

2017 Chaplain Training - Book of Mormon—Man-Made or God-Given
Elder Tad R. Callister

Elder Tad R. Callister: I would just first like to say, before I start, how much I honor and respect you. I very much love this country. I love our flag. I love all it stands for. And I'm grateful to you men and women who support this country and sustain it with your lives and with your words of counsel and all that you do. And you have my heartfelt appreciation for your service.

Well, if I had a title for this talk, it would be "Where Are the Ticking Clocks?" Hopefully, that will make some sense as we go on. Critics may cherry-pick some historical or cultural issues that provide them with some limited traction, but until they can explain away the Book of Mormon, they can't explain away Mormonism. The Book of Mormon, whatever you choose to call it, is the crux, the hinge, the kingpin, the keystone to the truth or falsity of this Church. And as long as it stands, the Church stands. The Book of Mormon and the Church are inextricably tied. And you can't separate one from the other in your search for truth. And so today, I'd like to talk more about the Book of Mormon.

Some years ago, a friend made a presentation to our family on the Book of Mormon, and he commenced by reading these lines from Julius Caesar's Shakespeare: "There is no fear in him, let him not die; for he will live and laugh at this hereafter. [Clock strikes.] Peace! Count the clock. The clock has stricken thrice."

Well, at first, these lines seem not only insignificant but also irrelevant to anything in the Book of Mormon. Then my friend made his point, that Shakespeare, one of keenest intellects the world has ever produced, had made a mistake. There were no striking or ticking clocks at the time of Julius Caesar. He had placed something out of context, out of date. Even this mastermind had momentarily stumbled.

Well, for decades, critics have placed their scholarly stethoscopes firmly against the Book of Mormon, anxiously listening for a ticking clock, something out of date, out of context, you know, commonly referred to as an anachronism. But their stethoscopes have been embarrassingly mute. Why? Because the Book of Mormon is not the work of man, but the work of God.

Well, many years ago, Elder LeGrand Richards said in a general conference talk: "I have never seen this in print, but I heard Charles A. Callis make this statement: That after the Book of Mormon came forth, the Prophet Joseph was terribly worried about what the world would say. And he said, 'O Lord, what will the world say?' And the answer came back, 'Fear not. I will cause the earth to testify of the truth of these things.' And from that day until now, and only Lord knows what is yet ahead, external evidences have been brought forth of the divinity of that book."

Well, what are some of those alleged ticking clocks in the Book of Mormon, and what has the earth produced to counter the critics and verify the book's divine authenticity? Well, alleged ticking clock number one. For years, the world laughed at the idea of gold plates as a medium for record keeping. They thought, "How childlike and ridiculous for

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Joseph Smith to claim such.” It was a favorite target of detractors. This wasn’t just a ticking clock. It was a grandfather clock.

In 1952, Hugh Nibley made this prescient forecast: “It will not be long before men forget that in Joseph Smith’s day, the prophet was mocked and derided for his description of the plates more than anything else.”

Surely Joseph Smith must have thought, like the rest of the world, that ancient civilizations recorded their histories on papyrus or parchments, not metal plates. All of the evidence supported the critics. Their arguments seemed so convincing, so incontrovertible, so historically correct, and so seemingly ironclad. Then time and truth worked their magic, and the day of reckoning came. As you know, discoveries of ancient metal plates began to unfold, and the critic’s myth was shattered.

The plates of Emperor Darius I of Persia, written about 518 B.C., composed of gold and silver, were found in 1933 by a German archaeologist. They were written during the same timeframe as the Book of Mormon and stored in a similar stone-type box. A copper scroll recording the book of Isaiah was discovered, as you know, as part of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Now many other metal plates recording the histories of ancient civilizations have likely been discovered.

While metal plates were considered nonexistent as a medium of writing during the Book of Mormon time, time has now proved the critics in error. John L. Sorensen, who’s an emeritus professor of anthropology at BYU, wrote, “Metals were indeed in use in Book of Mormon times in Mesoamerica. What kind of evidence there? The most compelling consists of actual specimens found. Over a dozen of these significantly precede A.D. 900. The earliest piece so far notably dates back to around the first century B.C. It is a bit of copper sheathing found on top of an altar at Cuicuilco in the Valley of Mexico.”

