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Abstract Review of *Timely Truths from the Book of Mormon* (1995),
by Allan K. Burgess.

Allan K. Burgess. *Timely Truths from the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995. 130 pp., with index. \$8.95.

Reviewed by Amy L. Livingstone

Timely Truths from the Book of Mormon by Allan K. Burgess consists of fourteen chapters, each constructed very loosely around a gospel topic partially supported by excerpts from the Book of Mormon. The book appears to be directed toward a readership that is less familiar with the basic content of the Book of Mormon and Latter-day Saint doctrine. Such an audience may find the book's anecdotal nature accessible. However, those looking for a scholarly treatment of Book of Mormon themes are likely to be disappointed by the book's structural weakness and its shallow approach to the subject matter.

The lack of introduction or preface of any sort leaves Burgess's objectives and the book's intended readership unclear. The back cover of the book announces that it "focuses on the relevance of the Nephite record to everyday concerns," but I often found only a minimal connection made between the two. Both the Book of Mormon and contemporary challenges are addressed, but their relationship remains vague. For example, chapter 4 is entitled "An Infinite Atonement: 2 Nephi 9." I expected to read relevant citations from Jacob's teachings about Christ's sacrifice and mercy, but in ten pages of text, only one brief reference is made to this important passage of scripture. Other chapters contain sections listing only the basic events and characters of the cited scriptures, without any commentary at all. While Burgess does use many scriptural references from the Book of Mormon, he relies most heavily on stories and quotations from the *Ensign* and other anecdotal sources to support his points.

The book's most apparent weakness is Burgess's failure to dig below the surface for any novel insight into the numerous gospel themes he tackles. Readers looking for a motivational (as opposed

to instructional) text will fare better than those expecting a new approach to Book of Mormon scholarship. Burgess states the obvious, without attempting to probe behind truisms and clichés for deeper substance. Topics ranging from adversity and repentance to missionary work and warfare are brought up but not pursued beyond rote seminary understanding. Ironically, he writes about this very problem in his book:

Sometimes we feel that we understand some gospel principle so well that we fail to continue to study and learn about that particular principle. It may be taught so often or seem so simple that when we have to give a lesson or a talk on the subject we just refer to the information we have used in the past. (pp. 45–6)

Burgess has filled this book with information that most Latter-day Saints have heard and often “used in the past.” As a result, I was left feeling unsatisfied and slightly bored, as though I’d been reading a rambling series of Sunday School lessons rather than a commentary on deeper themes of the Book of Mormon.

One way to add more depth and insight would have been to broaden the scope of reference material used. It seemed to me that an excessive amount of the content was purely anecdotal (at the expense of anything new by way of knowledge). To be certain, some stories from the lives of Church leaders are inspirational, assisting the reader in personalizing the application of gospel concepts. Many of the other stories, however, could easily have been omitted as they are dull and add little that is unique or meaningful, not to mention that some lack credibility or are factually inaccurate.¹ In addition, while scriptural texts and statements from General Authorities are the foundation for understanding gospel principles, consideration of the growing body of scholarly literature on the Book of Mormon should also enhance a believer’s search for new ways to comprehend and apply these texts.

A final oversight was the lack of information about the author. Since I am not familiar with Allan Burgess or his work, a

¹ For example a story is cited on page 4 as “heard by the author at a stake conference in February 1994,” and the BYU cheerleader story on pages 77–8 implies that BYU won a national football championship in 1990, when in fact that championship was won in 1984.

biographical sketch or even a simple sentence about his background and his qualifications would have been very reassuring. Data of this sort would lend weight to the author's exhortations.

In conclusion, those who wish to learn or be reminded of basic gospel teachings from the Book of Mormon may find this book useful. The publisher's note on the back cover promises a "deeper, more practical understanding of gospel themes." Realization of this promise will be confined to those who have only a limited understanding to begin with. Most are likely to consider this book bland and unoriginal, and serious scriptural students will probably find time spent with the Book of Mormon itself more satisfying and beneficial.