

The Ongoing Restoration

GARY E. STEVENSON

To all of you, I bring the greetings of the First Presidency, who never fail to extend their love to the Latter-day Saints wherever and whenever we assemble under their direction.

In October 2018, my wife, Lesa, and I accompanied President Russell M. Nelson and Sister Wendy Watson Nelson to South America for President Nelson's ministry tour. During our final few days there, we were in Chile for the Concepción Chile Temple dedication. I was blessed to be able to sit next to President Nelson during the final press conference and interview when he said:

This is a global ministry. We're prophets for the whole world—all of God's children, not just the members of the Church. So on this tour we've talked to people in five different countries. There are 200 countries in the world and more. Five is such a small drop in the bucket. Yes, we'll get around, but we'll still miss more than we'll touch. But we'll try. We won't give up just because it's a big job.

We're just at the exponential phase of growth, yes, but it will continue. The Lord said, "I will hasten my work in its time" [D&C 88:73], and He makes good on His promises.

*We are witnesses to a process of restoration. If you think the Church has been **fully restored**, you are just seeing the beginning. There's much more to come.*

*Wait until next year—and then the next year. Eat your vitamin pills. Get your rest. It's going to be exciting!*¹

Well, it is exciting, isn't it? The work is being hastened, and we see the work hastened by our dear, loving prophet, President Nelson. It was an absolute thrill for me to be able to hear him speak and testify of this, knowing all that has taken place since the Restoration of the Lord's true and living Church in the early 1800s. We are blessed to have this prophet in our day who continues the Lord's work that began almost 200 years ago in Upstate New York in the Sacred Grove, where God the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith.

I refer now to a valuable and instructive statement found in *Preach My Gospel* for missionaries

Gary E. Stevenson, member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, delivered this Campus Education Week address on August 20, 2019.

that seems relevant for me right now: “Whatever your initial approach, refer quickly and simply to the Restoration of the gospel, for this is our unique message to the world.”²

I would like to share with you some of my thoughts and my testimony of the Restoration of the gospel.

The Miraculous Miracle of the Book of Mormon

I invite you to travel back in time to the early 1800s to 1829, almost exactly 190 years ago, to a small group of mostly what we would call millennials today. Look at their ages:

Joseph Smith	23 years old
Emma Smith	24 years old
Oliver Cowdery	22 years old
David Whitmer	24 years old
E. B. Grandin	23 years old
Martin Harris	45 years old
Peter Whitmer	55 years old

I find it remarkable that the Lord chose this young of an age group to introduce the dispensation of the fulness of times.

To help you adjust to your travel back to 1829, let me create some context for you. It was just nine years earlier, in April 1820, that Joseph Smith experienced the First Vision at age fourteen, with the appearance of God, our Eternal Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Only six years earlier, in September 1823, Moroni, a Book of Mormon prophet, appeared to Joseph for the first time and, among other things, described a record that Joseph would later translate and over which he would become an important steward. Joseph was then directed to Hill Cumorah, and every September from 1823 to 1827, he was tutored there and prepared by Moroni for the day that he would take into his possession the ancient record engraved upon plates with the appearance of gold.

Indeed, after Joseph Smith had taken possession of the plates in 1828, he began translation with Martin Harris as his primary scribe. Their work continued long enough to create a manuscript that was 116 pages in length.

Through a series of events, Martin Harris persuaded Joseph, against instructions previously given by the Lord, to allow him temporary possession of the 116-page manuscript. It was subsequently lost by Martin Harris. This caused much anguish for Joseph Smith and his family. As a result, Joseph lost his gift of translation and his possession of the plates for a time.

Which brings us back to 1829, with the small group mentioned above, as well as others, who were instruments in the hands of the Lord.

On April 7, 1829, Oliver Cowdery, accompanied by Joseph’s brother Samuel Smith, knocked on the door of Joseph and Emma’s home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, with an inspired offer by Oliver to assist in the translation of the ancient record by acting as his scribe. Here is a depiction of that event.

