

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 1, Lecture 1 Introduction The Book of Mormon—Like Nothing Else

Would it be all right if I put on my trusty hat? The doctor says I'm to wear this hat at all times, so here I am. Nothing but the Book of Mormon would put me up to anything like this; you know that. This is ridiculous, and here we are. But the Book of Mormon is worth it; it's worth absolutely anything. At this moment everybody asks certain questions, and the questions we all ask are, "What should I be doing? What am I doing here?" Charles Adams has a famous book on that subject, "What am I doing here?" You find yourself in the most ridiculous situations, and you say, "What am I doing here? How did I possibly get into this mess? What should I be doing?" That is the question, you see. We know the world is in confusion because many people are doing things they should not be doing. And many people are not doing the things they should be doing.

Now the shocking thought comes to us: Is it possible that nobody is doing what he should be doing? The answer is yes. It's not only possible; that's the situation. When the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith in the Grove, according to the oldest and best account of all—that of Frederick G. Williams, written in 1832–33 and dictated by Joseph Smith when he was only 26 years old. It's different from the one we have in the Pearl of Great Price here because the Lord speaks in the first person. In the account we have here, it's an indirect quotation (what the Lord told Joseph), but here the words to the Prophet when he was only fourteen years old are, "The world at this time lieth in sin, and there is none that doeth good—no not one. Mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the world to visit them in this ungodliness." There are those who do well and have good intentions, but that is not what it means. It means to do what they should be doing—the best possible thing. If you break an arm, I might with the best of intentions try to mend it, but I could be doing a lot of damage. I'm not doing any good. I'm doing more harm probably, though I mean well and get credit for that. The fact is we are not in a condition where anybody can do what he should be doing because we are not living by the heavenly order anymore. We are not living by the order for which the earth was designed and created; we are a million miles away from it, completely independent. So the Lord says, "There is none that doeth good, no not one and mine anger is kindling."

Many of us are not where we should be. For example, everyone goes to college now. When I was young, very few people went. We don't have anything else to do. There's Goethe's famous line in Faust. Remember old Faust says, in the second Faust: "Here I am an old moss-covered gentleman still studying because I can't do anything else." We just get into the study habit and we can't do anything else. We write absurd articles, and we go on collecting things. Anatole France wrote a wonderful story about that, but we won't go into that.

However, there is a lot of relevant material we are going to bring in here that you may not have heard before. We will slap it on the board, and maybe we will require you to remember what these words are someday, if they are important. The thing is that this is where the Book of Mormon comes in. It's like nothing else. It's the only answer you are

ever going to get to that question in this dispensation. In reading the Book of Mormon no one is ever doing something he shouldn't be doing. Most of the time he would be doing probably the best thing he could possibly be doing. If it is not itself the best thing to be doing, it will quickly put you onto the best thing to be doing because it will have a direct effect on you. It will change you; it will work on you. It is a personal, intimate document. It will hit you. You can't just read the Book of Mormon and nothing else. It immediately puts you on the high road to what you should be doing, like no other book. And it will lead you directly into a course of thought or a course of action of the greatest significance to yourself and to the world you live in. In other words, it will enable you to break loose as nothing else can. Only the Book of Mormon breaks loose because it does break loose. It's like nothing else. Now we have the direct revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, etc., but the Book of Mormon was brought by an angel, a tangible thing. He gave it to Joseph. He gives this clinical description of how the angel was. This is something completely different.

I was going to ask the question, how many have read the Book of Mormon? It's an utterly absurd question. It's like asking, have you seen the moon? Or have you been to North America? The answer is "yes," I suppose, but you haven't told me a thing. How much did you learn from that? With the Book of Mormon, it can mean anything. You can say, "I read the Book of Mormon." I remember when I would say that, and it didn't mean anything, of course. It meant I had piled up so many pages and got my gold star; that was it. That's not what we are reading it for now. Oh, what would we do without the Book of Mormon!

