



Rel 121: Introduction to the Book of Mormon

(1 Nephi 1—Alma 29)

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.” (2 Nephi 31:20)



“This Is the Christ,” Mormon Tabernacle Choir

“We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet”

(hymn 19)

We thank thee, O God for a prophet
To guide us in these latter days.
We thank thee for sending the gospel
To lighten our minds with its rays.
We thank thee for every blessing
Bestowed by thy bounteous hand.
We feel it a pleasure to serve thee,
And love to obey thy command.

When dark clouds of trouble hang o'er us
And threaten our peace to destroy,
There is hope smiling brightly before us,
And we know that deliverance is nigh.
We doubt not the Lord nor his goodness.
We've proved him in days that are past.
The wicked who fight against Zion
Will surely be smitten at last.

We'll sing of his goodness and mercy.
We'll praise him by day and by night,
Rejoice in his glorious gospel,
And bask in his life giving light.
Thus on to eternal perfection
The honest and faithful will go,
While they who reject this glad
message
Shall never such happiness know.

Choosing a Religion Section

- Taking a religion class at BYU is an important part of a student's university experience
 - Fortunately, numerous sections of each course are offered in any given semester or term, allowing students to be selective in the classes that they take
- Although each section of the same course covers the same scriptural material, **sections differ in their approach and in the teaching philosophies and styles of their instructors**
 - Consider carefully the objectives of a given section, the personality and teaching style of the professor, and the way the course is organized
 - **Read the syllabus carefully by next class meeting**
- **You are most welcome in this section and hopefully it will add to your understanding and appreciation of the scriptures**
 - On the other hand, *you are also free to change sections if this does not seem like the experience that you want*

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Affiliate Faculty, Classics and Ancient History

- Academic Background
 - BYU alumnus: BA (1990) in Classical Greek and Latin
 - MA and Ph.D. (University of Pennsylvania: 1992, 1997) in Ancient History
 - More details at Bio link at <http://www.erichuntsman.com>
- Church Background
 - Thailand Bangkok Mission (1984-85)
 - Former bishop (1996-2002)
 - Current Provo Temple ordinance worker, member of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir
- Contact Information
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Samuel, Eric, Rachel, and Elaine



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Course Description

- A sequential study of the doctrines, principles, and narrative of the Book of Mormon
 - This semester: 1 Nephi 1—Alma 29
 - Journey of Lehi's family to the Promised Land
 - Establishment of the Nephite and Lamanite civilizations
 - Ministries of King Benjamin, Mosiah, Alma, etc.
- As “the most correct book,” particularly regarding matters of faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - Another witness of the Savior
 - “Fulness” of the gospel? See 3 Nephi 27:13–35, with the focus on what Christ has done for us and how we apply his sacrifice
 - A source for the foundational doctrines regarding the Atonement and the Plan of Salvation
- As a text, we will work to appreciate the literary artistry of its authors and abridgers
 - Identify its structures, imagery, and themes

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Course Objectives

- First, to increase the student's knowledge of the Book of Mormon
 - familiarize him or her with the basic content, themes and theological concepts of its constituent books
- Second, to help the student read, discuss, and write about the Book of Mormon as both a source of scriptural knowledge and as a sacred text
 - Ask basic historical, literary, and theological questions (a process known as “exegesis,” from the Greek “to lead out” or explain; *more in second lecture*)
- Third, to strengthen individual testimonies of sacred truths
 - particularly by an increasing our understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ and the doctrines of the Restoration
 - What did the Book of Mormon prophets teach about Christ
 - How have latter-day apostles and prophets helped us understand their writings?

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Course Requirements

Review after class

- Texts (LDS Standard Works, course packet)
- Online resources
 - <http://erichuntsman.com/rel122> ; Blackboard
- Attendance and class lectures
- Assessment
 - Quizzes, exams, paper, final exam
- Class discussions, quizzes, and exams will be formatted with the course's three overarching objectives in mind.
 - **Identifications** (scriptural knowledge)
 - **Scriptural commentary** (understanding and analyzing scripture as text)
 - **Essay questions** (understanding doctrine to strengthen testimony)

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Grading Policies

Review after class

- Straight points
 - students earn grades, teachers do not give them
- Syllabus, appendix A for religion courses at BYU
- ***In no way should the grading of a religion class be considered an evaluation of one's testimony or sincerity***
 - Difference between a university-level religious education course and seminary and institute . . .
 - While testimonies should be strengthened by a serious study and discussion of the scriptures, students are evaluated on their mastery of the material covered in class
- **Students are responsible for the grades that they earn**
 - ***if one needs a certain grade for academic reasons, then he or she should plan accordingly***

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Class Preparation

Read background material in the packet before beginning each text

- **Read the assigned scriptural text**
 - Use the outlines in the packet as a “road map”
 - Follow suggested reading strategies and approaches (see slide below)
- Review class presentations
 - Posted on Blackboard and on class website
 - The instructor may chose to focus on some slides more than others in class, understanding, needs and discussion dictate
 - Nevertheless students are responsible for all of them
- Periodically review Notable Passages lists
 - List important passages studied in each units
 - Not necessary to memorize chapter and verse, but **students should be able to recognize them and be able to answer basic historical, literary, and theological questions about each**
 - *Your greatest spiritual experiences will occur outside of class as you study and work with the scriptural text, so please take advantage of this opportunity to engage the scriptures in this systematic way.*
- Review sheets will be posted (or updated) before each quiz and exam

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What IS the Book of Mormon?

