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Book of Mormon Citations in General Conference, 1965–2014

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Joseph Smith referred to the Book of Mormon as the keystone of our religion;¹ however, the book was not frequently studied in worship services or in gospel instruction in the early Church.² In the 1970s, focus on the scriptures increased as the curriculum for adult gospel study shifted from manuals discussing the scriptures to the actual scripture texts. The Book of Mormon became part of the correlated curriculum for Sunday School Gospel Doctrine lessons,³ and Seminaries and Institutes also increased their use of scriptural content. In response, Church leaders oversaw the preparation of a fully cross-referenced version of the standard works, enabling publication of the first LDS edition of the Bible in 1979⁴ and the triple combination in 1981. President Spencer W. Kimball had told those involved in these projects that the goal was “to assist in improving doctrinal scholarship throughout the Church.”⁵ Church focus on the Book of Mormon intensified in 1985 when Ezra Taft Benson became President of the Church, emphasizing the importance of the Book of Mormon as the keystone of our witness of Christ, our doctrine, and our testimonies.⁶

Study Background and Purpose

Role of President Ezra Taft Benson. Following his call as Church President, Ezra Taft Benson felt an inspired prompting that the Lord was calling him to bring the Book of Mormon to the minds and hearts of Church members throughout the world. During a meeting of the General Authorities in the temple early in February 1986, Gordon B. Hinckley prophesied that President Benson would become the Church's strongest advocate of the Book of Mormon.⁷

A month later, in March, President Benson explained his prompting to the General Authorities and challenged them to reread the Book of Mormon before the April conference. In the solemn assembly where he was sustained as Church President, he told those assembled, "Now in our day, the Lord has revealed the need to reemphasize the Book of Mormon." In the general conference of October 1986, President Benson promised members that "there is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book."⁸

The General Authorities were taking the president's admonitions seriously. The two general conferences of 1986 included 301 references to the Book of Mormon. By April 1987 there had been so many that Elder L. Tom



Following his call as Church President, Ezra Taft Benson felt inspired that the Lord was calling him to bring the Book of Mormon to the minds and hearts of Church members throughout the world.

Perry began his talk by saying, "President, I'm starting to receive the distinct impression that we've been listening to you. I, too, will take my text from the Book of Mormon."⁹

Study of citations. Having observed the development in the 1970s,¹⁰ Noel B. Reynolds suggested in 1999, "One way to measure increased use of the Book of Mormon is to count and analyze the number of times the book is cited or discussed in general conference. The frequency of such citations reflects the extent to which Book of Mormon passages have entered the common discourse of Latter-day Saints, as well as indicating the current emphasis placed on the Book of Mormon by Church authorities."¹¹

In writing this 1999 article, Reynolds used a preliminary version of what became the LDS Scripture Citation Index to track frequency of general conference citations to the Book of Mormon. He found that they represented approximately 12 percent of total general conference citations to scriptures before President Benson's 1986 challenge to the Church to increase Book of Mormon study. These citations "jumped to 40 percent over the next year, then leveled off at about the 25 percent mark—almost twice the earlier rate."¹²

In the extensive historical study of twentieth-century Church attitudes toward and study of the Book of Mormon that is the major focus of his 1999 article,¹³ Reynolds acknowledged the influence of President Ezra Taft Benson. He concluded, "Probably more than any other single factor, his counsel stimulated an enthusiastic wave of Book of Mormon study and focus that continues to this day."¹⁴

Use of the current LDS Scripture Citation Index. The current index, developed and refined by Stephen W. Liddle and Richard C. Galbraith, provides a way to observe more specifically how Church leaders have cited the scriptures, including the Book of Mormon, in their speeches and publications. References to each scripture are recorded, whether it is quoted, discussed, mentioned, or referenced as additional support for a related point. Clicking on the author-title-date identification brings up a copy of the talk or article with all scriptures indicated and the requested scripture highlighted so its context can be easily found.

Church scholars have been using this index as a tool in a series of beneficial studies (e.g., Woodger and Brodrick,¹⁵ Spackman,¹⁶ Farnsworth et al.¹⁷). At the end of their article, which examined citations to the Pauline epistles, Farnsworth et al. posed a question for further research: Do the Apostles refer equally to other scriptures, such as the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants?¹⁸

Purpose of this study. The present study responds to the challenge of Farnsworth et al. by examining the LDS Scripture Citation Index to discover frequency and note some general patterns of usage of Book of Mormon scriptures by prophets, seers, and revelators during general conference. In his 1999 study, Reynolds¹⁹ counted overall usage statistics in addition to numbers indicating general extensiveness of use (brief reference, main topic, etc.). With the completed citation index, we were able to focus on which specific scriptures had been referenced most frequently by the First Presidency and Apostles, noting the depth with which these speakers used each verse, and the specific teachings they cited to develop and support it.

Because the talks are accessible on the index, we could read and make note of ways the prophets, seers, and revelators used these scriptures to instruct and inspire. We hope to encourage Church members to follow prophetic examples in applying Book of Mormon scriptures to their lives.