Professor Sorensen also referred to several ancient American languages that had a word for metal and then concludes, “So work in comparative linguistics shows that metals must have been known and presumably used, at least as early as 1500 B.C. That date extends back to the time of the Jaredites.”

Well, so much for the argument that metal plates could not and did not exist in Book of Mormon times. The critics’ insistence on the absolute correctness of their position—namely, that metal plates were not used to record ancient histories—only heightened the likelihood that Joseph could not have known of the existence of ancient metal plates. Therefore, his reference to them is all the more astounding, nothing short of a divine disclosure. A seeming crisis had now become a confirmation.

Well, alleged ticking clock number two: cement in ancient America. For many years, critics argued that a ticking clock was to be found in the Book of Mormon because of its references to the use of cement by the ancient inhabitants of America. The following scripture is an example: “The people who went forth became exceedingly expert in the

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working of cement; therefore, they did build houses of cement, in the which they did dwell” (Helaman 3:7).

Archaeologists were certain that cement was not invented until years after the recorded history of the Book of Mormon in the Americas. John L. Smith summarized the claim of the critics as follows: “There is zero archaeological evidence that any kind of cement existed in the Americas prior to modern times.”

The Book of Mormon references to cement were simply contrary to all known scientific facts of the time. Joseph Smith, they alleged, had inserted something out of date, out of context, certain proof of his hoax. But then truth, as it always does, surfaced, and the day of reckoning came. Cement was discovered in the Americas, dating to the same time period when the Book of Mormon people lived.

Heber J. Grant, seventh President of the Church, tells his own story in this regard during a general conference of the Church in 1929: “When I was a young man, another young man who had received a doctorate degree ridiculed me for believing in the Book of Mormon. He said he could point out two lies in that book. One was that the people had built their homes out of cement, in which they were very skillful. He said there had never been and never would be found a house built of cement by the ancient inhabitants of this country, because the people in that early age knew nothing of cement. He said that would be enough to make one disbelieve the book.

“I said: ‘That does not affect my faith one particle. I read the Book of Mormon prayerfully and supplicated God for a testimony in my heart and soul of the divinity of it, and I have accepted it and believe it with all my heart.’ I also said to him, ‘If my children do not find cement houses, I expect that my grandchildren will.’ Now, since that time, houses made of cement and massive structures of the same material have been uncovered.

“Not far,” he said, “from the city of Mexico, there is a monument 210 feet high built of cement that was supposed to be a big hill. My first counselor has stood on that monument. You could put 40 tabernacles”—referring to the Salt Lake Tabernacle—“like this one inside of it. It covers more than ten acres of ground and is two and a half times higher than this building. From the top of that monument, one can see small mounds, and as these mounds are being uncovered, they are found to be wonderfully built cement houses, with drain pipes of cement showing skill and ability superior almost to anything we have today so far as the use of cement is concerned.” Just recently, I was at that place in Teotihuacan in Mexico.

Well, for a time, the critics reveled in their argument. But when the earth produced the truth, there was no apology, no concession, only silence. Rather than accept and embrace the truth, they continued in their never-ending search for another ticking clock.

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Alleged ticking clock number three: Alma was a woman's name. For many years, critics claimed to have found another ticking clock. The Book of Mormon refers to a male prophet, as you know, by the name of Alma. Surely, the critics had caught Joseph Smith in an error this time. Alma was considered a female Latin name and Hebrew name, not a male name. Certainly, the critics believed, this would expose Joseph as a fraud. But then the day of reckoning came.

In 1961, under the direction of world-renowned archaeologist Yigael Yadin, the earth again yielded up its treasures, and a deed was found in Jerusalem dating to the early second century A.D. This was during the time period covered by the Book of Mormon. The deed was signed by Alma ben Yehuda, which means in Hebrew Alma, the son of Yehuda. In other words, Alma was a genuine Hebrew male name, just as revealed in the Book of Mormon. What had been a crisis became another witness of the Book of Mormon's divinity, another vindication of Joseph Smith's heavenly calling.

