

The Book of Jacob through Words of Mormon

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If You Accept a Job, Do the Job (Jacob 1)

With the death of Nephi, Jacob (Nephi's brother) takes over the responsibility of maintaining the history of the Nephite people. In the first chapter of Jacob's writing, he describes this new responsibility and also mentions his calling into the priesthood, having been ordained by his brother Nephi. Regarding this calling, Jacob writes that he and his brother Joseph "magnified their office", taking their responsibilities so seriously that they considered "the sins of the people [to be] upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence" (Jacob 1:19).

When I was a young man, one thing that my father taught me that has stuck with me is "If you accept a job, do the job". Sounds obvious, doesn't it? Yet, how often do we find ourselves accepting a job (or title) in the church and then for some reason not doing the work associated with that job?

The church is organized with many jobs ranging from ordained offices to positions that are elected or appointed. The sum total of the work associated with these jobs is what the church is able to accomplish at any point in time. Obviously, each job that is vacant detracts from the overall work of the church since the work of that job is not being done.

However, what hurts the church even more is when a job appears to be "filled" (a person is occupying the job) but the work is not being done. When that occurs, either there will be a false assumption that the work associated with the job is being done (when it's not) or, depending on the job, the work may not be able to be done at all until the person occupying the position vacates that position so someone else can be assigned to the job. In short, we don't help the church by accepting a job and not doing it – the job would be better off left vacant.

In order to avoid putting ourselves in this position of occupying a job and not doing it, here are some things we should consider when a job is offered to us:

- **Understand the term length of the job** – Ordained offices are for life (unless you're ordained to a "higher" office), elected offices are for 1 or 2 years, appointed positions may not have a specific term length.
- **Understand all of the duties of the job** – Make sure you're willing and able to perform all of the duties for the entire term length of the position.

- **Understand what will happen if you don't do the job** – As mentioned earlier, Jacob recognized that the sins of the people would be on his head if he didn't do his job of teaching the Word of God. Perhaps it would be sobering for us to consider people possibly missing out on salvation because we don't do our job in the church today.
- **Consider what other job may need to be given up** – If your plate is full regarding church work, it may make sense for you to give up an existing job in order to take on a new one. Consider the consequences of this and which job (existing or new) will allow you to add the most value to the work of the church.
- **Pray about it** – If unsure about any of the above, bring it to the Lord and He will direct you. He does want you to work for the church but allow Him to help you choose the best option(s) for you.

If, after following the above steps, you decide to accept a job for the church, God bless you! However, if you accept the job, make sure you do the job – that's the only way to truly help the church in its mission today.



Redefining Marriage (Jacob 2)

Polygamy (the practice of being married to more than one person at the same time) is something that was practiced (and even encouraged) by a particular church in the 1800's. Since this teaching is not found in the Bible, many people assume that the Book of Mormon (which is also used by that particular church) must be the book that teaches that polygamy is acceptable. Since The Church of Jesus Christ also uses the Book of Mormon, we want to make sure to set the record straight on this matter.

In reality, Jacob 2 is the only chapter in the Book of Mormon that discusses this subject and the instruction is clearly opposed to this practice: *"Hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife" (Jacob 2:27).*

You may wonder how the leadership of the church referenced above could have allowed polygamy when the Book of Mormon is so clearly against it. The answer is that they found what they felt was a loophole in verse 30: "For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things". Although this verse was meant to explain why the Lord tolerated this practice in the time of David and Solomon (as referenced earlier in the chapter), the leadership of that church took it as an opportunity to have God give them a "revelation" to go against the instruction of this chapter. Some years later, when the geographic area dominated by this church sought to become a U.S. state, another "revelation" revoked the first one, eliminating church support of polygamy and allowing them to comply with the laws of the United States and become a state in 1890.

This is not, however, the end of the story regarding polygamy. There are still people today (not necessarily associated with any particular church) who practice polygamy. It is currently illegal in all 50 states but there are movements that are seeking to change that. People who are in favor of such a change point out that marriage has already been redefined in the past couple of years, no longer matching the scriptural definition, so why stop there? Who (other than God) says that marriage has to be limited to a single partner? Don't people have a right to be married to people who they love?