Method

We selected 1965 to 2014 as the time period for the study: 20 years before President Benson's administration, the 8 years that comprised it, and 20 years thereafter. We began by filtering the citation index for these years and for the content of general conference addresses. As we went through the listed citations, we examined only the discourses of prophets, seers, and revelators. Talks given by individuals before becoming Apostles were not included; the year when each was called to the Quorum of the Twelve, we began examining and recording information regarding each succeeding address. To ensure accuracy, we verified that each address included in the study had been published.

The citation index lists scriptures in commonly cited units as well as individual verses. For example, the single verse Moroni 10:3 was used 5 times, but the unit Moroni 10:3–5 was utilized 7 times and the unit Moroni 10:4–5 was cited 24 times. The varied combinations often enhanced emphasis or perspective for different purposes: Moroni 10:3 emphasizes God's mercy throughout the dispensations, Moroni 10:3–5 completes Moroni's promise that the Holy Ghost will testify to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, and Moroni 10:4–5 emphasizes prayer as well as the power of the Holy Ghost to make known the truth of all things. We counted and rank ordered specific references only in the contexts in which they had been cited by the speakers. We began by calculating the overall frequency with which scriptures had been cited during our target period, compiling a list of those with the highest

numbers of citations and noting trends and patterns in the usage. We then compiled a list of the 11 most cited verses and studied the talks in which they appeared, recording basic information about the ways the scriptures were used and details about the topics covered and points supported by each.

The Results section of this article includes the overall statistical and comparative information. The Discussion section presents the subject matter, content, and purposeful nature of the uses of the 11 most frequently cited scriptures.

Results

Frequency of scripture citations. For the dates 1965 through 2014, we found a total of 40,102 citations of scripture in general conferences. The New Testament was cited most often ($n = 12,824$, 32 percent), followed by the Book of Mormon ($n = 10,203$, just over 25 percent), the Doctrine and Covenants ($n = 9,952$, just under 25 percent), the Old Testament ($n = 4,764$, 12 percent), and the Pearl of Great Price ($n = 2,359$, 6 percent). During the same time period, those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators cited the Book of Mormon 6,240 times in general conference, about 61 percent of the overall Book of Mormon citations. These citations included both single and multiple references, comprising 2,627 different scriptural passages. Verses in the Book of Alma were cited most ($n = 1,507$), and verses in the Words of Mormon were cited least ($n = 3$). However, when the number of pages per book was considered, verses in the Book of Moroni were the most cited, with 37 citations per page, followed by verses in the Book of Enos, with 19 citations per page. Verses found in Words of Mormon were still cited least, with only 1 citation per page. Table 1 shows the total number of citations for each book.

Table 1. Number of citations for each book in the Book of Mormon by members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in general conference addresses, 1965–2014

| Books in the Book of Mormon | Total number of citations | Citations per page |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Introductory materials | 54 | 18 |
| First Nephi | 579 | 11 |
| Second Nephi | 1097 | 17 |

| Books in the Book of Mormon | Total number of citations | Citations per page |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Jacob | 179 | 10 |
| Enos | 57 | 19 |
| Jarom | 10 | 5 |
| Omni | 23 | 8 |
| Words of Mormon | 3 | 1 |
| Mosiah | 779 | 13 |
| Alma | 1,507 | 9 |
| Helaman | 204 | 5 |
| Third Nephi | 857 | 15 |
| Fourth Nephi | 30 | 8 |
| Mormon | 156 | 9 |
| Ether | 220 | 7 |
| Moroni | 485 | 37 |
| Total | Total 6,240 | |

We found 1,600 Book of Mormon passages cited only once by prophets and Apostles and, in contrast, 82 cited 10 times or more. These 82 passages made up 25 percent of all scriptural citations included in the general conference sermons of members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the time period we studied.

We calculated Book of Mormon citations by members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in general conference addresses in the 20 years before President Benson’s administration and found 1,233. During the 8 years of his presidency, the prophets, seers, and revelators cited the Book of Mormon 1,276 times, and in the 20 years following his passing they used 3,323 citations. Because of the difference in the length of the time periods, we calculated the average number of references per conference. Thus before President Benson’s emphasis on Book of Mormon study, these particular leaders cited the Book of Mormon an average of 30.8 times per conference. During his administration they cited it an average of 79.8 times, and in the 20 years following his passing they included an average of 83.1 citations per conference.

Book of Mormon citations by President Benson. President Benson led by example. We tabulated President Benson’s own use of the Book of Mormon

in general conference addresses before and after he was ordained President of the Church in November 1985. Between 1965 and 1985 he spoke in general conference 40 times and cited the Book of Mormon 146 times. During his presidency he gave 23 general conference addresses and cited the Book of Mormon 256 times. In order to compare the two time periods and take into account the number of addresses per conference, we calculated the rate of Book of Mormon citations per conference talk before and after he was ordained President: 3.7 before and 11.1 after.

This increase in Book of Mormon citations by all conference speakers as well as by the group consisting of the prophets, seers, and revelators clearly demonstrates that President Benson’s prophetic priority made a striking difference in Book of Mormon emphasis during his presidency and during the succeeding 20 years. President Benson indeed fulfilled the calling he felt concerning the Book of Mormon, and he made remarkable changes during his administration which have lasted considerably beyond.

