

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

JOHN WELCH

Semester 4, Lecture 101
3 Nephi 19–4 Nephi 1
Understanding the Sermon at the Temple
Zion Society

Today is the fifth and final lecture that I will be giving to you. I want to thank you for your attention and your attendance, and I'm sure you're looking forward to Brother Nibley's return. He'll be back on Monday, if all things go as scheduled.

Several of you have asked about the material that I have been presenting to you and whether written notes or a written version of this is available. Hopefully by the first part of the summer there will be a book in print called *The Sermon at the Temple*, which is being published jointly by FARMS and Deseret Book Company. And I don't give that to you as an advertisement, but if you can wait that long—and I'm sure you can—that would be the best place to get the material in print.

Last time we were just winding up our reflection on the various implications of some of this, and I just want to take a minute to again thank you for the thoughts that you shared with me. I appreciated those written remarks. If any of you want to turn in any more—I know some of you asked if today would be okay—certainly that is fine.

It seems to me that there are wide-ranging implications for our lives and for our understanding of the Book of Mormon, [other] scripture, the temple, and a lot of other things as a result of our understanding of the Sermon at the Temple. As I indicated at the beginning of the lecture, I see this as kind of a Grand Central Station that sooner or later all of the paths of the gospel will run through or by. The Sermon on the Mount is given at a mountain that is very prominent on the horizon, a very prominent feature in the landscape of the gospel. And I think the more familiarity you have traversing its trails and knowing its paths, the more your life will be enlightened, and the more you will walk in the ways of truth and righteousness.

Looking at the way in which some of these things have emerged through our own study, I've come to appreciate even more the way in which the Lord reveals his will to his prophets, line upon line, precept upon precept. It's fascinating to study the way in which the temple ordinances and temple endowment were revealed to Joseph Smith. When he walked out of the Sacred Grove in 1820, he knew many things and certainly knew for a surety certain things better than anyone had known for several millennia. But he didn't know everything; things still had to be revealed. Pieces came, a bit at a time as a part of the dedication and temple work that was done in the Kirtland Temple, and things that came to him as he was preparing for the ordinance work in the Nauvoo Temple. It's fascinating to me to see how even though these little bits and pieces came a piece at a time, in a life that was certainly far from tranquil, when you get to the end, when Joseph's mission was finished, the entire picture is there. The pieces are all together and in place. That's something that at least I have difficulty attributing merely to happenstance or serendipity.

I also think that it helps us to reinforce and understand passages of prophecy going back to things like Isaiah 2. Reread the first couple verses of that chapter sometime, where he talks about how in the last days "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, . . . and he will teach us of his

ways, and we will walk in his paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law.” Isaiah is not talking about any ordinary mountain. The Sermon on the Mount is certainly also no ordinary mount, and the Sermon at the Temple no ordinary sermon.

In terms of our reflections on the scriptures, how often we need to be reminded that it’s only the one-hundredth part of what the prophets know that can be contained and communicated through the written word, in even the scriptures. We can appreciate even more the soul-searching complaints of Moroni and Nephi who wished that they had more power to be able to say those things that they knew and that were in their hearts, and how they realized that even though they have presented us with a powerful text, it is still weak by comparison to all that they would like to have us know.

Well, what were the aftermath effects of the Sermon at the Temple? Let’s look at what goes on in the rest of 3 Nephi and into 4 Nephi and just look at what takes place beyond. On the second day, of course, we begin with the baptismal ordinances, where all of the people were then brought; in the first part of chapter 19, the multitudes are divided into groups and they are baptized. Second, they are instructed in prayer. In chapter 19 Jesus has them pray, and it’s interesting that he says, continue in prayer, and he goes off and prays individually. Then he comes back and checks up on them to see how they’re doing and exhorts them and admonishes them. We have three prayers of Jesus in 3 Nephi 19. Actually, with the third one, it says that the words could not be written of the things that he prayed.