The Book of Mormon is like nothing else. It is totally different from the Bible by virtue of its genesis. Look at the Bible. It took hundreds of years to give us the Bible—thousands, actually, if you include the Old Testament, of course. The documents had to trickle in from different times, different places, and different writers. The *Tanakh*, the Torah; *Nebiim*, the prophets; and the *Kethubim*, the literary writings. These are the three things that make up the Bible—all from different authors. Some parts are poetry, some parts are prophecy, and some parts are history. There are lots of chronicles, etc. Some parts are the law from different times and different places—hundreds of different manuscripts.

Until the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, the oldest manuscript we had of the books of Moses (the first five books) was from the ninth century A.D., the Ben Asher Codex. There are eight thousand different old manuscripts of the New Testament, no two alike. So there is a lot of collating, comparing, and arguing about which passages are which and what order they come in. Then when you have translation, there is no agreement about that. Year after year there are new revised translations coming forth. Well, if the last translation is reliable, why the new revised, improved Cambridge, or Anchor, or whatever it is, edition of the Bible? It's processing all the time. The Bible is a very human document, of course it is. So is the Book of Mormon. It covers thousands of years. It has many authors; it was edited, etc. But it was handed to us in a single passage. Bang, just like that, the whole thing—all edited, all in order, all translated. We don't have to argue about any of that stuff. If it is true, it comes to us whole, and there is nothing to slow us down on it—nothing to hold us up until we have decided what this passage means, or what that is. It was translated directly by the gift and power of God. There is no need to argue about it. It is in words of exceeding plainness, in a very small vocabulary. We may treat that later. But here it comes to us in this package all at once. It is not only like no other book, of course; it's like nothing else. It's like no other thing. It was either brought by an angel,

or it came out of nowhere, this single shot—instant scripture and instant history of a thousand years, just like that.

Imagine you were some young person (anybody, I mean) who promised ahead of time that he was going to get out this book. He told about the angel and the gold plates and said, “This is coming out.” Everybody got all worked up about it and made fun of it. The *Painesville Telegraph*, etc., were all spoofing; they all had great fun about the “Book of Puki,” as they called it. The time was coming, and in a very short time he had to produce the book. Wouldn’t you panic at that occasion? Here you were going to give them a big book. You might say, “Well, I’ll give them a hundred pages, that’s it.” An assignment like that, how could you do it? He had eight weeks to do it in. You would think, “How am I going to face them?” But he gave them the book, for heaven’s sake. Nobody ever bothered to look at it. After that, they were embarrassed and started to change the subject—started to talk about the weather. That’s true. People will raise all these questions about the Book of Mormon, but they won’t wait for answers (you’ll notice that). They will find one parallel or two, and they will say, “Well, for example, there was a dream that Joseph Smith’s father had that was very much like Lehi’s dream” (or something like that). It was a standard dream, as a matter of fact. In the Book of Mormon there were lots of Indian wars. They will say, “Well, there were Indian wars all around New York when Joseph Smith was a child, so that’s where he got it from.” One parallel or two would explain everything. Of course, it doesn’t explain anything because this is a vast book. It is the history of a thousand years from beginning to end with nothing left out. Every aspect today is properly taken care of, and it’s never mixed up. No book has ever been written that could do that. Shakespeare gets all mixed up in things; everybody does that because you can’t help it. We could excuse Joseph Smith if he did it, but he didn’t. There is no garbling in the book at all, which is an amazing thing. You still have a time unraveling its complexities.