Passages with the most frequent citations. Overall numbers of citations reveal the increasing emphasis on studying and teaching the Book of Mormon over a period of 48 years: 20 before, 8 during, and 20 after President Benson’s administration. From these statistics we learn that the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve have been emphasizing its teachings and examples to help Church members find answers to their questions and guidance for living their lives. But we have been interested not only in how many times they have used these scriptures, but in how they have incorporated them into their talks, and what they taught through them. To explore these matters, we calculated the verses that have received the most citations and studied their use in the talks, which we accessed through the LDS Scripture Citation Index. Because of ties in important places, instead of the popular “Top 10” calculation, we offer a Top 11. Table 2 shows the 11 scriptures which were cited 30 times or more during the period we covered in this study, including key words or phrases to make them easy to identify.

Table 2. Book of Mormon passages cited more than 30 times by members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve in general conference addresses, 1965–2014

| Book of Mormon reference | Key statement or phrase(s) | Number of citations |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Mosiah 3:19 | “For the natural man is an enemy to God” | 50 |

| Book of Mormon reference | Key statement or phrase(s) | Number of citations |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 3 Nephi 27:27 | “Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” | 46 |
| Moroni 10:32 | “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in Him” | 40 |
| 2 Nephi 31:20 | “Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” | 39 |
| Alma 41:10 | “Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness” | 37 |
| 2 Nephi 2:27 | “They are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men” | 34 |
| 1 Nephi 3:7 | “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded” | 34 |
| 2 Nephi 2:25 | “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” | 33 |
| Alma 42:8 | “The great plan of happiness” | 33 |
| Mosiah 18:9 | “Mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort” | 30 |
| Mosiah 5:2 | “We have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” | 30 |

Discussion

Classification of citations. The study conducted by Reynolds (1999) with a developmental version of the citation index grouped citations on levels of use intensity: (1) brief reference, (2) brief discussion (one or two paragraphs), (3) a major component of the talk, and (4) the main topic. Results showed that the references on the brief discussion level “have been consistently higher and have increased over the years far more than substantial ones.” However, Reynolds noted that citation levels 3 and 4 “increased and reached their peak during 1985–89, most likely influenced by President Benson’s 1986 address.”²⁰

As the current edition of the LDS Scripture Citation Index makes the talks available, highlighting the target scriptures, we were able to look more closely at directions and meanings involved with the use of the most commonly cited scriptures. Because the brief references and short discussions have been decisively more prevalent than the major component and main topic levels, we adapted Reynolds’s categorization to more accurately represent the use we were making of the citation index.²¹

We subdivided the brief reference category, as we found two kinds of brief references that we considered distinct. A frequent strategy was an indirect reference to a scripture either singly or with others in parenthesis preceded by the word *see*—acknowledgement of relationship without development of content. The higher level of brief reference, the most frequent citation form overall, was a brief allusion to the meaning of a scripture in which a key word or phrase (occasionally the complete quotation) would be given with the content noted but very little if any development. These allusions were a specific informational support rather than a mere indication of availability.

Comparable to Reynolds’s study,²² we used a category of brief discussion: Generally these ranged from one substantial paragraph to three or four shorter paragraphs—occasionally five or six one-sentence paragraphs. Since speakers vary in the length and developmental level for their paragraphs, we did not attempt a precise delineation. For some of the scriptures, we found a number of treatments that had the depth but not the extensiveness of a major component. For these scriptures we added a subcategory titled *major development*.

For our most intensive category, we combined Reynolds’s full-talk and major-component treatments, because both were relatively rare and not all the scriptures had a treatment in the full-talk category. The major components were not identified by countable elements, but by presence of a high level of explanation, application, or clear synthesis with additional scriptures. For the sake of clarity and efficiency, we present our results in a series of tables. Because not all scriptures were used in all categories, slight shifts in numbers and labels of listed categories have been necessary to represent usage as accurately as possible.

For ease in making connections and discerning patterns, we have sequenced the Top 11 scriptures by frequency of use; as far as possible, we have considered the relationship of topics within the usage order. Although we have used numerical data, classification has not been formulaic. We’re dealing with individual ideas and often experiences expressed in varied individual ways; some subjectivity has been unavoidable.

Becoming like Christ. We were not surprised that the basic content area of the most cited scriptures involves becoming more like the Savior. The verse cited most frequently between 1965 and 2014 was Mosiah 3:19. It was cited 101 times: 11 of them before President Benson’s administration, 90 afterward. Prophets, seers, and revelators have cited it 50 times. The verse is long,

including many important teachings; we noted only three talks in which it was quoted in its entirety. Thus most of the quotations and citations involve a part of it, even when used as a major theme.