Alleged ticking clock number four: Jesus was born "at Jerusalem." The Book of Mormon states that Jesus "shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers" (Alma 7:10). This was music to the critics' ears. Doesn't even a child know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not Jerusalem? This time, they were certain Joseph Smith had erred and they had found their ticking clock. But as always, the day of reckoning came.

Once again, the earth would yield up its treasured truths. In 1887, 57 years after the Book of Mormon was published, some ancient documents dating back to the 13th century B.C. and known as the Amarna Letters were discovered. These ancient Near Eastern texts are described by D. Kelly Ogden, a Near Eastern study scholar, as follows:

"El Amarna letter #287 mentions the land of Jerusalem several times. And like Alma, the ancient writer of El Amarna letter #290 even refers to Bethlehem as part of the land of Jerusalem." Joseph, once again, was vindicated. He was merely translating language common to the usage of the time. Once again, the earth had come to the rescue.

Alleged ticking clock number five: "and it came to pass." Mark Twain once poked fun at the Book of Mormon, you may remember, by commenting that if you removed the phrase "and it came to pass" from the book, it would have only been a pamphlet.

And he was obviously referring to the repetitive nature of this phrase. But even Mark Twain's jab has become an additional testimony of the Book of Mormon. The people of the Book of Mormon originated from Jerusalem. Hence, they were immersed in the Hebraic culture. So if the Book of Mormon is true, you would expect it to be filled with Hebraic expressions representative of the culture from where the people came. How does this relate to the phrase "and it came to pass"?

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Well, such phrase appears 1,404 times in the Book of Mormon, thus triggering Mark Twain's comment. With such repetition, one might appropriately ask, "Does this phrase also appear with repetition in the Hebraic culture of the Old Testament?" It does. In fact, the Hebrew word from which the phrase is translated appears 1,204 times in the Old Testament.

In Genesis chapter 39, the phrase "and it came to pass" appears eight times in that single chapter alone. What many thought to be a boring, overtaxed phrase unrepresentative of the scriptures, a ticking clock, is in fact totally consistent with the scriptures and a reflection of the Hebraic culture from which the Book of Mormon people claim their origins. How did Joseph Smith know this? Was he so brilliant that he made this connection? Was he lucky? Or rather, was he the instrument in God's hands who translated a divine book just as he claimed?

Well, how did the critics respond to the foregoing discoveries? Their response is similar to the response of the critics to Samuel's prophecy concerning the birth of the Savior, that it would be evidenced by a day, a night, and a day of light. The Book of Mormon tells that in that day, "there were great signs given unto the people, and wonders; and the words of the prophets began to be fulfilled" (Helaman 16:13). Rather than rejoice and accept these prophecies, the scriptures tell us that the critics "began to depend upon their own ... wisdom, saying: Some things they may have guessed right, among so many; but behold, we know that all these great and marvelous works cannot come to pass, of which has been spoken" (Helaman 16:15–16).

But again, the critics were wrong. Very, very wrong. Every single prophecy was fulfilled. The day of reckoning came, and there was a day, a night, and a day of light. You can hear the critics now: "Oh, Joseph may have guessed right on cement and gold plates, and Alma's name, and a few other things. He was a very lucky guesser, yes. But surely, all these names and events spoken of in the Book of Mormon cannot be true." But once again, they will be proven wrong because in the Lord's timetable, the earth will yield up its treasures. And no doubt, many additional names and places and events in the Book of Mormon will be revealed.

Well, in the foregoing cases, the critics ridiculed the Book of Mormon for some ticking clock that seemed out of place, out of date, or out of context. While the critics have become relatively mute to the foregoing arguments, they now claim there are many items referred to in the Book of Mormon which have not yet been discovered in archaeological excavations, such as cattle, steel, the names of Nephite cities, and therefore conclude the Book of Mormon cannot be true.

But what they have failed to research or neglected to mention is that archaeology scholars have opined that only two percent or less of ancient American ruins have been excavated. One must wonder what will be discovered in the other 98 percent. Cattle? Steel? The names of Nephite cities? The very evidences they claim are

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now lacking? George Stuart, a leading Maya scholar who worked for National Geographic for almost 40 years, did an interview in 2011 on *National Geographic Live*.