This is the problem that arises when people "redefine" what God has established. Once you modify the Lord's precepts to suit yourself or your personal views, how do you then oppose someone else's desire to do the same?

If you choose to live completely according to the Word of God, then you have an absolute standard by which to measure whether any behavior is appropriate. If you decide that 98% is good enough, how much of a leap is it to 97% or 95% or 90%? And, who decides which 5% or 10% can be redefined?

The Church of Jesus Christ upholds the scriptural definition of marriage. Although sympathetic arguments can be made for redefining it to suit various types of people, we do not feel it is within our rights to redefine what God has established – be it marriage or anything else.



Blessed are the Pure in Heart (Jacob 3)

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8)

The words above were spoken by Jesus Christ as part of His famous “Sermon on the Mount”. The statement is one of a series of statements in which Jesus pronounces different blessings on various types of people (pure in heart, poor in spirit, merciful, peacemakers, etc.).

Something that is pure is something that consists completely of the same material with nothing else mixed in. If the material is something of value, then the more pure the object is, the more valuable it is. For example, a gold bar that is pure gold is worth a lot of money. However, if there are other materials mixed in, the bar will be worth less money – even if it looks the same on the outside.

What does your heart need to consist of for you to be considered “pure in heart”? When you consider that the heart (at least metaphorically speaking) is where a person’s true feelings are kept and it is also where love is supposed to come from, it becomes clear that when the scriptures refer to someone who is pure in heart, it is a reference to someone who truly loves the Lord and is completely devoted to living a life for Christ.

Another word that can be used in place of “pure in heart” is “sincere”. The origin of this word goes back to a time when street vendors would sell ceramic soup bowls. If there were any cracks in the ceramic, a little bit of wax was used to fill the cracks and, after a fresh coat of paint, the bowl looked as good as one without cracks. However, when the unsuspecting buyer tried to actually put hot soup in such a bowl, the hidden wax would melt and...well, it became obvious that the bowl wasn’t what it had appeared to be. In order to assure prospective buyers that they could purchase with confidence, many street vendors would mark their bowls as “sine cera” (Latin for “without wax”), meaning what you saw on the outside is what you were truly getting. Obviously, a “sincere” bowl was more valuable than one that was not.

OK, so you feel like you’re sincere in your service to God. Do you “see God” as Jesus said you would? Well, if you’re truly devoted to the Lord, then you see God everywhere you look! You see Him in the sun rising every day, you see Him in your work, you see Him in your family and, of course, you see Him in church. You see Him because you look for Him – if you pray about something, you’ll look closely for God’s response, seeing Him in ways that others will totally miss. So, if you’re pure in heart, you definitely see God.

In Jacob 3, Jacob specifically speaks to those who are “pure in heart”. He encourages them to pray with exceeding faith and to expect God to respond. He tells them to feast upon the love of God as it is always available to them. In short, he tells them that they can see God in their lives. On the other hand, he exhorts those who are not pure in heart to speedily repent, before the opportunity to see God passes them by.

Being pure in heart doesn't mean we're perfect but it does mean we love the Lord above all else. If we sense some impurities in our feelings toward God, let's do our best to work those out and move in the direction of being pure in heart such that we will see more of God in our lives.



Being a Commander (Jacob 4)

If asked to name great military commanders in history, you might think of names in American history such as George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant or George Patton. Perhaps you might think of names in world history like Alexander the Great or Napoleon Bonaparte. Hopefully, you would also think of names in the scriptures such as Joshua, David, Moroni and Mormon.

All of these commanders led large armies. In order to lead effectively, they had to be able to tell their soldiers what to do (command them). A great commander definitely influences the outcome of a battle but the strength of the army is a huge factor as well. Commanding an army with little strength is not likely to lead to victory.

On the other hand, imagine if, in addition to commanding your army, you could also command the physical environment to help you to victory. Think of Joshua commanding the sun to stand still so his army could complete their victory. Or the walls of Jericho falling down when the Israelite army blew their trumpets. Of course, God is the one who makes these things happen so clearly it's an incredible advantage to have God on your side in any battle as you then represent the greatest commander of all.

In Jacob 4, Jacob seeks to empower his people, saying, "we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea" (Jacob 4:6). Before anyone could get carried away with this perceived power, Jacob makes sure to add in the next verse that people of themselves are weak and it is only through the grace of God "that we have power to do these things".