We are talking about the Book of Mormon in an unbelieving world. Eduard Meyer was by far the greatest critic of Joseph Smith, the one to judge him. He was a great German historian who died in 1927. He was fascinated by the Book of Mormon. I had a letter, which unfortunately I have lost, from a scholar who is a specialist in Central Asiatic languages. He has just written a very good work on Tibetan epic poetry—the translated works from Tibetan. He is also an expert on Central Asiatic languages. He teaches at Oslo University, and his name is Petr Kavkavskii. He is a Pole who speaks all these languages, etc. He writes me, and he has been reading the Book of Mormon for eighteen years. It’s his favorite book, and he’s not a member of the Church. He says this book absolutely electrifies him. “Where could it have come from? What is it? It’s a vast work, a vast library that someone just handed to us overnight.”

In the early nineteenth century there was no scholarship. That was when Western scholarship reached its absolute abyss. It never got lower; there was nothing being done at that time. There had been great stuff in the eighteenth century. From 1850 on they really cut loose and got off to the races. There was the great age of scholarship after that, beginning with the Germans. But at that time no committee or anybody could have produced the book at all. The materials were not available or anything else. So Eduard Meyer says, “Well, obviously it’s easy to explain.” It’s not easy to explain, but you have to explain it this way: that the angel and the plates were a hallucination. But the Book of Mormon is not a hallucination; that’s the trouble. And he wouldn’t read the Book of Mormon. That’s very interesting because he was criticizing it. He said things like, “I’ve explained it now; don’t bother. The English is too primitive, too crude. It can’t possibly be

anything but just made up by a hick.” But he never found out what was in it because he never bothered to read it; imagine that, the great Eduard Meyer.

So it is in an unbelieving world, you see. How do you account for the Book of Mormon in a world that can't believe in another world, or other possibilities? If you don't believe in it, what's your alternative? There are no alternatives, absolutely none. Joseph couldn't have got it anywhere is the point. That's why no one will take it up. They ask some very searching questions and they should, but they never wait for the answers, you notice. They always leave the room as soon as you start showing that it is possible that this happened. Mr. Chandler, the religion editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, was here a couple of years ago. He would ask these questions, but as soon as we would start to answer them he would cut it off and go to something else. He had two secretaries there taking notes. He wouldn't allow me to use a tape recorder or anything like that. He just had what he wanted taken down by hand. That was criticism of the Book of Mormon, you see. As soon as some evidence popped up, he would say, “Well, let's turn to this now.” This is the way it goes.

This is a fact of enormous significance that the book can't be explained. It is what you would call a singularity, so we will write “singularity” on the board. (Boy, this is education! Tell me if I spell it right; it would be singular if I spelled it right.) A singularity is a thing that does exist but should not exist, as you know. It cannot be described or comprehended, like the universe before it started expanding, or like quasars or black holes. Astronomers and physicists are absolutely sure they exist, no doubt whatever. Yet they cannot describe them, they cannot conceive of them, they cannot imagine what they would be like. Yet they exist. Now that's a singularity. The Book of Mormon is such a thing if you won't accept Joseph Smith's story. Like black holes and quasars, its presence forces us to reassess all our ideas of reality. We are not just talking about philosophy or esthetics, or even theology or ethics, here—the usual matter of religion. Nor are we talking about happiness, the good life, success, and that sort of thing that TV preachers, Norman Vincent Peale, and others talk about. That has nothing to do with it; we are talking about real things here, no Christian allegory. This stuff is to be taken literally, and therefore we are supposed to take it very seriously. It has been given to us because it concerns us, and it comes to us full of instructions on how to use it. As a book, of course, it will turn most of us off because people don't read books anymore. We have other ways of learning things (we think they are good). But it comes to us as a written text.

I'm doing something I've never done before in a class; namely, I'm going to refer to my own previous effusions on the subject. It might be of use going through some of them. They are not bad, and they save me a lot of work because I am surprised how much research went into some of them when I read them today. I didn't realize there's a lot of stuff there (this guy was really knocking himself out here). I should remember that. In the early days at BYU, they had no library here at all. I used to have to go back to Berkeley or back to Harvard or some place like that to look up a few references. But now our library is one of the best. You don't have to go anywhere if you want to work in ancient religions and stuff like that.