“For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|-------------------------------------|-----|---|---|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 10 | Natural man by far the most common; also submissiveness, patience, childlike qualities, suffering, cheerfulness | Parenthetical references are made to help readers in making general extensions of topics and ideas being discussed. |
| Brief allusion | 24 | Natural man most frequent; also conversion, Atonement, spiritual enticings, childlike qualities, self-mastery | Additional contexts tend to be more abstract with more doctrinal depth. |
| Brief discussion | 12 | Natural man followed by child-like characteristics, also pride/humility | Comments help put the scripture in context, indicate importance, make brief applications or extensions. |
| Major theme or focus of entire talk | 4 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repentance 2. Nature of change when putting off natural man 3. Pride 4. “As A Child” talk focus | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elder Nelson used it to climax his discussion of the fruits of repentance (2007) and to enhance the conversion story of a friend (2009).²³ 2. Elder Bednar (2007)²⁴ synthesized scriptures and teachings on purity. 3. The section on humility climaxes the landmark address on pride (Benson, 1989).²⁵ 4. The theme of King Benjamin speaking is carried throughout the talk in discussing such topics as choice, change, submission, and the Holy Ghost (Eyring, 2006).²⁶ |

The second-most cited scripture by the First Presidency and the Apostles, 3 Nephi 27:27, also admonishes spiritual change that transforms lives.

Prophets, seers, and revelators included this Book of Mormon verse in their sermons 46 times between 1965 and 2014. Although the first part of this verse refers to judging, prophets focused only on becoming like Christ. This scripture was used with different degrees of emphasis and applied in different contexts, but the message of emulation is consistent and clear.

“And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people, according to the judgment which I shall give unto you, which shall be just. Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|-------------------------------|-----|--|---|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 13 | The Savior’s expectations for us, His example as a pattern for our lives, the nature of repentance | Parenthetical references to this scripture in relation to these topics remind audience members of the overarching role of His example as well as His explicit instruction. |
| Brief allusion | 16 | Comfort in despair, treatment of others, path of discipleship, self-mastery, forgiveness, honesty, priesthood | Contexts extend into a wider variety of applications and relationships than the indirect references. |
| Brief discussion | 9 | What it means to <i>know</i> Christ, what He outlined for us during his earthly ministry; what we can become as His children; how we can progress in the plan of salvation | These discussions include a strong eternal perspective, with emphasis on being and becoming. |
| Substantial development | 5 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Every virtue in its perfection.” (Benson, 1972)²⁷ 2. Conduct for priesthood holders (Benson, 1983)²⁸ 3. Doing good, resisting temptation, being obedient, blessing those in need, cleansing the temple 4. Savior’s parable of himself as the Good Shepherd (Monson, 1992); reprise of the Good Shepherd emphasizing the Savior’s love for us with new example (Monson, 2008)²⁹ | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Content is idealistic, personal, abstract (e.g., inspiration, personal revelation). 2. Specific actions and behaviors are treated. 3. Elder Christofferson (2006)³⁰ discussed activities of the Savior’s daily life that we can emulate. 4. The parable serves as a context in which all other lists of actions and activities become significant, with examples of individuals audience members can easily understand and admire. |

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|-------------------------------------|-----|---|---|
| Major theme or focus of entire talk | 3 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Lifelong and eternal process,” with traits portrayed in the Sermon on the Mount and other scriptures 2. Kindness, helpfulness, virtue, charity, and other attributes of the divine nature (Benson, 1986) 3. Talk focused entirely on spiritual concepts related to becoming like the Savior (Hunter, 1994)³¹ | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elder Peterson (1982)³² treated the theme in a synthesis of scriptures quoting and portraying the Savior. 2. President Benson (1986)³³ described idealistic but attainable attributes, in contrast to ethereal attributes of 1972. 3. Rather than giving characteristics or activities as the other had done, President Hunter focused on broader eternal perspectives concerning who Christ was and what He did that make it so important that we should accept and follow the example of His exemplary life. |

The third-most quoted and cited scripture by the prophets, seers, and revelators also involves the all-encompassing challenge of becoming more like Christ. The First Presidency and the Twelve referred 40 times to Moroni 10:32. There are so many principles involved in the scripture that most references quote it only partially; we noticed four full quotations: one accompanied by brief development, one by strong development, and two with no development included.

“Yea, 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; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|--------------------------------|-----|---|---|
| Indirect reference with “see.” | 10 | Eternal marriage, repentance, grace, perfection, accountability, Christ, consecration, humility | These parenthetical allusions bring Christ’s involvement, love, and perfecting power into a variety of topics/principles. |

| | | | |
|------------------|----|---|--|
| Brief allusion | 22 | Faith, celestial marriage, burdens, scripture comprehension, worldwide Church, success pattern, Church membership, grace, endurance, pioneers | Many allusions with brief comments invite listeners to come unto Christ, love Him, feel His love, be perfected in Him, and become like Him. Emphasis is on all individuals worldwide. |
| Brief discussion | 7 | Imperfect people, endurance, last days, physical appetites, chastening, repentance, the Savior | These discussions center on the love, power, and support of the Savior in various trials and dangers: healing/perfecting, repentance/conversion, spiritual control. |
| Major theme | 1 | Sacrifice, repentance, Holy Ghost, ordinances, covenants, overcoming habits, broken heart and contrite spirit | Pres. Benson (1979) ³⁴ quoted the entire scripture, counseling members to deny themselves of all ungodliness and offer a broken heart and contrite spirit as one of four ways to practice the principle of sacrifice. |

Maintaining Christ’s standards. A number of the most cited scriptures are concerned with standards of conduct that the Brethren hope Church members will follow. The fourth-most cited scripture by the First Presidency and the Apostles in general conference over the period that we studied was 2 Nephi 3 1:20, a rather comprehensive conduct guide. These brethren cited it in 39 speeches. We found no citations in which the scripture itself was the central focus or even a major theme of a talk, perhaps because it goes in so many directions. It was often quoted, partially quoted, or referenced to give impact and reinforcement to an important theme such as maintaining hope, studying the words of Christ, or enduring to the end.

