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### *Heroes from the Book of Mormon.*

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**Title**

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**Abstract** Review of *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* (1995), by Deseret Book.

***Heroes from the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995. 212 pp., with index. \$13.95.**

Reviewed by Cristie B. Gardner

“Thanks for the great book, Mom! I didn’t get a single other thing done.” So spake my teenage son Matthew. I had handed him a copy of *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* to peruse while he was waiting for an appointment. He filled in the time, totally absorbed, and then continued reading throughout the day. That, to me, was a good test of the riveting appeal our true heroes have for the youth in our day.

The fact that the descriptions of the heroes are written by General Authorities makes reading *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* doubly appealing. Perhaps many of us have wondered what influences in their past have prepared these modern-day witnesses for their callings today. What makes a man a prophet? What characteristics or talents do the Brethren emulate in their youth and adulthood that prepare them to be called and chosen? Who are their heroes? What shapes their lives? The individual messages in *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* have thrilled and inspired me.

The format in the book follows the sequence in the Book of Mormon. Different Brethren have selected different heroes, whom they describe from a personal perspective. Nephi is first. Elder Russell M. Nelson relates that

When I received my call to serve as one of the Twelve Apostles, my response included a quotation from Nephi: “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7).” (p. 1)

He cites the examples of willingness and obedience that were a hallmark of Nephi’s discipleship—examples which Elder Nelson has tried to emulate in his personal discipleship as he and Sister

Nelson have accepted assignments in the church. As an early morning seminary teacher, I found Elder Nelson's choice of a seminary mastery scripture (1 Nephi 3:7) a bonus for teaching my class. Any personal illustrations of the scriptures are valuable teaching resources. The added vignettes that describe how Elder Nelson applied the scriptures in his professional and family life make it easy for me and my students to see how we can liken the scriptures unto ourselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23).

How does one differentiate between academic and spiritual truths? Elder Nelson describes how he discovered that the two are not separate, and he recounts how understanding this principle enabled him to do inspired research in the field of medicine. He also speaks of honoring parents and of having implicit trust in the Lord and in the Lord's power to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. Nephi's life demonstrated for Elder Nelson the need to honor his word with determination. Nephi communicated his marvelous message with, as Elder Nelson writes, "a diversity of literary devices, . . . narrative, rhetoric, and poetic forms, including a psalm" (p. 6). Despite his literary talents, Nephi "had a penchant for plain expression. 'My brethren, I have spoken plainly that ye cannot err' (2 Nephi 25:20)" (p. 7).

It is clear from Elder Nelson's chapter that the life of a disciple is not easy (perhaps that phrase in itself is a Hebraic understatement), but that Nephi's signature—"I must obey"—was the source of a life and mission which "were destined to bless us and all people of our day" (p. 15).

Reluctantly leaving Elder Nelson's depiction of Nephi, I thumbed through the book with an eye for special details in its format. I discovered to my delight that page 3 includes a footnote with added references to additional information. The footnotes appear throughout the book and are a valuable resource. The back of the book also includes a detailed index, so someone like me (who can always remember that there was a great story in the book teaching a principle, but not who taught it) can readily locate the information.

Elder Merrill J. Bateman does an effective, thoughtful comparison of Lehi's tree and Alma's seed. His insights are deep and powerful. This chapter is not an easy read. It is, however, well worth the time it takes to study and reread its contents. The careful

student of the Book of Mormon learns of the many historical events prophesied by Lehi and fulfilled by the seed of Alma—events that foreshadow what we can see occurring around us today. With his wise insights, Elder Bateman conveys important messages to the serious Book of Mormon scholar. He also provides a feast of doctrinal abundance: “Christ’s fruit is His atonement, with all its attendant blessings and gifts” (p. 23). “If one has the tree (Christ) and its fruit (the Atonement and its blessings) within oneself, one’s countenance will reflect Christ’s image” (p. 29). Elder Bateman concludes his chapter with his testimony:

As the tree grows inside one’s soul, the image of Christ begins to appear in one’s countenance. Through a person’s faith in Christ, one receives additional gifts of the Holy Spirit made possible by the atonement and becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He puts off the natural man and becomes Christlike. One is born again by the power of the atonement and the Holy Spirit. (p. 31)

I have used Elder Jeffrey R. Holland’s teachings about “Jacob the Unshakable” several times personally and with friends who struggle with adversity. Writes Elder Holland, “Jacob was a child of the wilderness, a son born to affliction” (p. 34). Through the process of his growth through adversity, Jacob becomes a true prophet—one who is unshakable.