I did a study a few years ago comparing these prayers in 3 Nephi with the prayers of Jesus as are found in the New Testament. There are about nine places in the New Testament where you actually hear Jesus praying, where the gospel writers tell you what he prays for. I was impressed that the things that Jesus was praying for were not always the things that we pray for. When we pray, we ask a great deal. We ask the Lord that we will do well on our tests, etc. Did you see the article in *Time* magazine this last week about the evangelicals who ask you to give your shopping list to the Lord, etc.? Obviously, we have a long way to go as a culture in understanding the power and purpose of prayer. Just think, what is it that Jesus communicates to his Father in Heaven about when he turns to prayer? Of course, again, we only have a small fraction of what it is that he prayed for. We know that he would go up and pray all night long, especially on the mountains. He would go out into the countryside and pray.

But of those things that have survived in the scriptural record, step number one in his prayers is thanksgiving. He is always grateful whenever the Lord has revealed anything to his apostles or when the Lord has bestowed the gift of the Holy Ghost, as in 3 Nephi 19, upon the faithful. He is grateful, but he’s not just grateful for all the wonderful things that the Lord has given us. Often we seem almost arrogant in our gratitude. Aren’t we grateful for all the blessings that we have, and how blessed we are? If you’re not careful, that kind of sense of gratitude becomes precariously similar to the prayers of the Zoramites on the Rameumptom. But it’s Jesus who prays with gratitude for the revelation of God. Of all things we should be grateful for, we should give thanks for that. Of course, we should give thanks in all things. The Doctrine and Covenants says that the Lord is most displeased with those people who do not acknowledge his hand in all things, so we need to be cautious there, too.

“Just a real quick comment: I talked to someone in my Sunday School class when I was teaching, and he mentioned that he had the opportunity of listening to President Benson pray. He made the comment that about 90 percent of that [prayer] was in thanksgiving; only 2 percent was asking, which was interesting.”

Yes. And he has less need for the asking than we do. But maybe we should strive to be living a life that is worthy of that kind of model. That’s good.

The second thing that I've noticed that comes up in Jesus' prayers (and this is also present in 3 Nephi) is that he asks for forgiveness. Now, we ask for a lot of things, but the thing that Jesus asks for consistently in his prayers is forgiveness. That's a lot different than asking for that new house or for that diploma. Forgiveness. He says it on the cross in a prayer, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." And he tells us right in the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer that we will be forgiven our debts as we forgive others. We should ask, petition, for forgiveness. I think that is item number one, if you're putting a checklist together of those things that we should pray for.

And third, the final thing that you see Jesus praying for is the expression, "Not my will, but thy will be done." So often we forget that and [emphasize] the importance of trying to put our will beyond the will of anything else. And that's also in the Lord's Prayer. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So you see these elements not only in the actual prayers that Jesus offers in 3 Nephi 19 but also in the very model that he gave in Matthew 6 or 3 Nephi 13.

Following the prayers, we have in chapters 20-24 a lengthy sermon on the nature of the covenant relationship between God and his people. Having formed the covenant in the Sermon at the Temple, he can now talk about the future of the covenant people—about the coming of the New Jerusalem, the gathering of Israel, the role of the Gentiles, the position of the remnant of Jacob, that which is to come. He can quote and explain Isaiah 54 which promises the security of the establishment of God's people, etc. Question?

"Yes, I had a question about prayer back in chapter 19. I've heard an explanation before, but I've forgotten it. Here in verse 18 the disciples pray to Jesus instead of God the Father."

Well, let's look at chapter 19. In verse 6 he says they should "pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus. And the disciples did pray unto the Father also in the name of Jesus." Now, verse 18: "And behold, they began to pray; and they did pray unto Jesus, calling him their Lord and their God." I think that if you read both passages together, they are praying to Jesus in a way but knowing that they are praying to the Father through him. The way I've always understood that is to read verse 18 in the context of all of the instructions that have been given.

"In a dedicatory prayer Joseph Smith prays to Christ also in the Doctrine and Covenants."

I suppose it is proper, if you wish to pray to Jesus in some sense. Jesus is God; he is a member of the trinity. I don't mean that in a sectarian sense, but he is a member of the Godhead. Some prayers are prayers of thanksgiving; some prayers are simply prayers of expression of devotion. One could certainly pray to any exalted being in that sense, I suppose. But Jesus himself has told us that in terms of coming to the Father and praying to the Father, we should always pray through him and through his name. A couple other comments on this?

