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**Abstract** Review of *The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon* (1994), by Robert L. Millet.

**Robert L. Millet. *The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994. x + 342 pp., with subject and scripture indexes. \$14.95.**

Reviewed by Dennis H. Karpowitz

### **The Word Is Powerful**

My desire to continue to read, reread, study, ponder, pray about, and live the teachings of the Book of Mormon has been strengthened by my reading of Robert L. Millet's *The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon*. Professor Millet writes, "To the degree that persons who read what follows are motivated to turn to the pure word, to the scriptural text itself, and be transformed by the power of that word—to that degree this work will have fulfilled its purpose" (preface, p. x). I found myself turning to the scriptures as I read the book. Millet quotes from the Book of Mormon on almost every page. The book is organized around major sermons or doctrinal treatises given by the Lord through the prophets of the Book of Mormon. However, Millet's work goes beyond the Book of Mormon itself. Quotes from the other standard works and from apostles and prophets of our day greatly enlarge the reader's understanding of the doctrines discussed in the Book of Mormon. Thus *The Power of the Word* includes a larger view of God's enunciation of saving principles and doctrines throughout all ages.

Since the Book of Mormon is another testament of Christ, any book dealing with the doctrines of the Book of Mormon should teach and enlighten the reader concerning Christ. *The Power of the Word* is filled with such enlightenment. Chapters 2, 13, 16, and 20 are particularly motivating. Millet writes, "It has wisely been observed that what a person thinks of Christ will largely determine what kind of a person he will be. How then could one utilize his time more profitably than by seriously studying the Book of Mormon, a book whose primary purpose is to reveal and testify of

Jesus Christ” (pp. 17–18). “Sometimes we tend to focus so much upon the fact that Jesus Christ *died for us* that we do not attend to an equally important facet of his redemptive enterprise—the fact that he also came to *live in us*” (p. 177). “Ethical deeds, works of faith, acts of kindness toward others—these are so much more effective and pure when grounded in the love of Deity, when the source of goodness is the Holy One. As we begin to become new creatures in Christ, we begin to serve out of proper motives” (p. 234). “The Book of Mormon is not only an invitation to come unto Christ, but a pattern for the accomplishment of that consummate privilege” (p. 307). And finally, “I know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God. I know that the Lord God is its author. It speaks peace and joy to my soul. It is a quiet, steadying influence in my life. Many of our longings for another time and place, those vague but powerful feelings that we have wandered from a more exalted sphere, are satisfied and soothed when we read the Book of Mormon. Reading it is like coming home. It is a gift of God that we are expected to receive, understand, and experience” (p. 314). Without question, as a reader of this book and the scriptures it illuminates, I have felt a desire to come closer to Christ, understand his message more completely, and pattern my own life more fully after the pattern the Savior gave us.

At a recent area training meeting, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles and Elder William R. Bradford, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and president of the North America Central Area, taught temple, mission, and stake presidents in attendance about the *fundamental principles of the gospel*. They wrote,

These principles are fundamental to all we do in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Programs and activities, including essential support functions, should give emphasis to these principles. The first fundamental principle is faith in and a testimony of: 1. God, the Eternal Father; 2. Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer; 3. The Holy Ghost, the Testifier and Comforter. Fundamental to the restored gospel are: 1. The atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ; 2. The apostasy and restoration of the gospel and the Church

of Jesus Christ; 3. The divinely ordained role of the Prophet Joseph Smith in bringing to pass the purposes of God for His children; 4. The crucial and pivotal doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ as contained in the holy scriptures and the teachings of the prophets, including: a. The plan of salvation, b. Ordinances and covenants, and c. Continuing revelation.<sup>1</sup>