We are dealing with a special text now, and the knowledge that comes to us, because it's more specific, is something like a space probe. You send it out and it brings information back. This is what we have in the written word here. Arthur Clarke, who had much to do with the discovery of radar and who is a great popularizer of science, as you know (he now lives in Sri Lanka), pointed out that there is only one way we have of projecting our

knowledge over the past and over distant places, and that's the written word. No technology can handle it. As long as the speed of light is our limit, such a thing as star empires are utterly out of the question, you see. You send a message or a command to the nearest star, Alpha Centauri. In nine years you get a response on whether they have acted or not. What do you do next? Answer back, and its nine years before you have any communication. That's out of the question, you see. As far as visual connections and things like that, you have to send a camera out and get the message back as they have been doing now. That will do it, but otherwise sound waves and light waves alike get suffused, get fuzzy, and you get nothing but the universal hum, the humming background that you get from space—the three degrees, that sort of thing. It gets dampened out. As soon as sound has gone very far, it gets dampened out and you can't distinguish. The same with light. The best telescope in the world is very limited because light waves get suffused and dampened out after they have traveled very far. So the only way is to actually go out there and come back and report.

The book is the most remarkable invention ever made, as Galileo says. It is the miracle of miracles. "If anything is to be hailed as the greatest of all miracles, it would certainly be writing," he said. In 26 simple symbols you can convey not only what happened and what people's names were, but what they did (you can do that with TV), but their innermost thoughts and most sensitive feelings can be conveyed by these 22, 24, or 26 letters of an alphabet. That's all it takes. Nothing else can do or ever has done that. So writing comes to us as a special message and special emissary. That's where you get this emphasis all the time in the Book of Mormon. They talk about the importance of the record, how it's transmitted, how it's handed down, the characters it's written in, the trouble they have writing it (preserving the pages, etc.), because as they tell us, "This is the only way our knowledge can be preserved." That's why they had to go back and get the brass plates. The only device that has defeated time and space—and it does that, as Galileo says. But it's not a human invention, of course. We are told it is a superhuman invention. That's what put me onto this; I was referring to some other stuff. Writing is so minimal, so extremely simple. Any instrument that will make a scratch on any surface will record the most subtle message for any period of time over any amount of space. That's astonishing what you can do. Of course, it has to be a rather permanent surface and things like that, but it's so simple. All you have to do is scratch something on a surface, and you have done it. To read it again you don't need elaborate electronic equipment or anything like that. But the price is this (this is where it comes, of course): How do you unravel it? You don't need an elaborate electronic machine to feed it back into. You have to feed it back into yourself. You have to riddle (to read means to riddle; it's the same word). You have to unriddle what is written there. That's up to you; this is the thing. Reading is an act of faith. When you read, you riddle. You use your wits. That's why to say you've read the Book of Mormon doesn't mean a thing. It's how much you have applied to it here. You have to extract the meaning, and you have to do almost all the work. There's an immense lot of meaning in most of the verses of the Book of Mormon, an enormous lot. I've never noticed it until this year. I teach a Sunday School class on the Book of Mormon, and I had completely missed the point of nine tenths of the verses in the Book of Mormon. I had missed it entirely, and there it was all the time. It's there all right. It's like a Urim and Thummim. You need effort to use a Urim and Thummim. Joseph Smith could only use it when he was in top form. Remember, when he had a quarrel with Emma, or something like that, it wouldn't work. It requires just as much effort to use a Urim and Thummim as it does to use a dictionary and a grammar—far more as a matter of fact.