"Just one point worth mentioning. A few verses after that, when Christ is praying to the Father, he says [verse 22]: 'And they pray unto me because I am with them.' It was because he was in their presence."

Okay, so the point there, again, is read on and you'll find [the answer]. I tell my law students that's the first rule of statutory construction—read on. Usually you'll find a little more if you're puzzled about something. And so he says here, I am with you, so pray in that way also. You have at the end of chapter 12: "Be ye therefore perfect even as I or your Father which is in heaven." You've got there the merging in a way of the roles of the two, especially when Jesus was physically present there. Those are good points.

The discussion about the covenant relationship has imbedded in it also some interesting exhortations by Jesus telling us that we ought to study the scriptures; steering us toward the words

of Isaiah which are great; showing Jesus' concern about the accuracy of scriptural records to the point of having the Nephites produce their records, which he audits. I don't know how thorough the audit was, but at this time of preparing tax returns we can appreciate having your records produced and the audit going forward. But he found, of course, a place where he thought there was something important that had been left out—showing us the importance of each individual word and passage in the scripture.

And what you'll see here, I think, in the aftermath of the sermon is that Jesus is emphasizing certain things which we would emphasize. After a person has been brought into the Church through conversion, we tell them to do certain things, and what are they? To continue in prayer, to study, to attend church, and to do those basic kinds of things which Jesus again is setting forth for them.

We have then next a quotation from Malachi 3-4 toward the end of Jesus' second day. Why those chapters? Well, they pertain to the final judgment and to the day in which the Lord will come and the earth will be purged and burned. It tells about those who will be destroyed in the Second Coming and those who will survive the Second Coming. So the text fits again very profoundly into the overall context and the whole message. Again, it is not just a collage of unrelated materials that are being given to us, but if you read the entire thing [you can see that]. Victor Ludlow has done a good job of looking at the overall logic of this second-day covenant sermon. I commend to you some of the work that he's done on that.

We have also on day three the establishment of the church, starting in chapter 27; the giving of the name of the church; the explaining of the importance of the name of the church, that it is the church of Christ, it should be called after the name of Christ, etc. That's not just an idle thing, but it's related to the fact that the name of Christ has been taken upon these people by way of covenant and, therefore, the Church describes those people who have entered into this covenant relationship with Christ.

You have a number of miracles that are reported: raising of the dead, healing of the sick, seeing of great visions. In 3 Nephi 28:13: "They were caught up into heaven, and saw and heard unspeakable things." [The had] great experiences while Jesus was there with them.

He taught them for three days, but chapter 26:13 tells us that even after that he continued to appear to them on many occasions, so we don't know how many times he was there or how long this lasted. And even after that initial occurrence, the Book of Mormon will affirm that Moroni, for example, later in the history also was visited by the resurrected Christ.

The book of 3 Nephi then ends, as many covenant texts do in the ancient Near East, with a series of warnings and admonitions. Having entered into a covenant, people need to be reminded of the seriousness of what they have done. At the end of King Benjamin's covenant ceremony, Mosiah 6, the first order of business was to appoint priests to remind people of the covenant that they had entered into, to recall to their memory the seriousness of the commitments that they had made. So again as you see in many ancient Near Eastern covenant or treaty documents, it's appropriate to end with a number of *wo's*—wo to people who don't live up worthily to these things, wo to those who spurn the works of God, wo to them who deny the revelations of God, wo unto them that shall "say at that day, to get gain, that there can be no miracle wrought by Jesus Christ."

Finally, in chapter 30, [there are] exhortations to all the world to turn "from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness."

What was the effect of the establishment of the church of Christ among the Nephites? Well, we turn the corner into 4 Nephi and enter into the golden years, where for four generations the Nephites lived in great peace and unity and righteousness. In a way this is certainly the culmination of all that the Book of Mormon has been striving for. As the book speaks to our day, it is also the goal which we are still striving to attain. Let's just look at some of the attributes that these people took on and try to measure in a way how we're doing as we are striving toward a Zion community. I'm sure Brother Nibley will talk about this theme as well.