[A video was shown in which, after Samuel Smith introduces Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith, Joseph tells Oliver that he has been expecting him. He also tells him how he obtained the plates and that they will translate them “by the gift and power of God.” The two begin translation of the Book of Mormon, with Oliver as scribe to Joseph.³]

What we just viewed is the first step of our walk through eighty-five stunning and miraculous days following the day that Oliver met Joseph and Emma for the first time. It is clear that the heavens were opened and a waterfall of revelation and manifestation commenced in a special and unusual way.

Together, Joseph and Oliver, through the months of April, May, and June, recommenced the work of translation. By June 30 they completed the translation and recording of the Book of Mormon on 491 pages composed of 269,510 words. Some years later Oliver would reflect that “these were days never to be forgotten.”⁴

In discussing the translation, President Nelson said in 2016:

How the translation was accomplished is not fully known because the Prophet deliberately said little about that sacred task. Yet we do have a few precious insights. God prepared sacred objects to assist Joseph with the translation. Interpreters were buried with the golden

*plates. Joseph used the interpreters, and other seer stones that the Lord provided, in the translation process. Such instruments were used by prophets throughout scriptural history to translate texts and receive divine communications.*⁵

What we do know is that what was done is an absolute miracle, even by today's standards, with modern tools of electronic dictionaries, word processing, and machine learning in translation. The pace and subsequent work product are almost unthinkable! President Nelson has fondly referred to the translation of the Book of Mormon as "a miraculous miracle."⁶

Yet there is more. Those eighty-five days in the spring of 1829 brought much more than translation and recording duties. Remarkably, monumental elements of the Restoration took place in this time as well. These, too, required the time and attention of Joseph and Oliver, drawing them away from their translation efforts. Each of these activities has been carefully analyzed, and scholars believe that, in reality, the actual time available for translation was only sixty to sixty-five estimated working days.

When one considers what other events occurred in April, May, and June of 1829, the translation is even more impressive. I have summarized some, but not all, of the documented events that would have taken away from Book of Mormon translation time:

- John the Baptist restored the Aaronic priesthood.
- Peter, James, and John restored the Melchizedek priesthood.
- Thirteen sections of the Doctrine and Covenants were received and recorded.

Each one of these events is a story and a miracle in and of itself. In film we can view a depiction of just one of these miracles—the Lord's hand in setting up the relocation of Joseph and Emma to Fayette, New York, where David Whitmer lived with his parents, the Peter Whitmer family. This story demonstrates how temporal, even seemingly mundane events occurred through miracles.

[A video was shown in which David Whitmer receives a letter from Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith asking if they can come to the Peter Whitmer home, as directed by the Lord, to escape persecution and finish translating the Book of Mormon without interruption. David's father, Peter, responds that they have too many mouths to feed and so much work to do on the farm that they cannot accommodate them. Later, Peter agrees that if David finishes the plowing, he will reconsider letting Joseph and Oliver stay in their home. David begins plowing, but the progress is slow. He prays, asking that, if this is God's work, a way be prepared for the Whitmers to be a part of it. The next morning Peter and David find the field completely plowed. Peter tells David to take the wagon and bring Joseph and Oliver to their home.⁷]

This is one of the beautiful lesser-known miracles of the Restoration. And there are more. Here are additional events taking place in this eighty-five-day window:

- Application for a copyright for the Book of Mormon was made and received.
- Joseph began and ended the tedious process of finding a printer for the Book of Mormon.
- Joseph secured the financing of the Book of Mormon, arranged through the gracious pledge of Martin Harris's farm for collateral.
- Finally, the long-awaited day came for the three witnesses to view the plates with the angel.
- This was followed by the viewing of the plates by the eight witnesses.