When you read the Book of Mormon, every sentence is a whole proposition, and it presents a number of possibilities. It may or may not contain a vast amount of information (that's for you to find out). So all reading is a miracle actually. It's like the flight of the bee; there's no reason why it should take place. There's no reason why you should be able to read, except that there's something takes place in your mental processes that's transferred from that. Last night I was reading an Arabic text. Now this is quite remarkable. In an Arabic text you don't have any vowels written. You do not separate the words. There's just the flow of consonants, nothing else. You do not have any capital letters. There is no punctuation whatever. There is no division between paragraphs, sentences, things like that. It is all just a stream of consonants and nothing else, and it's the easiest thing in the world. When they start dividing up the words and start putting in the vowels to help you out—which is required for the Koran because you can't take risks of giving your own interpretation—it is much harder to read (when they try to help you along). It's the same thing with Hebrew. A pointed Hebrew text is an annoyance. It gives you a headache. Take away all those *shaddas* [Arabic diacritical mark indicating the doubling of a consonant], all those little dots and things, and it's much easier to handle. Then you hear the sound; then it speaks to you. But why does it speak to you? This is just the way you react to it; these things are intuitive. But when you are reading, it is just the same thing. What marvels might be there that you are not aware of at all?

So I'm going to make three points which are quite relevant to the Book of Mormon from something I wrote¹ years ago: “Few people realize that in Joseph Smith's day no really ancient manuscripts were known [none at all]. Egyptian and Babylonian could not be read; the Greek and Latin classics were the oldest literature available, preserved almost entirely in bad medieval copies no older than the Byzantine and Carolingian periods [at the earliest].” (Of course, today it's a different story entirely, but not in Joseph Smith's time.) “If Joseph Smith is right, the written records should be as old as the human race itself, for he tells us, ‘a book of remembrance was kept . . . in the language of Adam’ (Moses 6:5). . . . And what does the actual state of the documents attest? If writing evolved gradually and slowly as everything was supposed to have done, there should be a vast accumulation of transitional scribblings [people trying this out, trying that out, throwing them away, etc.] as countless crude and stumbling attempts at writing would leave their marks on stone [that was predicted], bone, clay, and wood over countless millennia of groping trial and error [that's the way it's supposed to have happened]. Only there are no such accumulations of primitive writing anywhere.” No such records exist anywhere, though they should. And slate palettes (Egyptian palettes beginning with the palette of Narmer—the hunting palette, the predynastic palette) you find in Egypt with pictures that are supposed to be the most primitive, stumbling writing. It's very funny that the oldest one, the palette of Narmer, has a picture of the Pharaoh, and he is accompanied by his scribe. The scribe is carrying the two ink wells of red and white ink that a scribe uses to write on paper. This is supposed to be a crude scribbling on stone, but he has his scribe there and the scribe has been writing. This is realized today. “Given the evolutionary hypothesis, any healthy, normal, growing boy can describe in convincing detail how long ago ‘the naive child of nature’ everywhere drew crude pictures to convey his simple thoughts, and how out of this process moved ‘everywhere inexorably . . . toward the final stage, the alphabetic writing.’”

Here I'm quoting from two eminent scholars [K. Sethe and E. Doblhofer]. One says, “The naive child of nature draws his crude pictures.” And the other says, “Everywhere, inexorably toward the final stage, it moves forward toward alphabetic writing.” What do you find? “But if it really happened that way, we would find traces of evolving writing

‘everywhere’ [as the man says]; veritable middens of scratched rock and bones and shells would attest the universal groping toward the inexorable final stage over tens of thousands of years, while the clumsy transitional forms should outnumber proper writing by at least a million to one [but no transitional forms have ever been found; that’s a surprising thing; they would last, too]. But the vast accumulations of attempts at writing simply do not exist; there is no evidence whatever of a world-wide groping toward the goal. Having made his lucid and logical statement, the author of our last quotation observes with perplexity that ‘it is surprising that the ultimate stage in evolution . . . was only achieved in a very few spots on the globe [not everywhere; he said it happened everywhere, but you don’t find it]. We find ‘only a very few systems of writing,’ says [the German scholar] David, ‘and even these are so much alike and are so closely related in time and space that their independence appears to be at least problematical.’ ”