First of all, it seems to me that there was no government. I'm not sure what we make of that. Less government is better? Well, in an imperfect world maybe some government is better than no government, but in a perfect world, the less government the better. All of a sudden, with the law being gone, with the old being done away, you no more will read in the Book of Mormon about judges, about the reign of the judges or about the officers of the old system. All we have reported in the Book of Mormon after this point is the ecclesiastical rule of the disciples of Jesus Christ. We learn that if there are any disputes or problems, that three of the elders will go and will talk to the person and try to work the problem out. If it can't be worked out, then they are brought before the congregation. We try to get them to confess and work with them and if not, then there are ecclesiastical sanctions that can be brought. But there's no indication that you have prisons or courts or any of those things, which I take to mean that the Nephites took very literally the words of Jesus in 3 Nephi 12 or Matthew 5 about having no disputations and settling quickly with anyone that you are in controversy with. Coming from a law professor, this may sound odd to you, but the litigious nature of our society is something that is not healthy in most ways. There are better ways, in most cases, to resolve your problems than going to court.

While that had a profound and beneficial effect on the Nephites for about four generations, I also think that it ended up producing somewhat of a political or government vacuum in their world so that once the righteous basis of this society deteriorated, there was nothing left to take the place of the church; people began splintering off and forming other organizations. One thing that is astonishing as you look at the Book of Mormon record is the rapid collapse and demise of something that was so good. How was it that it came unraveled so quickly? I think one reason is, as I've explained, that if you've taken away your military, your governmental superstructure, all of your political organization and all that you leave besides the church is something of a tribal or family substructure of the society, there won't be anything left to fall back to, once the religious fervor of the people and their righteousness is gone. I think that presents a realistic view and shows that the Book of Mormon record isn't just fantastic—that all of this could collapse so quickly. I think it's only logical after this kind of an experience.

Well, what other kinds of clues do we have? Go to 4 Nephi and look through some of the first twenty verses. Pick out some of the characteristics that this society enjoyed. Number one, they were all converted to the Lord. It wasn't their economic philosophy, it wasn't their political ideology that brought about this kind of unity. It was their conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ—their faith in him and their willingness to submit to whatsoever the Lord required. That then brought on a number of gifts and made it possible for other things to happen, such as the elimination of contentions or disputations. The text certifies that those things were done away.

Verse 2: "Every man did deal justly one with another." We have a long way to go in that regard. Verse 3: "And they had all things common among them." It appears to me that for a long time the Nephite economy was based on the principle of common ownership of land. Even in Israel there was no such thing as fee-simple, absolute ownership of real estate. The land of Israel belonged to God. A person in the tribe of Manasseh or Benjamin or whatever could be assigned to occupy land during his lifetime and had a life interest that could then be passed on to proper heirs, but a person in the house of Israel could not sell his land on the open market to a non-Israelite without there being a right of redemption, so that any other person in the tribe could come and redeem that land. Also, the farmland outside the community was typically not owned

privately, but at the beginning of every agricultural season the town fathers would meet and by lot they would assign each of the men the particular strip of land that they would farm. That would go to people who were able to farm. As people got older they would get smaller lots, and the stronger men would be given larger ones. It only makes sense because how else are you going to get the crops raised?

In Mesoamerica a similar kind of thing was the common practice, where people would come in as managers. Since the people who had vested interests within the city often would squabble about how these assignments would be made, it was somewhat common for outside managers to come in and make these kinds of allocations of land distribution on an annual basis. I've wondered if that sort of mentality didn't contribute somehow to the willingness of the Mulekites to have the Nephites come in as a minority party and manage their political affairs in the city of Zarahemla. I think they got more than they bargained for there, more than just managers. But the point I'm making is that as you look into some of the assumptions that existed in this world economically, having all things in common was not as difficult for them to achieve as it would be for us, where so much of what we have is completely privatized. Of course, they then turned in the Nephite world to other symbols of wealth, mostly gold and silver and costly apparel, tangible personal property, things that are portable. I guess if you're pulling up stakes as frequently as they did to move from one city to another, the real basis of wealth isn't going to be in the land but in these other kinds of things.