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|-------------------------------|-----|---|--|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 5 | Pressing forward, studying scriptures, enduring, and maintaining hope | References reinforced the hope experienced with the passing of a loved one and the endurance required in a struggle with cancer. |

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|--|-----|--|--|
| Brief allusion with at least partial quotation | 26 | Being converted, being born again, enduring to the end, dispelling despair, sharing the gospel, feasting on words of Christ, consecrating, hoping for eternal things, pressing forward men and women together, being disciples, self-assessing, being valiant in testimony | A brief quotation or partial quotation, often with one or two sentences of comment, was the most common form of usage and most diversified. Frequently, this scripture was quoted or partially quoted as a conclusion or other form of climax for a talk. |
| Brief discussion | 5 | Avoiding distraction by “appendages,” loving others despite differences, following the path of discipleship, recognizing Christ as the central figure of human history | These brief explanations give more depth and development for topics, extending their meanings and applications: (a) importance and difficulty of loving people of different cultures and beliefs, (b) what to do to be strong and how it will benefit you, (c) how Christ strengthens us and gives us peace. |
| Substantial development | 3 | 1. Feasting on the words of Christ 2. Becoming true disciples 3. Hoping for immortal things | 1. <i>Feast</i> goes beyond taste to savor and ultimately seal in heart (Nelson 2000). ³⁵ 2. Elder Ballard (2000) ³⁶ discussed particular aspects of true discipleship. 3. Elder Maxwell (1998) ³⁷ discussed how real hope goes beyond popular concepts. |

The fifth-most cited scripture, Alma 41:10, also involves conduct and consequences; but in this scripture the emphasis is generally on negative consequences rather than ultimate reward. It has been cited in general conference by the First Presidency and the Twelve 37 times. Although this scripture is found in Alma’s words teaching his son Corianton about the resurrection, overall the Brethren who have cited this verse in general conference have not done so to emphasize the resurrection, and they have not quoted the entire scripture. Only one, Elder Mark E. Petersen (1965),³⁸ mentioned the warning that one won’t be “restored from sin to happiness.” The rest isolated the phrase “wickedness never was happiness” and applied it to a variety of topics ranging from pornography to marriage.

“Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.”

| Type | No. | Some Topics Covered | Nature of Usage |
|--|-----|--|--|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 7 | Marriage, personal purity, pornography, self-deceit | The passage was referenced indirectly to support warnings: “not even a little wickedness” (Hales, 1990), ³⁹ “don’t flirt with evil” (Scott, 2002). ⁴⁰ |
| Brief allusion with at least partial quotation | 18 | Chastity, moral conduct, self-respect, pornography, temptation, disobedience, evil and sin, spiritual pain, inability to rest or find peace | Brief, undeveloped allusions, by far the most common use, were generally applied to moral challenges, repentance, and loss of self-respect or peace. |
| Brief discussion | 11 | Moral absolutes and law, specifics about Corianton as son, and Alma as advisor, desire of God for us to be happy, deceitfulness of appearances | Discussions dealt with deeper concepts (e.g., “sin creates disharmony with God” ⁴¹), more specific applications (story of young woman’s tragic experience), and more personal treatment (childhood error). |
| Entire talk | 1 | Return from error, consequences of sin, repentance, forgiveness, freedom from burdens through Christ | Elder Scott (2002) ⁴² pleaded with the straying to return with a detailed account of a young man who rode the “crest of the wave of appetite and passion.” Effects of sin are part of God’s plan; repentance and the Savior free us from the burdens. |

Two scriptures tied for sixth-most cited. In some ways comparable to Alma’s advice to his son Corianton, Lehi spoke 2 Nephi 2:27 as advice to his sons concerning their conduct and its consequences. In this final counsel that he gave before his passing, Lehi emphasized the individual’s freedom to choose but warned of the source as well as the negative consequences of wrong choices. This scripture was cited in general conference 34 times by the prophets, seers, and revelators. This is a long verse containing many components of counsel. We found it quoted in its entirety only 6 times. We were interested by the number of times that citations of all kinds were in the context of Satan: his plan, his wickedness, his misery, and his threat to men: 19 of the 34.

“Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|-------------------------------|-----|--|--|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 10 | Satan’s influence, Satan’s misery, our discouragement, marriage alternatives, moment vs. eternity | Half of these references were in relation to Satan. The non-Satanic parenthetical references involved the perspective of the mortal journey and the freedom to choose. |
| Brief allusion | 13 | Satan’s activities, Christ’s attributes, liberty, agency, accountability, law, family, trials, addictions | Seven of the thirteen related to Satan, including his plan and war, as well as the misery he wants to share with us. “Great mediator” was stressed as a role of Christ. Gifts of freedom and liberty were noted. |
| Brief discussion | 10 | The death of a loved one (personal example), plan of salvation/exaltation, choice of liberty, warning to women, trials, moral agency, sexual sin | Again, half of the citations dealt with Satan. The plan of salvation and its accompanying choices and blessings have their time of emphasis as well. |
| Substantial development | 1 | God loves us and wants us to have joy; he gives us commandments and choices; we make our choices through our desires, thoughts, and actions | In “The Great Commandment—Love the Lord” (1988), President Benson gave a detailed contrast of God’s and Satan’s qualities, desires, relationships with us, and gifts to us. This climaxes his talk. ⁴³ This scripture in itself was not a dominant theme in any talk. |

The other scripture that tied for sixth place in citations by prophets, seers, and revelators is also related to conduct—one of the most positive examples of conduct portrayed in the Book of Mormon, one of the best known as well as most commonly cited in general conference. The verse portraying Nephi’s courageous obedience to the commandment to obtain the plates of Laban was described or alluded to in general conference sessions by these Brethren with 34 citations of 1 Nephi 3:7. Qualities and characteristics these Brethren discussed

with citations to this scripture related most often to courage and obedience but also included trust, faith, prayerfulness, and commitment as well.

“And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: 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.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|-------------------------------|-----|--|--|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 4 | Character of Laman and Lemuel, tithing, need to trust God and pray to know His will, education and vocation of single men | This scripture is often noted in parentheses for listeners and readers to associate with various applications of strength of character. |
| Brief allusion | 15 | Obedying, having courage, going where the Lord calls, accepting call to apostleship (2 examples), responding to counsel, committing, serving, laboring | By far the most common use is a quotation or partial quotation with a brief allusion comparing Nephi’s love for and trust in the Lord to whichever of a wide variety of topics was being developed. |
| Brief discussion | 12 | Story of the call and struggle to obtain the plates; discussions of obedience, faith, prayer, spiritual direction, and seed of faith; importance of trusting and knowing God | Four of the discussions centered on the story, two of them comparing Nephi to Laman and Lemuel. Emulation was stressed: newly sustained Pres. Kimball’s faith was compared, as was the power of Heber J. Grant’s reading of the scripture. |
| Major theme or focus of talk | 3 | 1. Following the Lord’s commandments 2. Putting ourselves in Nephi’s place 3. Faith and divine guidance | 1. Elder Perry (1973) ⁴⁴ retold details of the story along with details about Benjamin Franklin. 2. With a story retelling, Elder Perry (1979) ⁴⁵ urged the audience to make right decisions as Nephi did. 3. Elder Scott (1989) ⁴⁶ told the story in terms of the guidance Nephi received because of his faith and willingness to obey the Lord. |

Understanding eternal contexts. The final set of scriptures emphasized eternal contexts surrounding various aspects and blessings of the plan of salvation. Two scriptures tied for the next position in the sequence. The previous scripture was considered seventh in calculating sequence, although it was tied for sixth according to number of citations. The following two are tied

for the next position—thus they are both in eighth place in number, though calculated as eight and nine in the sequence.

The first of the scriptures that tied for eighth place, 2 Nephi 2:25, was quoted in general conference by the First Presidency and the Apostles 33 times. It was used in many different contexts; 14 of the 33 discussed the Creation and the Fall, some of them including the Atonement. Many focused only on the scripture’s final assertion, which is a form of context as it expresses God’s overall perspective—“men are that they might have joy”—relating this to a variety of topics and gospel principles. Sometimes both areas were included.

“Adam fell that men might be; and men are that they might have joy.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|---|-----|--|---|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 10 | Acting for ourselves, keeping commandments, creating things, finding joy in the right, seeking true joy, exercising agency and self-reliance, maintaining chastity | These references were often made in relation to the Creation, Fall, and/or Atonement: that the fall was “a mortal creation” (Nelson, 1993), ⁴⁷ that joy is part of God’s plan, and that “men are that they might have joy—not guilt trips” (Nelson, 1995). ⁴⁸ |
| Brief allusion | 14 | Creation/Fall, control of appetites, joy in celestial marriage and family sealing, standard of conduct, relationship of patience to joy | Six focus on the Creation and Fall, with two specifically on Eve (e.g., “that men [and women] might be,” Holland, 1997). ⁴⁹ Though typically only partial quotes are accompanied by a sentence or so (often only phrases), they involve a variety of topics. |
| Brief discussion | 8 | Relationship to creation of physical body, answers to prayers, trust in the Lord, plan of happiness, joy/misery, joy in principles of the gospel | These present <i>hows</i> and <i>whys</i> with more depth and specificity: miracle of the physical body, ways trusting God brings joy, specifics on Eve’s act as a “glorious necessity” (Oaks 1993), ⁵⁰ LDS as a “joyful religion” (Uchtdorf, 2007). ⁵¹ |
| Substantial development (not the only subject or a major theme in any talk) | 1 | Global economy, societal immorality, pickets and persecutions, wars, natural disasters, God with us | Elder Monson (2009) ⁵² quoted the entire scripture in terms of discouraging problems in the world and trials in our individual lives. Listeners were assured that the Lord will always stand by us. |