In the course of his interview, he made the following revealing comment: “And we hardly know anything really about the Maya. You know, there’s almost 6,000 archaeological sites, and we’ve dug at 40 of them.” That’s less than one percent. Carrie Hall, a professor of ancient scripture at BYU, then made this observation:

“When my colleague Mark Wright, here at BYU, talked to George Stuart about this [the number of sites excavated], he told Mark it was about one percent. So a safe estimate would be around one to two percent of Maya sites have been partially excavated, and none has been fully excavated, or even anything close to that. When you figure all the other ancient Mesoamerica cultures into the equation—Olmec, Zapotec, etc.—from the Book of Mormon time periods, the number goes down to a fraction of one percent. In other words, we know pitifully little from archaeology, a science that on the best of days only provides mere glimpses into the complex histories of peoples.”

Nonetheless, some critics have unequivocally asserted that cattle, sheep, steel, and other names mentioned in the Book of Mormon have not been found in pre-Columbian America, and therefore the Book of Mormon cannot be true. Why are these things mentioned in the Book of Mormon, they say, as being made available in the Americas between 2200 B.C. and 421 A.D.?

Well, now suppose for a moment I were to tell you that a man surveyed two percent of the geography of the United States, as seen by this little dot that represents two percent. And then he made the unequivocal assertion to you that there are no large lakes. There are no Everglades in the U.S. There are no mountains above 10,000 feet. There are no redwood forests. There are no volcanoes. And there are no gold mines, because in his two percent survey, he did not see any such things.

You would likely respond, “How ridiculous. How shortsighted for him to categorically state there were no Everglades, no redwood forests, no mountains above 10,000 feet, no large lakes, no gold mines, no volcanoes, when 98 percent of the U.S. had never, ever been seen by him.” Likewise, how ridiculous and shortsighted to unequivocally claim there were no cattle, steel, and Nephite names in Book of Mormon lands and times when at least 98 percent of archaeological remains in ancient America have not been unearthed. Such a claim only diminishes the credibility of the critics’ arguments.

By way of clarification, the foregoing is not an attempt to prove where the actual geography of the Book of Mormon exists. I do not want to get into that argument, whether it’s to explain the minimal archaeological work has been done in ancient American settings, wherever those sites may be located.

Now, after B. H. Roberts extolled the depth and expansiveness of Joseph Smith’s contributions, not the least of which was the Book of Mormon, he would say to the

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critics, “Match it! Match it, I say, or with hand on lips, remain silent when his name is spoken.”

Well, with all the critics’ claims that Joseph Smith or someone else wrote the Book of Mormon, I have never seen anyone able to match it or duplicate it. Have you? Well, if I were to ask my good Christian friends how they unquestionably know the Bible is the word of God, I do not believe they would cite archaeological discoveries or linguistic connections with ancient Hebrew or Greek as their prime evidence. But rather, they would make reference to the Spirit. It always comes back to the Spirit. The very Spirit that helps me know the Bible is true is the very same Spirit that helps me know the Book of Mormon is true.

The Book of Mormon teaches that truth: “And if ye shall believe in Christ ye [shall] believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 33:10). The Spirit will always be the decisive determining factor, not archaeology, not linguistics, not DNA, and certainly not the theories of man. The Spirit is the only witness that is sure and certain and infallible.

Well, President Boyd K. Packer shared this following pertinent account. He said: “The story is told of two frivolous girls chattering through a great museum and then flippantly remarking as they left that the building hadn’t really impressed them much. One of the doorkeepers standing by commented to them, ‘Young ladies, this museum is not on trial here today. Its quality cannot be contested. You are the ones who are on trial.’”

And so it is with the Book of Mormon. It is not on trial. Its divinity cannot be contested by the honest in heart. It is we who are on trial to see if we will read it with a sincere heart and real intent and discover its truth. President Ezra Taft Benson expressed a similar view as follows: “The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ.”

Why is it so important for us to individually gain a testimony of the Book of Mormon? Because if we do, it will become our personal iron rod. The mists of darkness may come, the unanswered questions arise, but through it all, we will have our iron rod to cling to, to keep us on the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life. As certain as can be, the time will come when each of us will be faced with an intellectual question we cannot answer or a crisis that tries our faith to the very core. At that moment, we cannot draw from the oil of another’s lamp. We cannot rely on another’s testimony. We must stand independent and firm in our own testimony to weather the storm. Otherwise, we will fall.