But imbedded in that whole view of property is this idea that what is mine is not mine in a radical individual sense. It is mine [in that] it is entrusted to me for stewardship. It belongs to the community in some sense, and I have an obligation to work the land or to use what I have for a common benefit and not just for my personal aggrandizement. I think that's the attitude that the gospel is still trying to get us back to in teaching us the principle of the law of consecration—even the law of tithing. The law of tithing is simple to live if you realize that it is all the Lord's to begin with, and all he's asking from you is a mere ten percent of his own. Therefore when we don't pay tithing, we are robbing God because it belongs to him and we are keeping something that doesn't belong to us at all.

They understood that and they implemented that. They had all things in common, and that produced, of course, great unity. "There were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift." [They were] all equal in the church, all equal in the community, and this brought about, of course, extraordinary peace in the land.

What other clues do you see there? A lot of health. The Lord blessed them with health. He healed the sick. The disciples saw that there were blessings individually given to people. They were productive. We talk a lot these days about self-esteem, and I think one of the best ways to get a little self-esteem going in the lives of the youth you may be working with is to help them have some success experiences. The Lord prospers people when they are doing righteous things and when they are being productive. Fourth Nephi points out that the blessings of the Lord, the rebuilding of cities, the productivity that brought about again great self-esteem and good feelings about this.

Verse 11: They were married and given in marriage. The importance of family [is evident], and notice that verse 11 couples the blessings of marriage and the blessings that come from this in this society with the promises which the Lord had made unto them. What promises had the Lord made in connection with marriage? Well, we don't know. At least I'm not aware of any place in the text where those promises are spelled out. You can imagine what they might be, but there's a clue that Jesus promised them something that would be in that 99th portion of the text that we are missing.

They fasted, they prayed, they met together often, and they listened to the word of the Lord. As a result, this led again to no contention, no competition, no WAC basketball conference championships—things like that, I guess. What does it lead to? [A condition] (verse 15) caused because the love of God dwells in their heart. Let's not lose sight of the importance of the great and unifying commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, might, mind, and strength." That's what it's all about. We talk a great deal about obedience, being saved by obedience to the principles of the gospel, but what does it all lead to? Why are we out here running around being obedient? King Benjamin gives you an answer to that in Mosiah 5:13. He says if you want to know the Master, you have to serve the Master, "For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served?" The purpose is to bring us to the love of God and allow us to return our love for our Father in Heaven. I think they achieved that, and they note that specifically in the text.

Well, as you know, this was too good to last for very long. Just as it is interesting to ponder the attributes that made this unity and righteousness possible, the text is also very explicit in the steps that took place in the undoing of this golden era. What was number one? You go to verse 24. They multiply, they spread upon the face of the land, and the first twinge of difficulty is what?

"Pride."

They were lifted up in pride, and they began this just by the wearing of costly apparel, fine pearls, and things of the world. [These are] fairly simple sorts of things. You think, well, that's innocuous, but as President Benson has powerfully communicated to us, that's the front end of a very slippery slope, with a long and rapid decline. Yes?

"Wouldn't the division start in verse 20 when the people started separating into Lamanites again?"

Well, okay, they begin to have Lamanites. It's not identified as a sin, I guess, is what I thought of. It is possible as the land gets larger and larger that there has to be some kind of political subdivision. But maybe you're right. [Comment inaudible]

I don't think he says that there shouldn't be, but verse 17 up above says that in fact there weren't any -ites.

"It says one of the reasons they became Lamanites is that they revolted from the church."

Verse 20: "... a small part of the people who had revolted from the church and had taken upon them the name of the Lamanites; therefore there began to be Lamanites again in the land." Well, okay, so first of all you've got some splintering, and that creates a bit of a problem. I guess I was thinking more internally—what's happening among the righteous and within the church itself? As is typically the case in the Book of Mormon, the problem begins internally with the concern of pride. But that's a good point.

"The only thing I can think of that would cause that is pride."

Yes, why would certain people want to revolt and become Lamanites again? It could be their own pride, wanting to reaffirm their own cultural diversity, or it could be something that was aggravated by the unwillingness of certain Nephites to accept the Lamanites— reminding them perhaps of the fact that in their history were traditions of the fathers that were not acceptable, etc. These labels die very slow, lingering deaths, and we certainly have not been able to rid ourselves of all of these labels either.