A comparison of these fundamental principles with the table of contents of *The Power of the Word* is most interesting. The chapter titles are as follows: "A Spiritual Odyssey with the Book of Mormon," "The Condescension of God," "The Brass Plates: Past, Present, and Future," "Portrait of an Anti-Christ," "Adam Fell That Men Might Be," "Putting Off the Natural Man," "Redemption through the Holy Messiah," "The New Birth," "The Fatherhood and Sonship of Christ," "The Holy Order of God," "The Path of Repentance," "Justice, Mercy, and the Life Beyond," "Building Our Lives on Christ," "The Glad Tidings," "The House of Israel: From Everlasting to Everlasting," "Growing in the Pure Love of Christ," "The Salvation of Little Children," "The Christian Backgrounds of the Nephite Culture," "The Book of Mormon, Historicity, and Faith," and "The Sanctifying Power of the Book of Mormon." At least sixteen of the twenty chapters deal with topics directly focused on the fundamental principles outlined above. It is much to Millet's credit that he has maintained a focus on those doctrines and principles that are of greatest importance to the salvation of the reader.

The twenty chapters are not of equal length. They range from 5 to 27 pages, with an average of 15.8 pages. Each chapter is clearly organized with headings and subheadings. Italic and bold fonts help emphasize that which the author feels is particularly important. Each quotation is properly referenced, and notes at the end of each chapter allow the reader to seek additional information about more subtle issues. Because the book is organized around great doctrinal sermons in the Book of Mormon, the chapter headings suggest one major theme of the sermon or passage, but many other doctrinal elements receive attention as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Handout from area training meeting, North America Central Area, 28–29 October 1995.



This organization helps the reader understand more fully the message or messages of the sermon. It also leads to some repetition of material and some scattering of material across several chapters. For example, the title of chapter 5 leads one to expect a discussion of the fall of Adam, but it is only in chapter 6 that the personal meaning of the fall for each of us is amplified.

As with any book of this nature, some questions arise in the mind of the serious reader. For example, would it be appropriate to emphasize the speculative nature of the discussion in chapter 3 as to how much of the record on the brass plates may have been written in Egyptian or reformed Egyptian? Also in chapter 3, it might be more correct to suggest that the contributions of the Book of Mormon do not represent new doctrine but rather refined explanations and examples of doctrine found in many of the scriptures and taught by God to his prophets in all dispensations (see p. 28). Chapter 4 clearly illuminates how the anti-Christ's of the Book of Mormon worked. Would this chapter have been strengthened by giving examples of similar approaches and characteristics in our day? Much in popular music, politics, and business adheres to such tactics used by anti-Christ's. Would it be helpful to note in chapter 5 that some General Authorities have emphasized Adam and Eve's partaking of the fruit as sin while others have distinguished between sin and transgression? In the discussion of the natural man in chapter 6, is it possible that the spirit of humankind has a propensity for both good and evil? It is a difficult task to find a balance in the emphasis of the importance of both grace and works. Is it possible that chapter 6 too heavily emphasizes grace? Please don't read this as suggesting that grace is not important. Without grace no one except Christ would be saved. But it is also essential that each of us do all that is within our power to live fully the principles of the gospel. Even if all we do is pitifully small compared to what the Savior does for us, it is still absolutely vital to our salvation. "It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23). I wonder if chapter 11 on repentance might profitably be read before chapter 8 on the new birth.

I might choose to entitle chapter 9 as "Abinadi's Sermons on the Law of Moses, the Atonement, and the Fatherhood and Sonship of Christ." If any omission exists in *The Power of the Word*,

it is the lack of a discussion of the “fifth gospel,” particularly the Sermon on the Mount. It is my opinion that God often repeats that which is of particular importance. I don’t believe it is an accident that we have *five* gospels. The rendition in the Book of Mormon adds much to our understanding of these beautiful sermons and doctrine. I was somewhat concerned that in chapter 14 the reader might come away with the idea that the principles contained in the Sermon on the Mount are in some way linked to situational ethics. Surely these teachings are Christ centered in every way. The fact that others fail to realize the depth of those teachings and all that Christ is, does nothing to lessen their importance. I disagree with Millet’s statement in chapter 16, in his discussion of obstacles to charity, that “The Savior’s commission to ‘love thy neighbor as thyself’ has little to do with loving oneself” (p. 239). Each week our young women all over the world recite their Young Women’s Values and remember their “divine nature.” If we do not respect our divine nature, I believe it becomes difficult to love others in the way Christ intended. This is not a proud or haughty overemphasis on self, but rather a realization of what is good and worthwhile in each of us, all of which is magnified many times if we fully love and serve God and our fellowman.