The chances are there is only one system of writing known in the world, and it comes all of a sudden, and it comes full blown. It had to be otherwise because Doblhofer (a work on the subject) defines “pictorial writing,” which he says is “incredibly ancient,” as “a series of images which can possibly be ‘read’ accurately by any spectator.” See, I draw a series of little pictures and they are crude and simple, but anybody can tell what they mean because a simple, childish mind wrote them. It’s simple and childish to read them. Kurt Sethe, the great Egyptologist, agrees with that. He says that a “pure” picture writing is one which “could be read in any language at sight” (because it is pictures; it’s not a language). “And right here the issue is settled [that there is no picture writing]: if ever there was a true picture writing it has not yet been discovered. Where on earth is a single inscription to which any and all beholders, scholars and laymen alike, regardless of their own language and culture, would give the identical interpretation?” There have been such, but no two people interpret them alike. In other words, they are not simply picture writing. “Doblhofer himself confirms this when he assures us that ‘the most primitive pictorial writings . . . translate . . . abstract ideas with the aid of symbolical signs.’ ” When you are showing abstract ideas instead of a simple house, a tree, a man, a dog, a horse, and are conveying not with a picture of a house, a dog, a horse, but with symbolical signs that have to be memorized, or recognized by somebody else, that’s not picture writing at all. That’s the only kind you find, he says. Where you are using the most primitive pictorial writings, they are just symbolical signs and abstract ideas. That’s a strange conclusion to come to. No wonder they don’t agree on that sort of thing. What I’m saying here is that we have this thing as a gift from heaven. It has been handed down—this keeping of the records, which is such an obsession in the Book of Mormon, and especially in the book of Ether, as you know. They have been handed down from the beginning to come forth in their purity. If they hadn’t been handed down, we wouldn’t have them at all.

“Like the earliest Egyptian documents, the Babylonian tablets bearing ‘the oldest written signs thus far known’ are highly stylized and cannot be read.” And so it goes. This is an important thing, too: “If Joseph Smith was right, books and writing are a gift to man from heaven, ‘for it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration.’ (Moses 6:5).” God gave that knowledge to man. It’s a very simple knowledge—but very subtle, very complex. As I say, it was the most sophisticated, the most marvelous invention ever to come forth. But did anyone invent it? “The Egyptians believed that writing was a sacred trust to be given to the king as ‘high-priest and scribe’ to keep him and his people ever in touch with the mind and will of heaven.” That’s the whole idea. G. Widengren wrote a book on this subject, *The Apostle and the Heavenly Book*. He said, “And so the knowledge is communicated to the king, it is of a mysterious character, bearing upon the great mysteries of heaven and earth, the hidden things, and is

a revelation of the hidden knowledge by the gods [the god]. Can we style it ‘primordial revelation?’” So there is a primordial revelation, and the purpose of writing is to hand down this primordial revelation. In other words, there was a Book of Adam. And a great deal has come out in recent years about this Book of Adam that has come forth recently.

Incidentally, the oldest writing is used for business, for counting bales of wool, kegs of beer, and loaves of bread—but always in the temple, only in temple accounts. They call it the *Gebrauchsschrift* (business writing) and the *Kultschrift* (holy writing). So the temple is where you find it. As Sethe says, “Hieroglyphic is correctly named, for only on the walls of temples is its survival from prehistoric times.” So wherever you find it, “from first to last, ancient writing remains in the hands not of businessmen but of priests; it is a holy and secret thing, imparted only to the elect and zealously withheld from all others. ‘He who divulges it,’ we read of a typical holy book, ‘dies a sudden death and an immediate cutting-off. Thou shalt keep very far away from it. It is to be read only by a scribe in the workshop, whose name has been duly registered in the House of Life.’ [that’s from a very old writing (*Papyrus Salt 825A*)]. ‘Only the prophets may read and understand the holy books’ is the rule. Each system of writing itself is an effective seal on the holy books, a cryptogram, ‘a secret formula which the profane do not know.’ [it’s hermetic—this idea is common]: The idea of a holy book that is taken away from the earth and restored from time to time [the Book of Mormon, you see], or is handed down secretly from father to son for generations, or hidden up in the earth, preserved by ingenious methods of storage with precious imperishable materials to be brought forth at a later date and more righteous generation is becoming increasingly familiar with the discovery and publication of ever more ancient apocryphal works, Jewish, Christian and others.” So this is the idea.