There is a touching scene in a movie on the life of Martin Luther. He was about to be tried for heresy. Just before the trial begins, his hair is being cut by his longtime friend and longtime spiritual mentor, a priest. At one point, his friend rebukes Luther for turning the world upside-down with his teachings, spurring the world on in a

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revolt, Protestants against Catholics. Then, in a stirring moment, Luther grabs his friend's arm and says, "You wanted me to change the world. Did you think there would be no cost?"

Likewise, there is a cost for gaining the testimony of the Book of Mormon. Alma, who had seen an angel, nonetheless tells us the price he had to pay for his testimony of the truth:

"And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?"

"Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me" (Alma 5:45–46).

The question arises: Are we willing to pay a similar price for a testimony of Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon? If so, the answer will come.

In the 1960s, I was serving a mission for the Church in Washington, D.C. There I met an extremely bright convert to the Church by the name of Edna Bush. Many years before, she had traveled to Salt Lake City. She toured the temple grounds and left with the impression that the members of the LDS Church were good people but mighty gullible to believe in those gold plates and an angel Moroni.

Later, two sister missionaries from the Church knocked on her door and presented her with a copy of the Book of Mormon. She said, "I decided I would read it and prove it false once and for all." But as she read it, the ammunition she expected to find did not materialize. Instead, she became a recipient of the promise of Moroni, that He, God, will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost.

On one occasion, this good woman took my missionary companion and me down into her basement. On the shelf I believe there were more than 100 paperback copies of the Book of Mormon. Each one had a title on the spine, such as repentance, resurrection, or faith. She explained that she had read each one of the books from cover to cover, focusing on the topic listed on the backing. She then took out a scroll and unrolled it across the floor. With the passage of time, I've forgotten its exact length—probably 8 to 12 feet. On it were various timelines, tracking all of the major travels and events of the Book of Mormon people. It was detailed and most impressive. She then turned to me and said, "Elder Callister, if there were major errors in this book, I would have found them long ago."

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Her intellectual analysis was most impressive to me. But it was not the foundation of her testimony. Of course, it may have been a stepping-stone, and rightfully so, but the testimony that is rock solid, that does not waver with each transient scientific discovery is hewn from a humble and prayerful heart. I am continually asking questions about the history and doctrine of the Church, including the Book of Mormon. For most of these questions, I find answers that are intellectually and spiritually satisfying to me. For some questions, I feel I have some helpful insights but not yet the complete picture. And for the balance, I'm still searching for further enlightenment. For example, for every hundred questions I have, perhaps there are 70 or so for which I feel I have a good answer, 20 or so for which I have a partial insight, and the balance of which I simply say, "I do not know the answer at the current time."

Unfortunately, some people want an immediate answer to every question, perfection in every prophet, and a Church history that is flawless. In other words, they want Saints without imperfections and a religion without faith, and they can't have it. Eventually, science and the world of academia will be one more confirming witness of what we have already learned spiritually, that the Book of Mormon is the word of God.

But in the meantime, through our faith and diligence, we can have the more sure witness of the Spirit. The Spirit can come to young people as well as adults. President Boyd K. Packer tells the following:

"A 15-year-old son of a mission president attended high school with very few members of the Church.

"One day, the class was given a true-or-false test. Matthew"—who you might like to know is now a Supreme Court justice in the state of Utah—"was confident that he knew the answers to all except for question 15. It read, 'Joseph Smith, the alleged Mormon prophet, wrote the Book of Mormon. True or false?'

"He could not answer it either way, so being a clever teenager, he rewrote the question. He crossed out the word *alleged* and replaced the word *wrote* with *translated*. It then read, 'Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, translated the Book of Mormon.' He marked it true and handed it in.

"The next day, the teacher sternly asked why he had changed the question. He smiled and said, 'Because Joseph did not *write* the Book of Mormon, he *translated* it, and he was not an *alleged* prophet, he *was* a prophet.'

"He was then invited to tell the class how he knew that" ("The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ," *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 63–64).