- A history?
 - Not in the conventional sense—does not focus on dates or detailed political, military, social, or economic history
 - Rather examples of political or military events (even the long war chapters in Alma!) were all selected to illustrate spiritual truths
- An abridgment of Nephite records, sacred and temporal
 - Secular definition: **“a shortened form of a work retaining the general sense and unity of the original”**
 - As prophetic editors Nephi and especially Mormon and Moroni **selected and condensed Nephite history and teachings to illustrate gospel principles**
 - Drew from a **variety of source materials** and representing **a breadth of genres, including historical narrative and summary, sermons and other preaching, poetry, letters, etc.**

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A Spiritual Record

- A **religious or spiritual record** of some of the ancient inhabitants of America who were **of the House of Israel, intended to teach gospel truths, particularly as detailed on the Title Page**
- The Title Page *specifically* calls the Book of Mormon **another Testament of Jesus Christ**
 - **Testament**, as in the New Testament (*diathēkē*) is both a “will” (here “**witness**”) and a “**covenant**”
 - Thus the Book of Mormon is both **a witness of Jesus Christ and his interactions with his people** throughout their history *and* **reflects the covenant(s) that bind us to him**

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First and Second Witnesses: The Bible and The Book of Mormon

- A collection (in Greek *ta biblia* or “books”) of **sacred writings** comprising the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament
 - No single author or editor
 - No direct, overarching themes
 - Nevertheless directed by the spirit, individual authors taught vital gospel truths and focused on similar doctrines and purposes
- **Original manuscripts, or “autographs,” of biblical books do not survive**
 - Current Bibles are dependent upon a “textual tradition,” the earliest manuscripts being copies of copies of copies of the originals
 - Numerous changes—major and minor, intentional and unintentional—occurred in its long history of transmission
 - Still, the survival of the Bible is a miracle!
- A **unitary work, comprising a sacred record and testament of Jesus Christ**
 - Most abridged by the father-son team of Mormon and Moroni
 - The exception, the Small Plates—direct writings of earlier prophets, nonetheless selected and included by Mormon to support (and later replace) earlier abridged work
 - Three overarching themes
 - presumably elucidated in Mormon’s original introduction and referenced elsewhere in his narrative, recapped in the “Title” Page
- **The autograph or original text, the Plates of Mormon, survived**
 - Two-step transmission followed by a single “translation,” when Joseph brought for the Book of Mormon by the power and authority of God
 - Only minor textual changes—usually corrections of punctuation, grammar, and other transcription and publication mistakes, have been made in subsequent editions

The “Title” Page of the Book of Mormon

- Remember that the Book of Mormon did not original begin with 1 Nephi!
 - 116 pages, comprising Joseph Smith’s translation of Mormon’s abridgement of the early part of the Nephite record, was lost
- Presumably Mormon began with some kind of introduction
 - Perhaps “I Mormon, having witnessed the destruction of my people, moved by the spirit of Lord, have written a sacred record of my people to serve as a testament of Jesus Christ and to bring my people and future people to him . . .”
- Today’s Title Page is a translation of the *last* leaf of the Gold Plates, written by Moroni, that **summarized** what the Book of Mormon was and what its purposes were
 - The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “The title-page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left-hand side of the collection or book of plates” (*History of the Church*, 1:71; see Nyman, *INWTR*, 13-16).

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Title Page Summary

- Description
 - **Another Testament of Jesus Christ**
 - An abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi and also of the Lamanites
 - An abridgment of the people of Jared
- Audience
 - **Specific:** “Lamanites,” the surviving descendents of the Book of Mormon peoples
 - **General:** Jews (Israel = covenant people of God) and Gentiles (everyone else!)
- Purposes
 - “Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel **what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers . . .**”
 - **“that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever . . .”**
 - “And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile **that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations . . .**”

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Book of Mormon Chronologies and Peoples 1

“What great things the Lord hath done for their fathers . . .”

- **Descendants of Lehi**
 - Lehi leaves Jerusalem (c. 600 B.C.)
 - Arrival in the Promised Land (c. 589 B.C.)
 - Division into Nephites and Lamanites (by 570 B.C.)
 - Lamanites (Land of First Inheritance)
 - Nephites (Land of Nephi)
- **Destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.)**
 - Son of Zedekiah, “Mulek” (*melek* = king), and companions flee Jerusalem
 - People of Mulek settle in the Promised Land
- **Collapse of First Nephite Kingdom (c. 200 B.C.)**
 - Lamanites occupy Land of Nephi
 - Mosiah¹ leads Nephite refugees to safety

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Book of Mormon Chronologies and Peoples 2

“What great things the Lord hath done for their fathers . . .”