Now, the letter by itself. It takes a process like the flight of a bee, a miraculous process that can’t be explained. But you will notice how you put things together. A letter by itself is meaningless; it has to go into a word. Of course, it’s symbolic. The whole Cabala is based around that. There’s a whole gematria, a whole technique, a whole science based on the significance of single letters and the combinations—not only to form words, but in any combination—what they mean, that they have a mystic combination—forming words, as numbers, or anything else. But the letters have to be put together to make words. The words have to be put together to make phrases or single-word sentences. There is such a thing as a single-word sentence. A. H. Gardiner, the great Egyptologist and author of the big grammar, wrote a book on the nature of the sentence. He gives the example “rain” as a sentence. Here’s where your luck comes in. The single word is “rain,” and that’s a sentence. It tells a whole story, but it depends on how it is said or how you react to it. If I say “rain?” it means “is it raining again; are we actually having rain?” If I say disgustedly, “rain!” that means “it’s raining again.” All it is is “rain” and an exclamation point. It depends on the context in which it is found. You have to supply that. If I say “rain?” (Can it possibly be raining again?) If I say “rain!” (At last we are having rain.)

So it goes on. There are dozens of ways in which that one word will make a sentence. But it doesn’t make sense until you have put it in a sentence, the sentence you want it to mean. You see what you can get away with when you are interpreting the scriptures, if you do that way. If you say a thing like alas, it means a certain situation is implied here, and you get into the situation. But the word by itself has to be in a phrase; the phrase has to be in a sentence. Any self-contained message is a book. The sentence is part of a message; the message is a book, no matter how short it is. It can just be three sentences. With the ancients, length has nothing to do with it. But books were meant to be put in libraries. It’s a funny thing that writing began with libraries; it didn’t begin with single

letters, which are put together to make a word, which are put together to make a sentence, etc. No, it began with the library. It's the hermetic concept of the hologram that contains all knowledge. You start out at the top, just like Adam. You begin with the perfect pattern and run downhill from there. That seems just the opposite of what we say when we evolve; we get a little better as we go on and on and on. That was the delight of the Victorian Age.

Well, I'll read you something at the beginning of this article. It has nothing to do with what I was talking about, but I think it is quite relevant to what we're talking about right now. "We have all grown up in the world nurtured on the comfortable Victorian doctrine of uniformitarianism—the idea that what happens in this world is all just more of the same. What lies ahead is pretty much what lies behind for the same forces are at work on earth today as they were in the same manner with the same intensity and the same effect as at all times in the past and must go on operating inexorably and irresistibly just the same way forever."

Now, we agree with the basic proposition, but we are a million miles away from the fundamentalists. Other worlds like unto this, and other worlds hitherto formed—the same elements put together in the same way with the same pattern and form; you will find them everywhere to the end of the universe. So that is going on. There's a steady process here; what's going on here has gone on in other worlds. It doesn't begin out of nothing, and it doesn't end in nothing. It goes on continually. But they take it this way: They apply it to this world as a steady building up, everything better and better, constant amelioration. "There's no real cause for alarm; this is the conclusion we drew . . . in a world where everything is under control beneath the watchful eye of science, as evolution takes its undeviating forward course, steady, slow, reliable, imperceptibly slow and gentle, gratifyingly predictable." According to an eminent British scholar of the 1920s [E. Bevan] (this is what we believed when I was in high school),

The skies as far as the utmost star are clear of any malignant intelligence. Even the untoward accidents of life are due to causes comfortably impersonal. The possibility that the unknown contains powers deliberately hostile to him is one the ordinary modern man can hardly entertain, even in imagination.