I too bear witness of this miraculous book that will bring someone closer to God than any other. It is the most powerful, convincing witness we do have of the divinity of the Savior, the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith, and the truth of this Church.

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Recently, as I reread the Doctrine and Covenants, I was reminded of the multiple occasions in which Joseph Smith acknowledged his weaknesses. What does that do for his credibility concerning the origin of the Book of Mormon? It helps me know that he was not perfect, but he was honest; that just as he said, he did receive the gold plates from an angel; and that he did translate them by the power of God.

I love the Book of Mormon. It is our personal witness for our day. And I bear my witness of its divinity in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Major General Craig Larson: Thank you so much, Elder Callister. I think we've got a couple of minutes, if you're willing to answer a couple of questions.

Elder Tad R. Callister: If I keep speaking, I don't have to answer any questions. (*Chuckling*) I've got President Holzapfel over here. He'll help me.

Major General Craig Larson: Okay, if there are a couple of questions to ask, please.

Female Participant: Elder Callister, could you offer counsel about how we might best relate to our brothers and sisters of the Community of Christ, formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? They accept and use the Book of Mormon, but they don't come to the same conclusions that we do about it.

Elder Tad R. Callister: Well, I'm going to ask President Holzapfel to come up with me. We've been there together. And the truth is, while we love those people, I think they've abandoned the Book of Mormon. And I think they have sacrificed the Book of Mormon to be part of the community of saints, the other saints, Christian saints. And if they believed in the Book of Mormon like we did, it would be one of their foremost tenants of their church, and it's not right now. But President Holzapfel, you know those people back there. And they're good people, and we have good relations with them, but the Book of Mormon is just not an integral part of their gospel plan anymore.

Dr. Richard Holzapfel: Yeah, as you know, just recently, our Church has been purchasing historical documents from them. The president of their church announced last week that everything, property and documents, are available for sale, that are not specifically oriented toward their mission. And what we've seen the last 20 years is a great schism within the Community of Christ church. And it's because those who have a spiritual witness of the Book of Mormon, and that there really were Nephites, and that these stories were important, have not been able to continue with the Community of Christ church's understanding and interpretation of it, and therefore, they have left. So unfortunately, many of their congregations, even one of the most famous ones I used to go to when I was younger in Kansas City, is now closed.

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So they are desperately trying to figure out who they are and where they're going. And the change of name to Community of Christ was to focus that "we're Christians seeking peace." And so the Book of Mormon plays a less significant role. And as a result, while we share a common history, we do not share a common future. And it's very tragic.

I was in a meeting. I remember the First Presidency, Maurice Draper, was there in a panel. And a member of the church of the Community of Christ raised his hand to ask a question. And I'll never forget what he said. "President"—and this is to Maurice Draper—"what have you done to the church I grew up with? This is not the church I believed in." And they just simply have gone a different direction.

So unfortunately, it's with the scattered remnant that we're having our discussions. We're actually having some of our Book of Mormon scholars speak at their meetings, and they're coming to BYU. So these are the scattered remnants who still hold onto the Book of Mormon who have left the Community of Christ church.

Elder Tad R. Callister: Thank you, President. Thank you. Other questions that you might have? Yes, right back here.

Male Participant: Thank you for your talk. We know the Book of Mormon was written for our time. Can you tell us, in your opinion, where we should we be reading, which chapters of the Book of Mormon, to help us better understand where we are now and where we're going?

Elder Tad R. Callister: Well, I think it certainly was written for our time. They certainly had access to it and quotations were made in King Benjamin's sermons and so forth. But I think the most powerful sermons on the Atonement are certainly found in the Book of Mormon. Everybody needs to understand the Atonement to have hope in our day and age. And certainly people ought to understand 2 Nephi 2, 2 Nephi 9, Mosiah 2–5, Alma 32–34, 40, and 42. Probably Helaman 5 and 3 Nephi 11. All those are magnificent sermons on the Atonement.

In fact, I think if you were to go to the Bible, where would you go to find a sermon on the Atonement? I'd have to think for a moment where I would go to find a sermon on the Atonement, you know, other than the actual life of the Savior, but the sermon. And you look in the Book of Mormon, and these just masterful sermons, one after the other.