The value of Jacob as a true hero for our day is inestimable. Youth who read of this man of God, particularly as seen through the eyes of a modern-day apostle, cannot help but see parallels in their own lives. Many of us encounter our own “Sherem,” a person who tries to shake our testimony in everyday situations. Jacob is a worthy model who shows the way to deal with those who would want us to waver. Elder Holland’s vivid depiction of Jacob’s childhood makes Jacob’s experiences easier to visualize. Says Elder Holland, “at a very early age Jacob’s future character and unshakable faith were being forged in the furnace of affliction” (p. 34).

It might be said of Jacob that he was a victim of child abuse, for he witnessed Laman and Lemuel’s attempts to kill Nephi and their disruption of his family. Such comparisons, though painful,

may be an encouraging example for the youth of our day of how to conquer their environments. I read Elder Holland's message thinking of my seminary students—those from broken homes or those who struggle with temptations from questionable peer influences. Elder Holland's straightforward approach is appealing to read; his style is down-to-earth and has the tone of a great Gospel Doctrine lesson, written on a level that will appeal to any age group.

Referring once more to my seminary students, I think of the many lovely and faithful young women who also have need of feminine heroes. The only element I might suggest for consideration in creating such a book as *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* is to include some women for us to emulate—sisters like Abish, the faithful Lamanite convert who is a servant to King Lamoni, or King Lamoni's lovely queen, who, along with her powerful spouse, experiences the mighty change of heart. I think of Sariah's profound allegiance to Lehi as she follows him in faith through the wilderness, bearing children and enduring afflictions with equanimity and grace. Few sisters are described at length within the pages of the Book of Mormon, but their stories are faith promoting, and they serve to validate womanly roles for the young women of today.

"Enos was a prophet who practiced persistence" (p. 47), writes Elder John H. Groberg, who then goes on to illustrate "ever-expanding circles of spiritual growth" (p. 48) in the form of gratitude, humility, and effort. This motivational chapter has an inspiring "how-to" format that leads the reader to make the same kind of changes in life's directions as did Enos.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell shares his gleanings from the writings of King Benjamin with characteristic eloquence: "Some among us today certainly share their time and talents but nevertheless hold back some of themselves, indicating a lack of full consecration and an unwillingness to 'give away' certain small sins" (p. 62). Elder Cree-L. Kofford aptly describes the unique qualities of Abinadi: "Perhaps it was his total obedience as he went, presumably alone, among those whom he must have known would take his life, to deliver the word of the Lord and to cry repentance to the people" (p. 69). With Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, we share insights on "Alma the Elder: A Role Model for Today." He writes,

While yet a young man, Alma lived and worked in the court of the wicked King Noah as one of the king's appointed priests. . . . His life in an evil society presented Alma with many of the same temptations that afflict us today. His position of considerable authority in a corrupt government also confronted him with life-threatening conflicts once he embraced the gospel. Understanding how he turned his back on temptation, overcame sin, and stood fearlessly for righteousness can help us deal with our own challenges as we struggle to choose the right. (p. 80)

Elder L. Tom Perry continues with the legacy that Alma left his son Alma the Younger. Elder Perry shares his witness of the value of missionary service and of a life turned toward Christ, epitomized in Alma the Younger. Elder Henry B. Eyring talks of Amulek and the lessons in obedience we learn from him.

One of the great lessons from what we know of Amulek is that once God knows we will obey, He will try to give us the greatest of all blessings: sanctification and hope of eternal life. The process of receiving that may take more pain and loss than we would think to seek. But with that mighty change God blesses us with the spiritual sight to see value which dwarfs the loss, the trials, and the adversity. The story of Amulek's life after that day is a sobering yet hopeful lesson for all of us. (p. 107)

I loved reading of Zeezrom in the chapter written by Elder Dean L. Larsen. Elder Larsen goes into detail about the conditions in the Nephite government when Zeezrom appears on the scene:

It is not difficult to fill in the pieces of the political, moral, and social mosaic from the recorded account. Corruption and dishonesty in official circles have become endemic. Grasping for material riches, the people have clamored to gain advantage one over another. Judges have become corrupt, susceptible to bribes and yielding advantage to those who can show favors. . . .