During the time we studied, the First Presidency and the Apostles also referred 33 times to Alma 42:8. This verse is part of the teachings of Alma to his son Corianton concerning the Fall—describing spiritual and temporal death and affirming that mortality is a time of probation and preparation. A number of prophets, seers, and revelators have cited this scripture in terms of the significance of the Fall and the necessity of physical death. Others have cited it with a focus on the phrase “great plan of happiness,” associated with a wide range of gospel principles and practices, ranging from prayer to celestial marriage, including admonitions to avoid fear and listen to the prophets.

“Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|-------------------------------------|-----|---|--|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 10 | Aging, Gospel restoration, agency to injure others, forever families, death, separation, thoughts, deeds, testing, mistakes, God’s law | References to the plan with these topics relate a sense of God’s purpose to the discussion of both negative and positive aspects of mortal existence. |
| Brief allusion | 12 | Centrality of family/plague of pornography, Satan/children of God, world of misery/plan of happiness, standards/sin (topics joined here for illustration of contrasting applications, not combined in the talks) | All these contrasting factors come out in the allusions made in the talks. The effect is reassurance that the plan of salvation ultimately brings contrasting aspects of life together in meaningful relationships. |
| Brief discussion | 8 | Aging, death, gender identity, eternal marriage, resurrection, immortality, agency, probation, procreation, marriage, our return home | In 5 separate talks (1992–2013) ⁵³ Elder Nelson discussed processes of aging and temporal death, explaining they are necessary to fulfill the plan. Others also acknowledged the necessity of death, stressing the family unit that goes on. |
| Major theme or focus of entire talk | 3 | 1. Heavenly parents, Adam/Eve, transgression, joy, posterity, Atonement, eternal life 2. Premortal existence, council in heaven, Satan’s plan, our choice, Eve, transgression, our eternal destiny 3. Heavenly council, role of Lucifer, role of Adam and Eve, gender roles, motherhood | 1. The plan answers major questions of life; it’s “beautiful in its simplicity” and influences “every aspect of our lives” (Ballard, 1995). ⁵⁴ 2. The plan’s ultimate purpose emerges in terms of its premortal and early mortal history and its emphasis on family (Oaks, 1993). ⁵⁵ 3. The emphasis is on doctrine and principles that cannot change; blessings and responsibilities can be eternal matters (Packer, 1993). ⁵⁶ |

To prepare themselves for the principles, the processes, and the blessings of the plan of happiness, children of God need to go beyond recognizing that they will not be happy in wickedness and that their ultimate destiny, according to the plan, will involve temptations, challenges, struggles, and eventually mortal death. They need to be instructed in ways to resist the temptations and challenges and deal effectively with the struggles, helping others to do so as well.

Two scriptures are tied for tenth place; they are similar in both context and injunction. Both involved a group of newly converted individuals experiencing an overwhelming change of heart as they converted and committed to be followers of Christ. Both experienced cleansing that prepared them for the eternal blessings of the plan of salvation. In quoting and citing these scriptures, the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles have taught their listeners of the changes and cleansing that they too must experience to receive the blessings of the plan of salvation.

In Mosiah 18:9 Alma explained to those requesting baptism two forms of commitment that might be perceived as themes of the scripture: to act with compassion (as they “mourn with those that mourn” and “comfort those that stand in need of comfort”) and to stand as a witness for Christ (“even until death”). The ultimate outcome is the redemption and eternal life promised in the great plan of happiness.

“Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|-------------------------------|-----|---|--|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 5 | Showing compassion, reflecting Christ’s example, sharing the gospel, testifying of Christ | These references support both the compassion and witness themes, with strong words like <i>commandment, obligation, and “captained by Christ.”</i> |
| Brief allusion | 15 | Map for eternal destination, healing, baptismal covenant, family life, pioneers, Church name, help for missionaries | The witness theme is used most often in the allusions: as a closing final encouraging comment by four speakers; to stress covenants, responsibilities, and eternal destinations by others. |

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|------------------------------|-----|--|--|
| Brief discussion | 8 | Compassion, testimony bearing, members/missionaries, mourn with and comfort, sincere concern | Both compassion and witness themes are developed. Examples are used well: children of Israel in fiery furnace, critically ill child comforting mother, Joseph F. Smith facing drunken threats. |
| Talk focus or prominent idea | 2 | 1. Baptismal covenant, eternal life, charge, covenant, service, prayer, bold witness, scripture study, endurance, courage 2. Early apostles, Holy Ghost, every member’s testimony, gift to know, gift to believe others | 1. Elder Eyring (2011) ⁵⁷ centered his talk around the scripture, developing both the compassion and witness themes with moving personal and scriptural examples. 2. As a major theme, Elder Oaks (1990) ⁵⁸ illustrated the responsibility to witness and testify with a wide variety of scriptural testifiers. |

King Benjamin’s people underwent a transformation similar to that of Alma and his converts. In their renewed state they needed to avoid evil and repent and be cleansed of the damages it had done to them; the prophets, seers, and revelators have counseled in general conferences that doing these things requires an eternal perspective involving their disposition toward evil. The First Presidency and the Apostles have cited, quoted, or discussed Mosiah 5:2 during 30 conference talks between 1965 and 2014, with references by others bringing the total to 45. The assertion of King Benjamin’s people may become a goal for all of us.