But then I think if you read Mormon and Moroni, you get a pretty good picture for what the last days are going to be like. And we see a lot of that happening now. And you also see the antichrists. You see a lot of the arguments that they make that are being used today. So we just go through Nehor and Sherem and Korihor, and if you want to find some of the exact same arguments that are used today, just go through their arguments, and you see that the devil keeps using the same ones over and over and over again. Another thought? Yes.

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Male Participant: Elder Callister, Lieutenant Bowler. A question that I have comes from a friend of mine who is a member of the Church but struggling with faith. And not so much with the historicity or archaeological things, but what he deems issues of morality and that the story opens up with an account of murder that's justified, and that there seems to be racism found within it and what you could call sexism from today's age, and that women are virtually absent. A lot of those types of issues are labeled as moral issues, not necessarily the historical ones. I'm interested to know from your studies or Dr. Holzapfel as well, if there's maybe anything to speak to that, that could be of help.

Elder Tad R. Callister: Elder Wood, come up here. (*Chuckling*) Emeritus doesn't mean you're off the hook. (*Laughter*) This is one of the brightest men you'll ever meet. I say that honestly and with a humble heart. And do you want to just take a stab at responding a little bit? I have some feelings too, but I think you may give us some insights that we might not otherwise get. Would you do that?

Elder Robert S. Wood: Indeed, many of the accusations concerning racism really come from a misunderstanding of really what's being said. You know, even the question of skin color is, in fact, I think a misinterpretation. There's been some great work being done on that, by the way, about the use of darkness and darkened skin. I read a very interesting essay recently by a really remarkable man down in Arizona, in which he talks about tattooing and, in fact, how in ancient Mesoamerican culture, people when they joined into groups, tattooed themselves. By the way, that happens in Central America today. And in fact, they literally took on the appearance and the quality of the group to which they joined. So even some of the phrases we see.

Now the absence of women in the Book of Mormon. There are great references to them. That's true of ancient culture generally, by the way, including the Old Testament and even the New Testament, in which women are much more prominent than the Old Testament but still do not have there. They're not number one on the hit parade. I think that is culture. I think it would be surprising if the Book of Mormon was not reflective of the culture from which it came. In fact, I would be skeptical if in fact it became a feminist track or a discussion on the issues specifically of today. It would relay some skepticism in my mind. So I think, in fact, the absence of some things, the exposition of some things, would be actually relevant to the culture from which it came.

Elder Tad R. Callister: Thank you, my friend. Lieutenant, yes. Please come up. Go ahead. Say one thought you had.

Dr. Richard Holzapfel: From Harvard to Berkeley, every history professor—this is just ubiquitous, universal—the first thing that we have to do is to teach our students about the flaw of presentism. Presentism is to read back into the past based on your current views. And that blocks our understanding of ancient people. I'm talking about every university professor. That's the first thing to tackle, the flaw of presentism in interpretation.

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And it's interesting, I heard the story personally from Hugh Nibley. He, for a number of years, taught Middle Eastern students, non-Latter-day Saint Muslims who came to BYU on scholarship, the Book of Mormon class. And I heard this story personally. This is not a legend. I actually heard it from him. One day, when they had read the story about Nephi slaying Laban, his students came in and said, "Dr. Nibley, this book cannot be true. Absolutely cannot be true." And he said, "Why?" "He hesitated." (*Laughter*) It's cultural.

Elder Tad R. Callister: Lieutenant, where are you, that raised that question? Were those friends you were speaking of, were they Christians or non-Christian?

Male Participant: They're members of the Church.

Elder Tad R. Callister: Oh, members.

Male Participant: A current faith crisis, and a lot of these questions are sincere questions.

Elder Tad R. Callister: I think too, if you look at some of these questions, to me, do they honestly believe that the Lord has never commanded murder to take place? Do they believe that? And if they do, they haven't read the Bible. What about David and Goliath? What about the righteous wars? What about the Lord wipes out how many Assyrians, hundreds of thousands of Assyrians, in one day? I mean, sometimes you have to put it in perspective. And I think of course the Lord has said that you're entitled to defend yourselves. And we have stories where the Lord's commanded people to take someone else's life. And that's not inconsistent with the Bible. It's not inconsistent with what we would expect the Lord to do.