So, how about us today? Do we typically move mountains in the name of Jesus? Perhaps it depends on what we consider mountains. Any large obstacles in our lives can be considered mountains and, through prayer, these can be removed. In fact, any time a miracle is performed as a result of praying about it, we are in effect commanding our physical environment to change – and it's changing!

Is it impossible for us to actually command a physical tree or mountain to move? No, it's not impossible but, for that type of command to work, it would have to be something that God would want to make happen for some reason. It's not going to happen just because we think it would be cool to move some things around.

It's important to remember that God is the ultimate commander and we take direction from Him, even when it comes to what to pray for. As Jacob says later in this chapter, "seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand" (Jacob 4:10). In other words, we don't tell God what to do but rather we seek to do what He wants us to do. If God wants a tree to be moved (or some other miracle to be performed), He will prompt us to pray that way – and the tree will move at our command!

So, in the spiritual battles that we face in life, it's great to know that we have reached the rank of commander. As long as we remember that our power to command comes from God and that He decides when we use it, we will win our spiritual battles as we command (pray) in the name of Jesus.



Understanding Parables (Jacob 5)

The New Testament records many parables related by Jesus. The Lord stated that He used this method – in which people or objects in a story represent other things – to communicate various spiritual truths such that only someone who was looking for the spiritual meaning would understand what He was saying. So, whereas one person might hear a story about seeking a pearl of great price as the pursuit of wealth, the spiritual person would understand that this story illustrates that the gospel of Jesus Christ is worth more to us than anything we have on earth.

The key to understanding a parable is to identify what each element of the story represents and what their interactions indicate. For example, in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), a man gives half his wealth to his son who then goes out and wastes it all on “riotous living”; when the money is all gone, the son returns home and his father throws his arms around him and takes him back! Rather than thinking of the father as an enabler and the son as a deadbeat, we understand that the father represents God and the son represents you or me or anyone who has gone astray in life. When we put ourselves in the story like this, we gain a clearer understanding of God’s unconditional love for us.

Jacob 5, the longest chapter in the Book of Mormon (with 77 verses), represents the only parable in the book. It’s a story that features olive trees and people who take care of the trees. The basic elements of the story and what they represent are as follows:

Vineyard = The World

Master/Lord of the Vineyard = God

Servant of the Lord = Servants of God (Church/Priesthood)

Tame Olive Tree = House of Israel (descendants of Jacob/Israel)

Wild Olive Tree = Gentiles (people not of the House of Israel)

Using the above representations (and a few others), the story can be told something like what follows below. The words in parentheses indicate the intended meaning of the element of the story immediately preceding them. I have included verse numbers throughout so you can line up the story with the actual text.

[3] The Lord of the vineyard sees His tame olive tree (Israel) beginning to decay (rejecting God). [4,5] He does His best (sends Christ to earth) in an attempt to save the tree. [6] There is some initial success with young and tender branches (the early church) but the main top (the Jewish leadership) still works against this effort.

[7-11] Rather than lose the entire tree, the Lord directs that branches of the wild olive tree (the Gentiles) be grafted in to the tree (have the gospel extended to them, allowing them to share in this with Israel). [12-18] As the grafted branches (the Gentiles) are bearing fruit (taking hold of the gospel), the original branches (Israel) are scattered throughout the vineyard (the world). [19-24] The branches planted in the worst (yet unidentified) areas do well but [25] the part of the tree (the seed of Joseph) planted in the good ground (the Americas) has mixed results (the Nephites serve God, the Lamanites do not).

[29-32] After a long time (about 1000 years) has passed, the Lord finds that none of the fruit is good (the gospel has fallen away). [33-34] Although the roots (the gospel of Christ) are good, [35-40] only evil fruit is being produced (the church is in apostasy). [43-46] Even in the good ground (the Americas), there is no good fruit to be found (the Lamanites have killed off the Nephites). [47-51] In spite of His disappointment, the Lord decides not to destroy His vineyard (the world) but rather to spare it a little longer.

[52-60] The Lord formulates a plan to gather the natural branches (Israel) from the various parts of the vineyard (from throughout the world) and graft them back into the original tree (bring them back together under the gospel of Jesus Christ). [61-65] He calls servants (restores the gospel) to try one last time to bring together the natural branches (restore Israel) and [66-69] He reveals to His servants His plan to gather the natural branches (Israel) in one place (Zion).