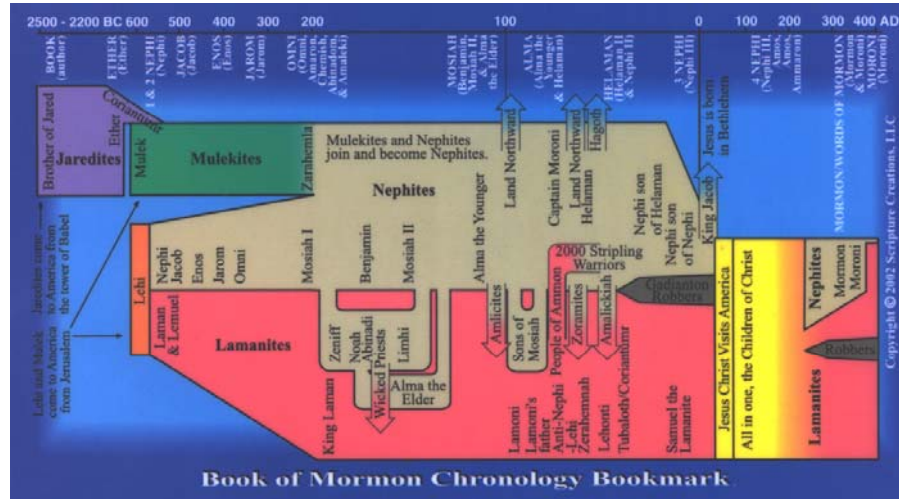
- **Rise and Fall of Zarahemla (c. 200 B.C. – A.D. 30)**
 - Zarahemla, descendant of Mulek
 - Mosiah¹ discovers People of Zarahemla, becomes king of both groups (c. 200 B.C.)
 - Temporary Nephite reoccupation of Land of Nephi (c. 200 – 121 B.C.)
 - Limhi, Noah, and Zeniff in Nephi and Shilom
 - Alma¹ in Land of Helam
 - Benjamin
 - Mosiah²
 - Lamanite Mission of the Sons of Mosiah leads to the People of Ammon settling among the Nephites
 - **Reign of the Judges (c. 91 – A.D. 30)**
 - “Nephite Reformation” of Alma²

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Book of Mormon Chronology Graphic



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Covenants

“That they may know the covenants of the Lord . . .”

- See s.v. “Covenant,” BD, 651
 - A solemn, binding, two-way agreement
 - Horizontal: Between equals, agreements between individuals (cf. Nephi and Zoram)
 - In antiquity included treaties and other formal agreements
 - Vertical: Between a superior and an inferior
- **Priesthood covenants**
 - God-initiated or established, made by means of proper authority
 - Often associated with ordinances that symbolize and/or “seal the deal” (cf. handshake or signing a contract)
 - “The gospel is so arranged that principles and ordinances are received by covenant placing the recipient under strong obligation and responsibility to honor the agreement”
- **Individual Covenants**
 - Baptismal, oath and covenant of the priesthood, temple endowment, temple sealings (only baptism explicitly mentioned in the Book of Mormon)
- **Corporate or “group” covenants**
 - With Noah, **Abraham**, **Deuteronomic** (Moses and Joshua with Israel), David, Joseph, **Lehi**

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Christology

“that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD . . .”

- **The Person and Work of Christ**
 - Christ = Messiah = Anointed One
 - Ancient prophets, priests, and kings were anointed
 - Anointing is symbolic of selection
 - Anointing is symbolic of creation and healing
- **Who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us**
 - What do we mean when we say that “Jesus is the Christ?”
 - Jesus = Yeshua (Joshua) = One Who Saves
 - Son of God
 - First born in the spirit; “Jehovah,” the self-existent one; the one who was, is, and is to come
 - Only begotten in the flesh
 - The Book of Mormon is consistent in calling Jesus Christ the Eternal God
...
 - The Atonement of Jesus Christ saves us from death and sin
- **Always note the unique contributions of Book of Mormon Christology: a clearer and more complete idea of who Christ is and what he did**

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Next Lecture: Studying and Interpreting the Book of Mormon

- **Read the Following:**
 - Title Page of the Book of Mormon
 - Strathearn, Rust, and Welch & Welch (packet)
 - Huntsman, “Teaching through Exegesis” Be aware of the following supplemental readings
 - Rust, *Feasting on the Word* excerpt (online)
- **Topics**
 - Reading Strategies: Approaches to Scriptural Texts
 - “Interpreting” the Book of Mormon: Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Exposition
 - The Exegetical Process: Asking historical, literary, and theological questions of a text
 - Book of Mormon Sources
 - Literary Aspects of the Book of Mormon
 - Structure and Genre
 - Theological Questions

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