And of course, if you look at the Bible, we have women. How many women were speaking in church in the New Testament? Paul said they were not to speak or rule, preside. I think if you look at some of these, people have a dual standard sometimes, and they put over here the Bible is one standard, and then they judge the Book of Mormon by another standard. I think if you look at the underlying rationale and say, "Well, what were the other issues that you had?" They were racist. Well, was the Savior racist when He said you're not to go to the Gentiles any city of the Samaritans? Enter ye not? Was He racist? Oh, no, no, no, but He corrected that later.

Well, have we now changed that later, and they can now hold the priesthood. But was there a time when they were not to receive the gospel of the Gentiles? Yes. And who was that who gave that order? The Savior. And I think sometimes if you look through these individually, and you look at precedence in the past, they start to make sense to you. And you say, "Okay, I know God's no respecter of persons." I can't tell each individual circumstance, but I believe He's no respecter of persons, and it's no different

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in the Book of Mormon than in the Bible as I read it. Do we have one more question, or are we all done?

Male Participant: One more would be great.

Elder Tad R. Callister: One more question back here?

Male Participant: Good morning, sir.

Elder Tad R. Callister: Good morning.

Male Participant: Some Christians have an ironic critique of the Book of Mormon, that there's too much Christ in it. The Jews didn't expect a universal savior that would forgive the world of its sins and to die on a cross and be resurrected. That was a surprise. So why, in the Book of Mormon, was that so clear? I wonder if you have any comment on that critique.

Elder Tad R. Callister: Well, I'd hate to make that argument in the next life, that there was too much Christ in the Book of Mormon. Is there too much Christ in someone's life? That would just be hard for me to accept. And, you know, the Old Testament is filled with prophecies of Christ.

And to me, that's why this is the greatest witness we have of Jesus Christ because what is it? I forgot. It's every 1.7 verses or whatever it is that talks about the Savior in the Book of Mormon. And that's why it is the greatest witness we have of Jesus Christ and His divinity because it continually refers to Him. And to me, that is an evidence of its truthfulness. In fact, it's amazing to me in the Book of Mormon how they kept referring to the coming of Christ so many times. Because you think how much easier it is for us to accept a historical Christ than a Christ who's not yet come. And I think they continually refer to these prophecies of the Savior coming, but they didn't have the perspective that we did, that He'd been born, and here He is. He performed all of these miracles. And He was resurrected, and we have these multiple accounts of it.

They didn't have any of that, so it seems to me there just needed to be repeated prophecies by the Old Testament and by these Book of Mormon prophets to remind them of this great event, that it was true, and to bear witness of it. And I bear my witness in conclusion that the Book of Mormon is filled with titles of Christ, the roles of Christ, prophecies of Christ, because He is the center. He is the focal point of that book, as it should be. And I bear that witness in Jesus's name, amen.

Elder Robert S. Wood: I'm literally going to intervene. He brought me up. Now he can't shut me up.

(Laughter)

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Elder Wood: I just want to end with one story. When I was serving as the Area President in the Brazil North Area, the Brazilian House of Deputies, Communados Deputatos, decided to have a solemn assembly honoring the Latter-day Saints. And I was invited to attend that assemblage. One of congressmen after the other got up and said very nice things about the Church. But the one I remember was a man by the name of Calvacante, who's actually a congressman from the area in which I was living, got up and said, "Before I joined Congress," he said, "I was professor of civil engineering at the University of Sao Paulo." He said, "And I discovered something quite interesting." He said, "Literally all the professors of religion in the theology school, none of them believed in the miracles of the Bible, including the miracle of the Resurrection."

He said, "But then I came across a book which I have read several times." And he held up a copy of the Book of Mormon. And he said, "I've read this book." He said, "Several times, and I have concluded that this book"—and then he held up a copy of the Bible—he said, "This book is the definitive witness that the Bible is true and that the miracle of the Resurrection, in fact, took place. And it has restored my testimony in Jesus Christ."

So indeed, yes indeed, the Book of Mormon is full of Christ, as well it should be, because it establishes once again that the Bible is true.

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