[70-72] In what represents the present day, the Lord sends His servants (the church), though few in number, into the vineyard to enact His plan. The servants receive a promise that they will enjoy the fruit (participate in Zion) also.

[73-75] In what represents the future, the efforts are successful as the natural fruit returns and the bad fruit is cast out (Zion is established). [76] The production of good fruit (Zion) lasts for a long time. [77] Eventually, the evil fruit begins to return (Satan is loosed for a season). The good fruit (the righteous) and the bad fruit (the unrighteous) are gathered to their respective places (heaven and hell) and the vineyard (the world) is destroyed by fire.

As you can see, the above story contains considerable information and identifies several key events regarding God's dealings with Israel, the Gentiles and His servants. Hopefully, the above rendering provides some understanding of this key parable and the general techniques illustrated will assist in understanding other parables in the scriptures.



The Hard-Hearted Person (Jacob 6)

In Jacob 6, after providing some brief explanation of the parable presented in the previous chapter, Jacob encourages the people in 3 consecutive verses to not “harden their hearts”. He points out that those who do harden their hearts will be unable to hear the voice of God and will therefore be unable to take advantage of His mercy and will therefore be unable to be saved in the kingdom of God.

What does it mean to have a hard heart? Physically speaking, nobody’s heart can truly be hard as it would be unable to function as a pump for the blood and the person would die. However, to the extent that the heart represents our true inner self and the place where our love resides, it makes sense that we can choose to erect a barrier such that the words or love of another individual (or of God) cannot penetrate and get to us.

It’s in essence a way people have of protecting themselves from being influenced or affected by someone who they have already decided they don’t want to have a connection with.

For example, if my doorbell rings, I look out the window and if the person there is holding a clipboard or a tablet or is wearing some type of name tag, I don’t open the door. The person may be there to buy me dinner or give me the keys to a brand new car or tell me about Jesus but I’ll never know because I don’t open the door. I’ve already decided that this type of person is there to try to sell me something I don’t need so I don’t give them the chance to even begin their pitch.

We of course don’t want to be in this position regarding the things of God as we would then be missing out on the greatest thing of all – the gift of salvation. However, it’s fairly safe to assume that you are not hard-hearted toward the things of God. How do I know? Because you wouldn’t be reading this article at all if your heart was not open to the things of God.

On the other hand, you probably know people who are hard-hearted toward the things of God. If you mention God, they roll their eyes and don’t listen to a word you’re saying. And that’s if they’re polite. Others may belittle or try to make a joke out of what you’re saying. Some may even get angry and demand that you stop.

So, how can you possibly get a message about God through to someone who is hard-hearted? You could try telling the person he’s a sinner and needs Christ to avoid eternal destruction. It’s a true statement but the most likely outcome is to turn the polite hard-hearted person into an angry hard-hearted person. You can try telling experiences and talking about miracles in your

life but the truly hard-hearted person will not hear what you're saying and may even belittle these wonderful experiences.

So, what do you do with a hard-hearted person? Just show love. The only way to break through the barrier erected by a hard-hearted person is to get him to understand that you truly love him. It can't be fake – you do have to love the person. In time, if the person feels that love from you, he will trust you sufficiently to open his heart enough for you to be able to share the things of God and you will have your opportunity.

It doesn't mean that the person will necessarily accept Christ and be baptized. If the person ringing my doorbell got me to open the door, it wouldn't necessarily mean that I would be buying new windows or having my driveway resealed or become converted to another faith. However, count it a victory if you have loved a hard-hearted person enough to be granted the opportunity to share the gospel and then leave it in the hands of God for the outcome.



They Can't Both Be Right (Jacob 7)

One of my favorite movies from years ago is “Fiddler on the Roof”, a story about Tevye the milkman struggling to hang onto old traditions in the face of a changing world. In a memorable scene, a young rebel (who would eventually marry one of Tevye’s daughters) tries to convince the circle of traditional older men to take notice of what is happening in the world outside of their little village. The dialogue goes like this:

Man 1: Why should I care about what’s going on in the outside world? Let the outside world take care of itself.