Further in chapter 16, Millet discusses charity as a fruit of the spirit. Is the suggestion here that will, choice, or attitude plays no role in the development of charity (see p. 241)? I hope not. Clearly the quotation from Bruce C. Hafen on page 242 seems to imply will or choice. David O McKay wrote, “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.”<sup>2</sup> In this phrase both God and man seem to do something. I would like to make a subtle nuance of emphasis on the constant interaction between our efforts, will, heart, soul, and action and the Spirit of God, which moves us beyond our own capacities and comes as a gift of love and grace. The last two paragraphs of this chapter deal with small concerns and subtle points of emphasis that should not detract from the great positive contribution of Millet in *The Power of the Word*.

I found many moments of enlightenment and inspiration as I read *The Power of the Word*. A few items from Millet’s writing

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<sup>2</sup> *Conference Report*, October 1959, 89–90.

were particularly meaningful to me: Chapter 1 is filled with the beautiful spirit of testimony. In chapter 4, "Portrait of an Anti-Christ," Millet makes it very clear that Sherem prophesies while denying prophecy: "I know that there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be" (Jacob 7:9; see p. 50). I like the connection of the spirit of adultery with the spirit of blindness (p. 52). In chapter 7 Millet does a wonderful job of clarifying how Christ's atonement is infinite (see especially p. 89).

I also appreciate the questions he raises and then answers with scriptures or quotations from modern prophets. For example, in chapter 7 he quotes a question asked of Joseph Smith and the answer Joseph gave: "What are the fundamental principles of your religion?" Joseph was asked. "The fundamental principles of our religion," he replied, "are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; *and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it*" (p. 90). Chapter 9 offers a wonderful emphasis on the importance of baptism by fire, the reception of the Holy Ghost (see especially p. 104). Chapter 9 reiterates four specific ways in which Jesus Christ is both the Father and the Son. "First of all, Jesus Christ is known as Father by virtue of his role as the Creator" (p. 122). "Secondly, Christ is Father through spiritual rebirth" (p. 122). Third, Christ is "known as Father by divine investiture of authority" (p. 123). Fourth, Christ is both the Father and the Son because "he was conceived by the power of God and inherited all of the divine endowments, particularly immortality, from his exalted Sire. He will be called the Son because of the flesh—his mortal inheritance from his mother, Mary" (p. 124).

Chapter 10, "The Holy Order of God," makes clear the meaning of the Church of the Firstborn (p. 141). Before reading the discussion on page 162, I had never equated hell with outer darkness. I really enjoyed reading about the concept of the "articles of adoption" (p. 175). I appreciated Millet's discussion of the millennium in chapter 15, "The House of Israel: From Everlasting to Everlasting" (see especially p. 225). His descriptions of several tender experiences of love of God and love for God through vision and the Holy Ghost are beautiful and uplifting (see p. 232 as an example).



*The Power of the Word* does much to help us understand, in the words of President Ezra Taft Benson, that

Not only will the word of God lead us to the fruit which is desirable above all others, but in the word of God and through it we can find the power to resist temptation, the power to thwart the work of Satan and his emissaries. The word of God, as found in the scriptures, in the words of living prophets, and in personal revelation has the power to fortify the Saints and arm them with the Spirit so they can resist evil, hold fast to the good, and find joy in this life. (cited in the preface, p. ix)

I recommend this book to anyone who seriously desires to understand more fully the saving doctrines from the Book of Mormon, from other scriptures, and from the teachings of modern apostles and prophets.