Numerous lawyers have emerged, skilled not only in the law but also in exploiting the devious legal system for the potential benefit of themselves and their clients. (p. 113)

Sound familiar? I thought so, too. After all, the Book of Mormon was written for us—never read in its entirety by the Nephite or Lamanite populations in their day.

Elder F. Burton Howard's mother read the stories of the missionary experiences of Wilford Woodruff, Parley P. Pratt, John Taylor, and Ammon to Elder Howard before he could read. What a way to teach our children! Hence, Elder Howard's enthusiasm for the missionary story of Ammon is evident from the very beginning of his chapter: "to me a hero is one who is and does more than we commonly expect of someone by exceeding the normal limitations of virtue, faith, valor, and excellence. He or she inspires others to exceed them as well" (p. 121).

"Captain Moroni, an Authentic Hero," is the title of Elder Joe J. Christensen's chapter. "With divine guidance [the prophet Mormon] selected and included those portions of the records that would be most valuable to us in our day. What are the messages from Captain Moroni and his time that have applicability to us at the present time?" (p. 128). Elder Christensen goes on to share those messages with us: what to teach, principles of true leadership, and the characteristics of a true model for our times. Elder John K. Carmack follows with his depiction of Pahoran, whose "conduct and spirit in the face of extreme provocation teaches us how to react during threatening situations and also teaches us about freedom's priceless value" (p. 135).

Elder Richard G. Scott combines scripture and narration masterfully in a text about Nephi, son of Helaman. The flow from quotation to commentary is so natural and smooth that the reader is absorbed into the thought processes Elder Scott wishes to stimulate: "'And it came to pass that Nephi went his way towards his own house, pondering upon the things which the Lord had shown unto him' (Helaman 10:2). As is characteristically the case, that pondering opened a channel of communication that brought additional understanding and truth to Nephi" (p. 152).

Elder Andrew W. Peterson combines his story of Samuel the Lamanite with his own experiences to share three thoughts re-



garding principles that Samuel exemplified in his life: (1) Whate'er Thou Art, Act Well Thy Part; (2) Daily Walls to Climb; and (3) Following Living Prophets. Elder Spencer J. Condie begins his chapter with these words: "If ever there lived a person who resisted and withstood the evil influence of a depraved world to become a worthy servant of the Lord, this person was Mormon" (p. 168). I love the practical and motivating insights that follow in both of these chapters.

Perhaps the most famous example of faith in the Book of Mormon is that of the brother of Jared, who saw the finger of the Lord, and then was able to see and learn far more than ever was shared in the written pages. Elder Cecil O. Samuelson Jr. speaks of the brother of Jared as a personal hero—an exemplar for our lives.

Although the book of Ether is brief, it covers a lengthy period of history and contains a great message of hope in the face of tragedy. Elder Monte J. Brough relates several experiences in which a study of the prophet Ether was helpful, and then says: "As each of us faces personal tragedy, we can have a much better acceptance of the final results because of the prophet Ether's example" (p. 194).

*Heroes from the Book of Mormon* includes a message about Moroni from our modern-day prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. President Hinckley writes, "Of all the characters who walk the pages of the Book of Mormon, none stands a greater hero, save Jesus only, than does Moroni, son of Mormon" (p. 195). Elder Carlos E. Asay describes how all the chapters in the book *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* teach of prophets who "wove into the tapestry of the Book of Mormon precious strands of truth that make it a powerful and enduring volume of sacred writings known as another testament of Christ" (p. 202).

Part of the pleasure in reading *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* is in enjoying the different teaching styles of those who contributed chapters. I hesitate to share too much, for my narration of what was meaningful for me will only be a watered-down version of what may or may not be meaningful for another reader. As one professor once told me, "The personal notes and applications you write in the margins of a book are more important for you than what is actually printed in the pages of the book." The book is

not one to be read once and put on a shelf as a dust magnet. It is rich in stories, applications, and doctrine; it is a thought-provoking and inspiring depiction of great men who have inspired great men. It is a book to read again and again, and to share with our families.