





**By Elder
Gene R. Cook**

Served as a
General Authority
Seventy from 1975
to 2007

THE Lost SCRIPTURES

*God does hear and answer our prayers if we exercise faith in
Him and in His Son.*

On July 29, 1977, Sister Cook and I had just finished visiting the Bolivia Santa Cruz Mission as part of my assignment as a member of the Seventy when we had a layover in the Cochabamba, Bolivia, airport for about five hours. We were very tired, so we were both delighted to have a few hours to rest. As I was drifting off to sleep, I had a strong impression that I should awaken and write down some ideas flowing into my mind.

I wrote for nearly three hours, solving some organizational problems I had struggled with in my responsibility at Church headquarters for a number of years. I felt a great outpouring of the Spirit and excitedly wrote down each inspired thought.

Finally we left for La Paz, Bolivia. We were graciously met by President and Sister Chase Allred at the airport and driven in their van to the mission office. We locked the van, leaving our luggage and my briefcase inside, but only did so because Sister Allred asked an elder to keep his eye on the van.

Upon entering the office, the president was confronted by a woman whose husband was dying. Both the president and I helped calm her and assist with her needs. Meanwhile, Sisters Cook and Allred left for the mission home.

When the president and I returned to the van, all of our property was gone. I assumed that Sister Cook had taken the things with her to the mission home. But while we were driving toward the home, I discovered that the right front small window-wing had been damaged and began to fear that perhaps our property had been stolen.

The woman had a strong impression that something holy was being desecrated.

Upon arrival at the mission home, we realized that all of our property had indeed been stolen. The loss of the clothing and a large amount of cash created an immediate but only temporary problem. What was more disheartening was that my scriptures were in the stolen briefcase along with the inspired ideas I had just received in Cochabamba. I was overwhelmed with discouragement, anger, and feelings of helplessness.

After we had all prayed for the recovery of our possessions, we tried to enjoy our dinner but could not. My scriptures had been given to me by my parents, with a sacred inscription to me from my mother and my father before he died. I had spent thousands of hours marking, cross-referencing, and loving the only earthly possessions I had ever considered to be of much value.

Though President Allred and I had much to discuss, I felt a strong impression that we must do all in our power to recover the scriptures. So after supper all of those present knelt to pray once again. I pled with the Lord that the scriptures would be returned, that the persons who had taken them would be led to know of their unrighteous act and repent, and that the return of the books would be the means of bringing someone into the true Church.

We determined to search the area near the mission office and in a nearby field, hoping that the thief or thieves might have taken the saleable items and discarded the English books.

About 10 of us then loaded into the van with flashlights and warm clothing. We drove up and down streets, scouring vacant lots and talking with people until we'd exhausted all possibilities. No one had seen or heard anything. Finally we returned home dejected. President Allred and I finished our business late into the night, and the next day Sister Cook and I flew back to our home in Quito, Ecuador.

Over the next few weeks, the missionaries in Bolivia kept searching. In sheer desperation, they decided to place an ad in two daily newspapers offering a reward.

Meanwhile, in Quito, I was struggling spiritually. I had not studied the scriptures at all since mine were stolen,

which had almost never been the case since my youth. I tried to study, but every time I read a verse, I could recall only a few of the many cross-references I had made over 20 years. I was disheartened, depressed, and had no desire to read. I prayed many times that my scriptures would be found, expressing to the Lord that I had never used my scriptures for any purpose other than for glorifying His name and trying to teach others the truths He had taught me. My wife and young children prayed continually for the same blessing every day for three weeks, saying, "Heavenly Father, please bring back Daddy's scriptures."

After about three weeks I felt a strong spiritual impression: "Elder Cook, how long will you go on without reading and studying?" The words burned, and I determined that I must be humble enough and submissive enough to start all over again. Using my wife's scriptures, I began reading in Genesis in the Old Testament, and with her permission, marking and cross-referencing once again.

On August 18, a Church employee, Brother Eb Davis, arrived in Ecuador from Bolivia with a package from the mission president in La Paz. He laid my scriptures on my desk along with the inspired notes I had made of my spiritual impressions.

The joy I experienced is indescribable. To realize that the Lord, in some miraculous way, could lift those books out of La Paz, a city of 700,000–800,000 people 1,300 miles away, from the hands of thieves and return them intact—not one page removed, torn, or soiled—is still beyond me. That day I promised the Lord I would make better use of my time and my scriptures—as instruments in His hands for teaching the gospel—than I had ever made before.

A few days later I returned to Bolivia and discovered that a lady had been in a marketplace—one of hundreds in La Paz—and saw a drunken man waving around a black book. She was a member of a protestant church and had a strong spiritual impression that something holy was being desecrated. She approached the man and asked him what it was. He did not know but showed her the book. She



asked if he had anything else. He pulled out another black book. She asked if there was more. He removed a folder full of papers that he said he was going to burn. She then asked to purchase those things from him, to which he agreed, for the price of 50 pesos (about U.S. \$2.50).

Afterward, she felt unsure why she had purchased the books. They were in English, but she didn't even know English. And they had been expensive—nearly 10 percent of her monthly income. She had no reason to buy the books except for her spiritual impression. She immediately began a search for the church that was named on the front of the books: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

After approaching a number of churches, she finally arrived at the mission office of the Church in La Paz. She hadn't heard about the reward or seen the ad in the newspaper, which was to appear that day. She did not ask for any money, not even to reclaim the 50 pesos she had paid. The elders received the books with joy and paid her the reward anyway.

She told the missionaries that she was associated with a Pentecostal sect but listened intently as they told her about the gospel. She recalled reading something about Joseph Smith from a pamphlet she had picked up in the street two or three years previously. She accepted the missionary lessons, and after the second lesson, she committed to baptism. Two weeks later, on September 11, 1977, on a Sunday afternoon at a branch in La Paz, Bolivia, Maria Cloefe Cardenas Terrazas and her son Marco Fernando Miranda Cardenas, age 12, were baptized by Elder Douglas Reeder.

The Lord had transformed my overpowering feelings of helplessness when the scriptures were lost into great feelings of joy at seeing His hand revealed. The Lord said, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).

God does hear and answer our prayers if we exercise faith in Him and in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. ■