

# "MORMON" - What Does It Mean?

by Bruce T. Forbes, 2005

The prophet Joseph Smith taught in 1841 that “Mormon” means ‘more good’. (Times and Seasons, 4:194; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 299-300) Many Latter-day Saints have taken ‘more good’ to mean ‘better’, when this is not the correct understanding. Elder John H. Vandenberg related the experience of introducing two business associates to the Book of Mormon. One of them asked what the word ‘Mormon’ meant and he replied –

“...The meaning of the word, as given by Joseph Smith, is ‘more good.’ The gentlemen seemed interested, thanked me, and departed without further comment.

“In retrospect I have recalled this experience and pondered over the words ‘more good’, which undoubtedly mean *“an extension of the good.”* Joseph Smith, in commenting on the subject, referred to the Bible as being ‘good.’ As to the Book of Mormon, he stated: ‘It may be well to observe here, that the Lord greatly encouraged and strengthened the faith of his little flock, which had embraced the fulness of the everlasting Gospel, as revealed to them in the Book of Mormon, by giving some more extended information upon the scriptures.’ (Documentary History of the Church, vol. 1, pp. 131-32.)” (“Touchstone Of Truth” Elder John H. Vandenberg, April 1974 General Conference; underlining by myself for emphasis)

Supporting the truths in the Bible and continuing its teachings, the Book of Mormon truly is an "Extension (or, 'continuation') of the Good" that was already had in the Holy Bible.

## **MOST CORRECT BOOK**

Concerning this record the Prophet Joseph Smith said: "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." (Preface to the BOOK OF MORMON) How could he say the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book? How dare he?

Let's think for a moment: most any English-language Bible used today is a translation of a translation ... in the case of the Old Testament, it has gone from Aramaic to Hebrew to Greek to Latin to German to English. The New Testament, being written first in Greek, has not gone through quite as many translations to get to us.

Let's examine another thing Joseph Smith said:

"I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have

committed many errors." (Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-1951], 6: 57.)

"We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." (Articles of Faith #8)

With each translation, errors - unintentional or otherwise - can and do seep in to what's being translated. It's just a matter of human fault. Additionally, translators can translate concepts and doctrine from their point of view and not necessarily create an exact translation.

The English-language Book of Mormon has been translated directly from the original tongue without three or four other languages in between. Other language versions of this volume have been translated from the original manuscript written out while the Book of Mormon was first translated.

The Book of Mormon has one more thing going for it in this regard: it's translation into English and then into other languages have all been at the direction of a prophet and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It has been at the hands of those who are lead by a prophet - and by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, the Bible has not had this advantage.

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:19-21)

It would be impossible to *correctly* translate scripture into another language without the aide and assistance of the Holy Spirit - He through whom it came in the first place! Unfortunately for the Holy Bible, it has not always been translated by persons who even believe the Holy Spirit speaks in their day! Hence He has not been called upon to assist in the translations.

It is the testimony of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints - as well as my personal testimony - that Joseph Smith was a prophet called of God to restore His church to earth. He translated the Book of Mormon by the power of the Holy Spirit and presented it to the earth as the word of God - not to replace the Holy Bible but to stand next to it as a Second Witness and definer of its truths.