Everything is lovely; nothing can go wrong because evolution is taking us steadily, slowly forward ever toward the better and better. What a happy reassurance is that. "In such a world one needed no longer to run to God for comfort. The matter-of-fact, no-nonsense approach of science has since the days of the Milesian school and the ancient atomists banished all childish fears and consigned horrendous and spectacular aspects of human past and future to the realm of myth and fantasy." And yet what was required reading in the Honors Program a couple of years ago, *The Violent Universe*, about the dangers that surround us. We are among powers that could annihilate us. There's no reason why we should exist. That this world is so comfortable for us in a universe that is so utterly hostile is amazing—a totally different picture. With these powers in the universe, everything is being swallowed up. But with the universe here, there is nothing hostile. Everything is impersonal, and you have nothing to worry about. This doctrine backfires, of course.

How it backfired is the point. The atomists said, "There's nothing there; there's nothing outside." It began with the Milesian school (especially Anaxagoras and Xenophanes, friends of Pericles, and with the Stoics). There is nothing there. There's nothing to fear.

There are no monsters; there's no boogeyman out there. There are no goblins, no devil, nothing like that. In fact, there is nothing out there. Then this horrible gasp. What, nothing? So we are going into nothing. There are some good lines from *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* about that. This is how it backfired in my day, and then we started to learn the *Rubaiyat*:

One Moment in Annihilation's Waste,
One moment, of the Wine of Life to taste—
The Stars are setting, and the Caravan
Starts for the dawn of Nothing—Oh, make haste!

You don't have much time, and you are going nowhere. Lucretius wrote his great *De Rerum Natura* on that subject. All these superstitions about the hereafter—heaven, hell and that stuff—forget about it. There's nothing to fear out there; there is just nothing. Then the horrible shock was much worse. "I've seen the eternal footman hold my cloak and snicker and, in short, I was afraid." Because there was nothing out there. It's something to be quite terrified by. And this is what we run into. You have your choice, you see. I prefer the other stuff. There is evidence that there is the other stuff. But, you see, we have in writing here for us a most choice document. It's not like any other book in existence. It's not like anything else. It is a standing revelation, a standing miracle, as we have it here. No one could have produced this book of a thousand years, covering every phase of the cultural, historical, intellectual, literary aspects. What a miracle of condensation, as we will see! But the point is that it's not just written as a tour de force to show it can be done. Every word of it is significant. It's meant for us, it's directed to us, and it's very urgent that we know this. "This is directed to you, ye Gentiles, that ye may learn to be wiser than we have been." We are in a very powerless state, and this tells us what it is in the Book of Mormon. If you start to panic, grab for the Book of Mormon and it will be all right. We will end with my slogan for the class, Mosiah 4:11–12. Oh, what choice words here! "If ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceeding great joy in your souls [notice, his goodness and his love; he means to do best] even so I would that ye should remember and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God and your own nothingness. . . . And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice."

You will have nothing to worry about if you realize God's greatness, what his intentions are, and what his power to carry out those intentions is. And don't worry about yourself—your career and all that sort of rot. Remember, we should always hold in remembrance our own nothingness. I remember my nothingness, so I don't have anything to worry about. And then I remember God's goodness, and I have something to cheer about. So it's quite marvelous, this Book of Mormon. It has everything in it which we hope to find out.

[In these lectures Brother Nibley quotes and paraphrases material from his own writings. This information is not in quotation marks unless it is quoted exactly and the source is known.]

1. See "Genesis of the Written Word," in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1978), 101–27; reprinted in *Temple and Cosmos*, vol. 12 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 450–90.