Tevye: He’s right.

Young Rebel: Nonsense! You can’t close your eyes to what’s happening in the world!

Tevye: He’s right.

Man 2 (addressing Tevye): He’s right and he’s right? They can’t both be right.

Tevye: You know, you are also right!

In Jacob 7, Jacob concludes his portion of the narrative by relating an account of a man named Sherem who was going out of his way to undermine the faith of the people and contradict Jacob’s teachings about Christ. Here is a description of Sherem based on Jacob’s account:

- Well-Educated
- Speaks with confidence like he’s got it all figured out
- Knows how to reach people through flattery and well-chosen words
- May have some knowledge of the scriptures but rejects portions he disagrees with
- Uses all of the above to influence people to share his viewpoint

Perhaps you know someone like this. Most of us do. This is someone who is hard to argue with because he seems to have all the answers. The easy thing to do with someone like this is to acknowledge that his points are valid and his position has merit. But if his position is the exact opposite of yours, how can you do that? They can’t both be right!

Just because someone is a good debater, it doesn’t mean his position is correct. I took a debating class years ago and one of the exercises was to take one side of an argument and effectively present that position and then switch sides and effectively argue the opposite position. Which side was actually right didn’t matter – you were learning how to make the side you represented sound right by effective use of words, examples, quotations, passion, etc.

When it comes to religion, opposing viewpoints can bring about sensitive situations. Since none of us is God – in theory, we are each receiving messages or direction from God and proceeding accordingly – how can we say that someone’s message from God is wrong? However, if I say I’ve received a message from God and you say you’ve received a message from God and the two messages are exactly opposite, there is only one explanation – one of us got it wrong. They can’t both be right.

In Jacob 7, Sherem demands a meeting with Jacob where he firmly asserts his position that there is no such thing as a Christ who would come. He says that Jacob can’t prove it so why should he or any logical person believe such a thing? Jacob could have said, “Maybe you’re right” or “Let’s just agree to disagree” but these types of responses would leave the people confused. Instead, Jacob calls down the power of God and Sherem falls to the earth and is incapacitated for several days after which he admits having been deceived by the devil and then he dies. This educated, polished and confident man had to admit that he was wrong and Jacob was right. After all, they couldn’t both be right.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the father, but by me” (John 14:6). Jesus said He is the only way to God; others say He is not the only way. They can’t both be right.

So, while we should definitely not be disrespectful to people with different beliefs than ours, let’s be careful about compromising on our beliefs to earn labels like “tolerant” and “politically correct”. We need to understand that by acknowledging that opposing beliefs could be correct, we’re also saying that our beliefs could be wrong.

Some would have you believe that everyone’s beliefs are right, even the ones that are opposite each other – clearly, that type of statement can never be right.



What Our Children Remember (Enos)

At the end of his life, Jacob (the brother of Nephi) turns over the Nephite records to his son Enos. Enos would only add one chapter of information to the record but that one chapter does contain the account of his conversion. While in the forest, Enos prays mightily and hears the voice of the Lord say, “Thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed” (verse 4). At that point, any guilt he felt is swept away and he is fully converted to a faith in Christ.

But let’s back up a little bit in the story. Prior to praying mightily, what was Enos thinking about? According to his account (in verse 3), he was thinking back on the words which he had often heard his father speak concerning eternal life and the joy of the saints; and these words sunk deep into his heart. This caused his soul to hunger for the same blessings in his life and he went on to establish his own relationship with God.

Now, if you have children (or if there are children in your life who you influence), think of that child as an adult and put them in the place of Enos – alone one day, thinking back over what they remember from their childhood years – perhaps things they are hearing or experiencing right now. Will these memories inspire them to pray mightily to God for their salvation? Will they at that time hunger to have the type of relationship with God that they have witnessed we have?

The memories of 1000 Sundays spent with us – will they include family discussions about the message of salvation that was given at church? Or will the conversations about church that they recall be more about who was wearing what or who said or did something that was annoying?

When they think back on problems that arose, will they have memories of us falling to our knees to look to God for help? Or will they remember us dealing with these situations in the same way anyone who doesn’t know the Lord does?