One of the eight witnesses, Hiram Page, a son-in-law of Peter Whitmer, later in life reaffirmed his testimony of the Book of Mormon and of Joseph Smith as its divine translator. He said:

*To say that a man of Joseph's ability, who at that time did not know how to pronounce the word Nephi, could write a book of six hundred pages, as correct as the book of Mormon, without supernatural power . . . , would be treating the God of heaven with contempt, to deny these testimonies.*⁸

I add my own personal witness to Hiram’s.

My dear brothers and sisters, consider what we have learned—eighty-five miraculous days. Imagine accomplishing the complete translation of the Book of Mormon and all the additional events just described in about two weeks less time than that of a typical semester at BYU. That is what Joseph Smith did.

Over many years I have studied intently the events surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. If we had the time, we could also spend another hour on the concurrent miraculous preparation for its printing to take place.

My conclusion, as a result of my deep dive into the events surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, is that it is truly a heavenly directed miracle. Its origins are irrefutable.

Another Testament of Jesus Christ

But there is more, isn’t there?

President Nelson has said:

The value of the Book of Mormon lies not in the miracle of its translation, miraculous as it was. The great worth of the Book of Mormon is that it is another testament of Jesus Christ. Its four major authors—Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni—were all eyewitnesses of the Lord, as was Joseph, the inspired translator of that book.⁹

We have discussed the miracles associated with the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon, but miracles don’t cease there. Each and every day, miracles surrounding the Book of Mormon continue. Imagine: within our grasp is another testament of Christ. Joseph Smith described its significance in the Book of Mormon’s introduction:

I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.¹⁰

The power of the Book of Mormon comes in the mighty change that comes into the lives of those who read it “with a sincere heart, with real intent,

having faith in Christ” (Moroni 10:4). I believe this is why the Prophet Joseph Smith defined it as “the keystone of our religion.” The Book of Mormon is the engine that powers conversion and a change of heart, leading us closer to Jesus Christ.

Allow me to share a story to demonstrate this. Four missionaries, a senior couple, and two elders serving in Micronesia walked into the only attorney’s office on the tiny island on which they were serving. They had a problem: they needed an amendment to a birth certificate for a membership record of a girl in their branch.

Previously the municipal office had had no sympathy for their request. They had said it would be too hard, and it didn’t matter anyway since “we all know her and know when she was born!” So the city had turned down the missionaries’ request. It was suggested that the missionaries go to the only attorney’s office on the island, where they met a highly educated and deeply respected man.

The missionaries sat across from him at his desk and described their plight, to which he replied that within thirty days he would get an amended birth certificate.

At this point he stood up and walked around his desk, closed the door to his office, walked back around his desk, opened his desk drawer, and placed a worn-out Book of Mormon on his desk. Much to their surprise, he then stated, “I have been reading your book for more than twenty years, and I know it is true. It was given to me by a fellow student when I was studying in the United States.”

He handed the book to the missionaries. They each marveled at the marked-up book.

“I can’t join your church because I smoke two to three packs of cigarettes a day, my family would be devastated, and I would likely lose my job.”

The missionaries replied, “We can help.” And they did. The teaching was easy because he already had a testimony of the Book of Mormon. With some time and help, he overcame his smoking habit, which was much harder for him. And although his family was upset, especially his wife, he was baptized just months later on Christmas Day.

He began to share stories from the Book of Mormon and hymns of the Restoration with his wife. She too gained a testimony, and two months later she was baptized. Since then, most of their children have also been baptized, and this attorney has served as a leader in the branch.

The Book of Mormon *is* a miracle, and it brings forth miracles that lead to happiness and lasting joy.

I am not aware of another book anywhere else of which Jesus Christ Himself testified of its truth. In describing the work Joseph was called to do, the Lord declared: “He has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true” (D&C 17:6).

Read the Book of Mormon

Let me conclude by asking you, What are you going to do? How do you make the Book of Mormon your keystone to your testimony of Jesus Christ?

