripture is, what "fulness" of the gospel means, and the Book of Mormon as a "record" instead of a history. Readers well-versed in the basics will find a more definitive statement about these already familiar concepts and many useful quotations for further research and study. Additionally, there are a few areas where the author departs from these fundamentals and brings out some interesting, if debatable, points. For instance, the author devotes almost an entire chapter to paralleling the events that preceded the coming of Jesus Christ to the Nephites (from the book of Mosiah to 3 Nephi 11) with very similar events that occurred, or will yet occur, from the organization of the Church in 1830 to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

On the whole, however, I was disappointed with this volume. Though the author meticulously establishes his points and expends a great deal of effort to prove them, I feel the basic premise of the book lacks credibility. The idea of building a work around Joseph's statement is appealing and shows promise; unfortunately, the volume ends up being more of an attempt at a definitive study on the statement instead of an elucidation on the inspired message of the Book of Mormon. To be sure, the volume does an adequate job of using the Book of Mormon as a tool to substantiate the statement of Joseph Smith. However, I found myself asking why there would be a need to write a book that shows how the Book of Mormon "verifies" and "supports" the Prophet's statement. Does the statement require a confirmation from the Book of Mormon to be credible? Is the author trying to prove the statement or is he using the statement to prove the Book of Mormon? I felt unsure about the need for writing the volume unless it was only to create a format in which to bring together various evidences to validate either the statement or the Book of Mormon. In any event, it seems superfluous to test either by checking each against the other, especially when the author defines the statement (or the Book of Mormon) using nine verses in the Doctrine and Covenants as his

only criteria. As a result of this confusing premise, the author's intention to motivate members and nonmembers has a tendency to get lost in a sea of evidences and proofs.

The statement of the Prophet does not need to be verified or supported by the Book of Mormon. On the contrary, the statement was meant as an announcement about the importance of the doctrines and teachings of the Book of Mormon. When viewed in this context the question should be how the Book of Mormon is the "most correct of any book," the "keystone of our religion," in terms of its own doctrines and teachings. What are the precepts in the Book of Mormon that assist one in getting "nearer to God"? Does one go to the Doctrine and Covenants to extrapolate these important teachings or is it better to go to the Book of Mormon and let it speak for itself? Though the Doctrine and Covenants can certainly illuminate many doctrines in the Book of Mormon, it is not the basis of the message that the Book of Mormon contains. Significant doctrines on which the Book of Mormon elaborates, such as faith, repentance, and atonement, become relegated in Nyman's book to some obscure place, hardly receiving any attention, while those concepts and ideas (some very loosely connected) found in the nine verses of the Doctrine and Covenants are studied at great length. There are only a few brief references to the significant teachings in the Book of Mormon, which leaves one wondering again whether the main objective is flawed.

Dr. Robert J. Matthews wrote an insightful and succinct article on the statement made by the Prophet. Matthews observes that the Prophet wrote his statement in reflection and that "we can have unshaken confidence that it conveys just what he wanted it to say" and that it "accurately reflects his feelings." Matthews also separates the statement into the same three divisions but then establishes a premise which departs from that set down by the author under review. Matthews places the statement in its historical context by saying that the Prophet was speaking of the then-current third edition (i.e., October 1840). He states that the Prophet "no doubt had reference to the *contents*—the doctrines and teachings—of the Book of Mormon rather than to its grammatical construction, punctuation, and spelling."² Somehow this concept is never developed, nor even introduced, in Nyman's volume. The author is trying to make a

² Robert J. Matthews, *A Bible! A Bible!* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 70.

neat little package using the verses from D&C 20, but in limiting his analysis to the points contained in those verses, he cannot discuss the many significant doctrines and teachings (the *contents*) of the Book of Mormon with the same emphasis given those teachings in the Book of Mormon itself.

I suggest that the statement of Joseph Smith can only be understood and appreciated in light of the doctrines and teachings of the Book of Mormon. According to Elder Boyd K. Packer, "true doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior."³ President Ezra Taft Benson has said "the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion, . . . the keystone of our testimony, the keystone of our doctrine, and the keystone in the witness of our Lord and Savior."⁴ To emphasize the Savior's power, President Benson has also stated that "the Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. . . . The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature."⁵

Joseph Smith's statement, therefore, is a concise declaration that the Book of Mormon is the "most correct of any book" because it has the power to change individuals into more correct (Christlike) people. This change can only come because of better understanding Christ as the "keystone" figure of the Book of Mormon, and by applying the atonement, which embraces all of the "precepts" that bring one nearer to God.

Another difficulty with the volume is the author's writing style. Although the author excels in research and analysis, progress is often impeded by dry, stilted sentences and uninspiring language. In short, I feel this book falls far short of enhancing our appreciation of the Book of Mormon message. In the future, it would be refreshing to see more volumes true to the 1988 challenge President Benson gave to Church writers. Addressing the issue of writing on the Book of Mormon he said, "Let us know how it leads to Christ and answers our personal

³ Boyd K. Packer, "Little Children," *Ensign* 16 (November 1986): 17.

⁴ Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign* 16 (November 1986): 5.

⁵ Ezra Taft Benson, "Born of God," *Ensign* 15 (November 1985): 6.

problems and those of the world.”⁶ The Prophet’s statement challenges all to immerse themselves *in* the Book of Mormon rather than to watch from the sidelines and just talk *about* this sacred record.

⁶ Ezra Taft Benson, “Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign* 18 (November 1988): 5.