Will our future adult children know firsthand what is meant by the joy of the saints? Will they recall an excitement about getting together with the saints at church to share the joy of salvation? Or will they remember church as a place we went because we felt obligated to be there? Or as an opportunity we often skipped in favor of doing other things?

Will their memories of the brothers and sisters be reverent, remembering them as saints of God? Or will they be happy to have reached the age when they no longer have to feel obligated to deal with them as we appear to feel obligated to do?

How will what our children remember influence the choices they make relative to God and the church when they are adults? If we feel confident that they are witnessing a spirit-filled joyful life from a person they look up to (you) that they will desire when they are adults, thank God for that and keep doing what you're doing.

If, on the other hand, we realize that we may be (perhaps inadvertently) portraying the life of a servant of God in a way that is not the most positive, now is the time to make the necessary adjustments. As the saying goes, "they grow up fast". Let's do what we can now to help build the future church by exhibiting the joy of salvation and the joy of the saints even in our own homes. Let that be what our children remember.



How to be Exceedingly Rich (Jarom)

Like the Book of Enos, the Book of Jarom is also only a single chapter as Jarom (the son of Enos) continues the Nephite record. Jarom records that during his lifetime the Nephite people “became exceeding rich in gold, and in silver, and in precious things” (verse 8) in accordance with the word of the Lord which had said, “Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land” (verse 9).

If you read the entire Book of Mormon, you will find that there are many occasions when the Nephite people become prosperous as a result of keeping the commandments of God. However, on almost all of these occasions, what follows the period of prosperity is an attitude of pride among the Nephites such that they drift away from God and they are no longer prosperous in the land. Eventually, they get themselves right with God and become prosperous again, only to be lifted up in pride again and turn away from God again. The cycle repeats itself over and over again.

Perhaps some might say they wish that prosperity could be associated with serving God for all of us today. I can hear such people assuring the Lord that they wouldn’t become prideful if they became wealthy; they wouldn’t drift away from God or stop keeping His commandments. This in spite of the example of the Nephites and in spite of the words of Jesus regarding how difficult it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

What does it mean to be “rich”? According to one dictionary definition, being rich means “having more than enough to gratify normal needs or desires”. Looking at it this way, being rich is not an absolute term but a relative term. If what you have exceeds what you need/want, you are rich. Consider these two scenarios:

- Person #1 earns a million dollars per year. He lives in an expensive home, drives expensive cars, etc. It costs him well over a million dollars per year to maintain this lifestyle. And he would really like to eventually move into an even larger home. Each year, he is further and further in debt but he hopes to find a way to earn more money to cover his expenses.
- Person #2 earns \$60,000 per year. His modest house is paid off and he drives a used car. His expenses are about \$30,000 per year. He is content with what he has and uses some of his excess income to donate to the church and other worthy causes. He has enough money and available time to enjoy his life.

Which of the above is the rich man?

If we compare our personal level of wealth with our own desire for natural possessions and we find the wealth lagging behind our desires, we have two basic options – increase our wealth to meet/exceed our desires or adjust our desires such that we can be truly content with what we have. Which option is more consistent with what the Word of God teaches? Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 (the passage that says the love of money is the root of all evil). The first of these verses reads, “But godliness with contentment is great gain”. Saying it another way, to be godly and content with what we have is to be exceedingly rich!

Of course, there is a minimum level that we require in this life (what we truly “need”). However, as Jesus stated about food/drink/clothing, “your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:32-33).

Limiting our desire for natural gain and being content with what God provides for us – these are the steps to being exceedingly rich in this life. Seeking first the kingdom of God and storing treasures in heaven rather than on earth – these are the steps to being exceedingly rich for all eternity.



The Book of You (Omni)

The Book of Omni (like the preceding books of Enos and Jarom) consists of only a single chapter. However, the title of this book is actually misleading. Omni (the son of Jarom) refers to himself as a wicked man (with no relationship with God) and as a result, adds only 3 verses to the record before passing it on to his son Amaron. Amaron, also with nothing to say regarding a relationship with God, adds a mere 5 verses and passes the record to his brother Chemish. Chemish wins the prize for the shortest “book”, writing just a single verse – and using that verse to call out his brother for waiting to write his part until the day he passed the record over!

The Book of Omni continues in this manner, illustrating what happens when people who have no substantive relationship with God are called upon to write a “book” about what God has done in their lives.