As President Benson's talk indicates, this pride manifests itself in all kinds of ways; it's not just a haughty feeling. I assume you have all read his conference talk from a year ago. If you haven't, keep it on your desk and keep looking at that, because it's the word of the prophet to us and certainly something crucial for our well-being.

This, of course, then leads in verse 25 to the privatizing of goods, the division next in verse 26 into class structures, and the conversion of their economy into a monetary-based economy where people try to get gain. Then this leads to the denial of the fact that there was a true church. Everybody's okay; there are a lot of good ways to live—that kind of mentality. That then leads, before too much longer, to the denial of parts of the gospel, which is the logical inference that you must draw from the idea that there are many true churches. Well, if there are many acceptable churches, then certain parts of the gospel must not be very important because they all don't have the same parts. That then leads to a breakdown of the distinction between the sacred and the profane, which at the end of verse 27 you see happening. They then become willing to administer that which is sacred, even to those to whom it had been forbidden.

Well, this process continues on into the end of the Book of Mormon. I like Brother Nibley's collection of words, which you will find in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* volume on pages 530-31. He looks at this long-term process and says first they became privatized. Then they became ethnicized—they taught their children to hate the Nephites or the Lamanites. Then they became nationalized, militarized, terrorized, regionalized, tribalized, fragmentized, polarized, pulverized—and eventually vaporized. That's what's in store there.

I'd like to turn my attention now to just a few comments about the Book of Mormon in general and these chapters that we've been looking at. The Book of Mormon is one of these amazing books to me that is going to wear us all out long before we will ever wear it out. It is amazing to me how a book that is so simple can be so complex, how a book that is so accessible to the Primary children of the Church can also be so challenging to a room of very bright young students like yourselves. This book is a miraculous book in many, many ways, and one of its miracles is the way in which it has so many characteristics and attributes and dimensions and features so that every time you come back to the book, it speaks to you in a new way—partly because you are now in a different position in your life. It spoke to me differently as a teenager than it did as a missionary, than it did as a young father, than it did as a bishop, etc. You'll find that as you go through life, if you will take it with you as a companion, it will talk to you. No matter where you are, it will meet you on its terms. It will come to you and meet you on your ground—whether you are sinful, or doing a pretty good job with righteousness, whether you are well informed in the gospel or whether you are the most recent convert. It will speak to you, and it will reflect to you the true condition of humanity, the true state of how we are to return to our Father in Heaven, and what the plan of the gospel is all about. I've got my list of words: I think the book reflects reality, profundity, accuracy, subtlety, complexity, antiquity, artistry, variety, verity, remarkability, and a lot of other -ities. You can keep going on and on.

I'd like to just mention a couple of these and illustrate the point I'm trying to make. Look at reality. There are few books in the world that speak the truth as bluntly to individuals and to whole societies as does the Book of Mormon. It tells it the way it really is. It talks about reality. Just look at that cycle of nations that we see in the rise and the fall—what made the Nephite nation great and what finally brought about its undoing. Profundity: Look at the little phrases. Imbedded in these texts are profound truths about the real nature of what's going on between you and the eternal worlds. Take something as simple as the teaching of repentance in 3 Nephi 18:32. We can think about repentance as a revolving door, where every time you repent you run to the bishop and get this taken care of. We even talk about that. I've got to go "take care" of this with the bishop. Repentance isn't "taking care" of anything. Repentance in Book of Mormon terms is more profound. It talks about returning and repenting with full purpose of heart. There's a profound message in the return aspect of repenting, rethinking, and returning to the Lord with

full purpose of heart. Repentance isn't complete until we have really meant what we are doing. Brother Nibley has said there are only two things in this world that we can do very well. We can't build very good buildings—they come falling down after a few years. We can't build very big dams—they get washed out after a while. We can't paint perfect pictures. We can't do anything very perfectly. But the two things we can do perfectly are to *repent* and *forgive*. Forgive ourselves, forgive other people, and come to the Lord, to return to him with full purpose of heart. The Book of Mormon, I think, tells us a lot about that.