“And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.”

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|-------------------------------|-----|--|--|
| Indirect reference with “see” | 9 | Godly sorrow, behavior change, addictive behavior, chastity, change of heart, conversion, Christ’s healing, natural man vs. discipleship | References related to both needs for change and blessings following change. Many stressed it must be a “mighty change,” not an easy or a casual one. |

| Type | No. | Some topics covered | Nature of usage |
|--------------------------------|-----|---|--|
| Brief allusion | 8 | Mercy, God's love, personal understanding, charity, worldwide gospel culture, armor of God, gathering, conversion | These allusions tend to be associated with positive effects, especially in terms of experiencing God's love and the change that occurs with deepening love. |
| Brief discussion | 11 | Christlike qualities, conversion, covenants, spiritual rebirth, conference talks, Church welfare, intensity/effort, becoming | In talks that closed conferences, members were told to apply their learning to change. Several described the context of Benjamin's people. Rebirth was stressed. |
| Topic focus or prominent theme | 2 | 1. Benjamin's and Alma's people are described in terms of "mighty change." 2. Benjamin's people were cleansed from "taint and tyranny of sin." | 1. Elder Christofferson (2008) described both groups as "born again" and becoming "new creatures." ⁵⁹ 2. Elder Bednar (2007) described the "fundamental change" in their desires, motives, and nature. ⁶⁰ |

Implications and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify the number of times the Book of Mormon was cited in general conferences between 1965 and 2014. We looked at the number of citations in all conference addresses, but we were particularly interested in the frequency of Book of Mormon citations by prophets, seers, and revelators and in the contexts in which the verses were quoted and referenced. The results were consistent enough with the increased emphasis on scripture study in the Church curriculum and the availability of cross-referenced editions of the scriptures during the 1970s to suggest some cause-effect relationships. Additionally, the use of statistics and treatment of content vividly reflect the impact of President Benson's focus throughout his presidency on the Book of Mormon as the keystone of the Latter-day Saint religion. He was a living example of his memorable sermons on studying, knowing, testifying of, and living its teachings. During and since his time as Church President, the leaders, especially the prophets, seers, and revelators, have cited the Book of Mormon to explain, clarify, and support a wide variety of teachings and testimonies.

Results of this study have implications for personal study as well as for learning and teaching in Church classes. President Benson said, "The Book of Mormon . . . was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us."⁶¹ In "I Know Your Doing': The Book of Mormon Speaks to Our Times," published in the *Ensign*, Richard Dilworth Rust confirmed, "The Book of Mormon fits our era of world history precisely, even though it refers to age-old events that happened in a foreign culture."⁶² The Book of Mormon contains carefully selected sermons, letters, experiences, and prophecies inspired by the Lord to be preserved for our day. President Gordon B. Hinckley wrote, "In its descriptions of the problems of today's society, [the Book of Mormon] is as current as the morning newspaper, and much more definitive."⁶³ Moroni wrote, "I speak unto you as if ye were present."⁶⁴ He and his father saw our greatest latter-day needs through revelation. Mormon affirmed, "I . . . write the things which have been commanded me of the Lord."⁶⁵

Religious educators have the privilege and responsibility of helping learners make connections relating the Book of Mormon to their personal lives and to the world in which they live. Understanding the connections the Brethren have made may provide examples and motivation to guide learners in doing the same—enabling all of us to more fully appreciate the strength and magnitude of the keystone of the restored gospel. **RE**

Notes

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22. Reynolds, "Coming Forth," 11.
23. Russell M. Nelson, "Repentance and Conversion," *Ensign*, May 2007, 102–5; "Ask, Seek, Knock," *Ensign*, November 2009, 81–84.
24. David A. Bednar, "Ye Must Be Born Again," *Ensign*, May 2007, 19–22.
25. Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, 4–7.
26. Henry B. Eyring, "As a Child," *Ensign*, May 2006, 14–17.
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29. Thomas S. Monson, "To Learn, To Do, To Be," *Ensign*, May 1992, 47–50; "To Learn, to Do, to Be," *Ensign*, November 2008, 60–68.
30. D. Todd Christofferson, "Let Us Be Men," *Ensign*, November 2006, 46–48.
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35. Russell M. Nelson, "Living by Scriptural Guidance," *Ensign*, November 2000, 16–18.
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63. Gordon B. Hinckley, "An Angel from on High, the Long, Long Silence Broke," *Ensign*, November 1979, 8.
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