There is another book being written today – at this very moment, even as you read these words. It is called “The Book of You”. It’s not being engraved on plates and it may not be being written on paper or typed into a computer but it is unfolding day by day and you are a firsthand witness to it.

The Book of You is a compilation of everything that God has done in your life. It’s not your biography – that would be what you have done. Rather, it’s what God has done – how He called you into His family, how He has blessed your life, how He has answered your prayers, how He has provided for you, etc. In essence, it’s your entire testimony, encompassing your entire life as a child of God.

The Book of You includes:

- All the Miracle Monday blogs and Blessing Bits you’ve personally submitted (as well as the ones you keep meaning to submit)
- All the testimonies you’ve given at church (at least the ones that praise God)
- Everything else God has done for you, large or small, even if you are the only who is aware of it

Perhaps you’re feeling like your Book of You is a bit slim right now. What to do? Here are some suggestions:

- Make sure your relationship with God is solid. If you've not begun your walk with Christ, that's the first step that needs to be taken.
- Put more things in the hands of God. The more that you trust the Lord with things in your life, the more you will see Him work in your life.
- Increase your church involvement. God is moving within the church – if you're involved, what He is doing will be part of your Book of You.
- Do more to help others. You will then witness – and even be part of – God providing for others which will then be part of your Book of You.
- You may even want to take a crack at actually writing the Book of You. As the hymn says about counting your blessings, "it will surprise you what the Lord has done".

Hopefully, your personal Book of You will continue to grow regularly such that by the end of your life, it will be quite voluminous. Here's wishing each and every one of you a big fat Book of You!



The Words of Mormon

OK, who is Mormon and why do we care about his words? Is Mormon the founder of the Mormon church? No, he's not. Is he the author of the Book of Mormon? Well, sort of but not exactly. Mormon would best be described as the historian of his time, the keeper of all the various books and writings of men like Lehi, Nephi, Mosiah, Alma, etc.

As any good historian should do, Mormon eventually organizes all of the material in his possession and sits down to produce a book that will relate the story told by all of this writing. There is way more material than can ever fit between two covers so he chooses what to include or not include and abridges a lot of it so the story can be told without necessarily including all of the painstaking detail.

Part way through the writing process – when Mormon has reached the point in the story that corresponds to the beginning of the reign of King Benjamin – he notices a separate set of engraved plates that contain many valuable prophecies given to Nephi and others, including prophecies of the coming of Christ. He feels strongly that the Lord wants this information included in his book – the only problem is that he has already finished the writing covering the lives of Lehi, Nephi and their descendants. To include this additional information would duplicate the same time period, potentially causing some confusion for readers. What to do?

As any servant of God should so, Mormon goes with what he feels the Lord wants, even though the flow of his book will be thrown off. After adding this information from the “small plates of Nephi” to his book, Mormon adds a note to inform the reader what he has done. This note is titled “The Words of Mormon”. It is of course written “many hundred years after the coming of Christ” (verse 2), not at the time period that the story is up to at that point in the book.

If you've read the Book of Mormon, you may be asking – What duplication? There's no duplication of time periods in the Book of Mormon! And you would be right – the book begins with Lehi leaving Jerusalem in 600 BC, continues through his descendants and then goes right to the story of King Benjamin. So, where's this duplication that Mormon is talking about?

There is no duplication because of what happened during the translation process. Joseph Smith allowed the first 116 translated pages to be removed from the house where the translation was being done – those pages were never returned and were not included in the translated Book of Mormon. Those pages covered the exact part of the book that Mormon had completed prior to noticing the “small plates”. If Mormon had not included the “small plates” information

(appearing under the titles First Nephi through Omni) in the final book, that time period would have been lost entirely from the book and the story we read today would begin with King Benjamin and the Book of Mosiah.

Mormon had this valuable information available to him because – even though it may have seemed illogical at the time – Nephi followed God’s direction to maintain a second set of records (see 1 Nephi 19). And because Mormon also followed God’s direction to include this information in his book – even though it may have seemed like a haphazard presentation of the material – we get to know about Lehi and Nephi and the various prophecies. God wanted us to have this information and he used His servant Mormon to include it in the Book of Mormon. This is why we care about the words of Mormon.