We start by becoming personally familiar with it, by reading, pondering, and praying about its truthfulness. We could think about the devotion it took from the Prophet Joseph Smith to get the book to us. We could perhaps resolve to spend more time reading it. It is so simple for us—we all have it with us almost continually. Take some of your screen time or time you use for other pursuits and make it “Book of Mormon screen time.” It really is simple.

How about at least ten minutes a day?

I would like to share my testimony with you by sharing the testimony of my second-great-grandfather Edward Stevenson, who, as a fourteen-year-old boy in 1834, listened to and recorded the testimony of Joseph Smith, who had come to his community in Pontiac, Michigan, and had spoken in the old log schoolhouse. It changed his life. Here is what Edward Stevenson said:

I can very well remember many of the words of the boy Prophet as they were uttered in simplicity, but with a power which was irresistible to all present. . . . Here are some of the Prophet’s words. With uplifted hand he said: “I am a witness that there is a God, for I saw

*Him in open day, while praying in a silent grove, in the spring of 1820.” He further testified that God, the Eternal Father, pointing to a separate personage, in the likeness of Himself, said: “This is my Beloved Son hear ye Him.” O how these words thrilled my entire system and filled me with joy unspeakable to behold one who, like Paul the apostle of olden time, could with boldness testify that he had been in the presence of Jesus Christ!*¹¹

Brothers and sisters, I conclude with my testimony of each of these heavenly events that we have considered today. They are all elements of the ongoing Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the restored Church of Jesus Christ—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

It fills me with unspeakable joy to know that Jesus Christ stands at the head of this Church, that the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God and is the word of God, that Joseph Smith was the Prophet of this final dispensation, and that President Nelson is the Lord’s living prophet and mouthpiece on the earth today.

Finally, I bear my witness of Jesus Christ, to whom the Book of Mormon leads us, and of His sacred role as our beloved Savior and Redeemer. I offer that testimony and witness to you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, in “Interview with President Nelson and Elder Stevenson in Chile,” Church Newsroom, YouTube video, 30 October 2018, 5:09–6:28, [youtube.com/watch?v=hOc2R2IpK7w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOc2R2IpK7w); emphasis added.

2. PMG, 159.

3. *Days of Harmony* (2015), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, video shown at the visitors’ center at the Priesthood Restoration Site, Oakland Township, Pennsylvania, 6:06–8:57, [churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2018-03-1000-days-of-harmony?category=historic-sites&lang=eng](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2018-03-1000-days-of-harmony?category=historic-sites&lang=eng); quoting Joseph Smith, letter to John Wentworth, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842): 707; also HC 4:537 and Joseph Smith, “The Wentworth Letter,” *Ensign*, July 2002.

4. Joseph Smith—History 1:71, footnote.

5. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: A Miraculous Miracle,” seminar for new mission presidents, 23 June 2016, 2; emphasis in original. See also Nelson, “Transcript: President Russell M. Nelson Remarks and Dedicatory Prayer at Priesthood Restoration Site,” Oakland Township, Pennsylvania, 19 September 2015, newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/priesthood-restoration-site-dedication-transcript.

6. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon,” 2.

7. *A Day for the Eternities* (2016), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, video shown at the visitors’ center at the Peter Whitmer log home,

Fayette, New York, 2:08–5:29, [churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2018-03-2000-a-day-for-the-eternities?category=historic-sites&lang=eng](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2018-03-2000-a-day-for-the-eternities?category=historic-sites&lang=eng).

8. Hiram Page, letter to William E. McLellan, ed., Ray County, Missouri, 30 May 1847, in *The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ* 1, no. 4 (January 1848): 63.

9. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon,” 3.

10. Introduction to the Book of Mormon; see also HC 4:461 (28 November 1841).

11. Edward Stevenson, “In Early Days: The Home of My Boyhood,” *Juvenile Instructor* 29, no. 14 (15 July 1894): 444.