Accuracy: The Book of Mormon is incredibly accurate as a text. We look at something like 3 Nephi 26:4-5. These are Jesus' last words at the end of the second day. He spoke about "the great and last day, when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues will stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—If they be good, to the resurrection of everlasting life; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of damnation."

We won't take time right now, but compare that with Helaman 12:25-26. As Mormon was giving that [speech] about the dust of the earth being greater than man because the dust of the earth will obey, he concluded his chapter by saying, "But we read that in the great and last day there are some who shall be cast out, yea, who shall be cast off from the presence of the Lord." We will stand before God to be judged. "They that have done good shall have everlasting life; and they that have done evil shall have everlasting damnation." Now it is interesting. He doesn't say as we read and then tell you where, but somewhere he has read that. Where has he read it? He has read it exactly here in 3 Nephi 26. Now, he hasn't yet abridged 3 Nephi 26, but he knows it is there. He has read it, and he quotes the text. That's really rather remarkable. Here you have Joseph Smith going along translating, and he quotes a text that he hasn't even encountered yet, which he will later find in 3 Nephi 26.

Same thing happens in Alma 36:22. In the middle of Alma's conversion story, where he's telling Helaman about how he was converted, he says that his soul did long to be in the presence of God and he thought he saw "even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God." Twenty-two words there in Alma 36 are not just a loose paraphrase, but an identical, word-for-word quote of 1 Nephi 1:8. And at the time Alma 36 was translated, 1 Nephi 1 had not yet been translated. Again, a remarkable occurrence of a quotation that's very, very precise. Imagine that Joseph Smith as he was translating along turned to Oliver Cowdery and said, hey, here we want to quote Lehi. Read back to me what we had Lehi say back in the first part of this or that. Oliver Cowdery would have walked off the job. And yet the text is accurate, down to some of these minute details.

Subtlety: That's a master of understatement. When Jesus says you should settle quickly with people in your way, he says you won't come out of that jail until you've paid the very last senine. Well, a senine, of course, is a monetary unit of exchange in the Nephite world. It happens to be the smallest gold unit, but not the smallest coin, because the silver neas was a smaller amount of money. But in subtlety it doesn't tell you why he's using a senine there. But if you go back to Alma 11, you'll find that is the amount of money that a Nephite had to pay a judge for a day's service on the court. So there's a reason for that. But the Book of Mormon doesn't tell you all these reasons. It gives us more credit than it ought to. It assumes that we'll be smart enough to figure some of these things out.

We'll take one of the last ones, artistry. We've only got a minute to point out something here. Some of you may have encountered some passages that have been described as chiasmic in the Book of Mormon. I was the one who on my mission in Germany first ran across chiasmus in Book of Mormon studies and came back to BYU to do my master's thesis under Brother Nibley on that subject. So I have been blessed in my life with an appreciation, and many share this, of the artistry of this text—it's amazing. Look, for example, at 3 Nephi 17:5-10, the account of the healing of the sick in that text. Verses 6-7 have a little chiasm imbedded in them. Look at the

repetition. “Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you. Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither.” Then he lists eight different types of sickness that they should bring, and then he repeats himself. “Bring them hither and I will heal them [the sick will be healed], for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy.”

Now this isn't just a cute little device that somebody's using; it's employed in the text to intensify our sense of contrast and feeling for what is going on. This is done beautifully as you compare verse 5 with verse 10. Notice in verse 5 the beginning of this account of the healing of the sick. The emphasis is upon the eyes. Three times Jesus casts his eyes around about the people, and he sees that they have tears coming down their eyes, and they look as if they would want him to stay. They look steadfastly upon him. You have three impressions of the eyes of the people there. And at the end, what happens? They all bring forth their sick who had been healed, and three times the emphasis is now on the feet. They bow down at his feet; they worship and kiss his feet; and they bathe his feet now with their tears, bringing you back again to the beginning of the system. The people from their eyes to their feet have experienced Christ. Literarily the piece is beautifully done to help you feel that you with your eyes can see what has gone on, and that with your feet you can walk the path that Christ would like you to.

I'm glad to share with you my testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. I hope and pray that it will become a great light and companion and a happy friend in your life forever. And I leave you this testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.