

To Every Tongue and People

By Lia McClanahan
Church Magazines

When the Book of Mormon prophet Alma entrusted the records of his people to his son Helaman, he instructed his son to remember that the Lord had “a wise purpose” for preserving the scriptures (Alma 37:12). He said of the records, “They should be kept and handed down from one generation to another . . . until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (Alma 37:4).

In 1827 Joseph Smith obtained those records and by 1829 had finished translating them into English by the gift and power of God. The book, published in 1830, was a powerful missionary tool for convincing readers of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. With an initial print

run of 5,000 copies, however, sending the Book of Mormon to “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” may have seemed a long way off.

Still, the Lord reaffirmed this prophecy to Joseph Smith in 1833, foretelling a day when “every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language” (D&C 90:11). The Book of Mormon, which “contains . . . the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (D&C 20:9), is playing a key role in the fulfillment of this prophecy.

In the mid-1800s missionaries carried the gospel to Europe. The Book of Mormon was published in Danish in 1851, followed by editions in French, German, Italian, and Welsh in 1852. Today the



The first edition of the Book of Mormon had a print run of 5,000.

full Book of Mormon is available in 82 languages, with selected chapters in another 25 languages. The prophecy that all people will hear the gospel in their own tongue is unfolding year by year as translation and missionary work move forward.

The Work of Translation

The process of translating the Book of Mormon from English into a new language sometimes takes years to complete. The process begins only after the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have approved

the project and there are enough members who are native speakers of the language to serve as translators. Translators and reviewers are given careful guidelines and are instructed to stay close to the Spirit as they translate. After the translation is finished, the text goes through a separate ecclesiastical review process.

After publication, members can order the new edition through Distribution Services. Many of these members previously have had only selected chapters of the Book of Mormon in their language or, in some cases, only the testimony of the missionaries.

The Book of Mormon and Missionary Work

When a geographic area is first opened to missionary work, language barriers can pose a significant challenge. With no printed Church materials in that area’s language, missionaries must learn the language and bear testimony with the Spirit. In some parts of the world, many people speak a second language, and the missionaries are able to give them a Book



A PROPHET TESTIFIES

“I cannot understand how any intelligent man could think that anyone without the help of the Lord could have produced the Book of Mormon, which has been before us now for more than a hundred years and has stood the test during all that period of time, notwithstanding the ridicule that has been brought against it, for one reason and then another. Today that book, which was translated by Joseph Smith as the instrumentality of the Lord, stands out supreme. It is today the greatest missionary that we have for proclaiming this gospel; there is nothing else to compare with it.”

President Heber J. Grant (1856–1945), *Gospel Standards*, comp. G. Homer Durham (1941), 15.

of Mormon in that language. Before the Book of Mormon was translated into Mongolian, for example, many members in Mongolia studied the Russian edition.

But the gospel is best understood in the familiarity and clarity of one’s native tongue. Eric Gemmell, who served in the Slovenia Ljubljana Mission from 2001 to 2003, saw firsthand what a difference it makes for members and investigators to have the Book of Mormon in their first language. He served the first 18 months of his mission before the

Book of Mormon was available in Slovenian.

The work was difficult. The first branch of the Church had been established only a decade before. Slovenia had recently gained independence and was in the process of phasing out the former state language of Serbo-Croatian. The missionaries carried copies of the Book of Mormon in Serbo-Croatian and English, which most young people had studied in school. But more often than not, people declined the book because they could not understand either language.

Eric remembers how hollow it felt to bear testimony to people of the greatness and importance of the Book of Mormon—and then to have to tell them that he didn’t have a copy in their language.

Six months before Eric went home, the first shipment of copies of the Slovenian Book of Mormon arrived. The branch held a meeting where each member and missionary received a copy. “There was a special spirit in the air,” Eric remembers. He recorded in his journal how it felt to hold such a precious, long-awaited book. “It was like



As translation work moves forward, members around the world, such as Lea and Flora Lotrič in Slovenia, experience the joy of holding for the first time a copy of the Book of Mormon in their own language.



A PROPHET TESTIFIES

“There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path.”

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 4; also in this issue on page 52.

After a translation is completed, Church members who speak the language are asked to review the text. From left: Walter Barillas Soto, Mike Peck, Sulenny Ruby Cucul Sierra, John Bringham, and Josefina Cucul Tiul review the Kekchi Book of Mormon in Cobán, Guatemala.

holding the golden plates themselves,” he wrote.

After the meeting, the missionaries took the remaining books to use for missionary work. Eric and his companion were so thrilled that when they got to their apartment, they opened the boxes, spread the books out, and took pictures to remember the event. They could hardly wait to share the books with people. With the Slovenian Book of Mormon in hand, not only did the missionaries have more success approaching people, but they also had a way to reinvigorate the testimonies of less-active members who hadn’t been to church in years.

In the last six months of his mission, Eric watched

the testimonies of the Slovenian members blossom. “Once they got the Book of Mormon in their native language,” he says, “they really understood it. It sunk deep into their hearts.” Before, speakers and teachers in Church meetings had to read scriptures in Serbo-Croatian and have someone translate and explain some of the words. “It felt like we were limping along on borrowed words from another language,” Eric remembers. When the members started reading the Book of Mormon in their native language, “their understanding of the gospel increased immediately,” Eric says.

In Their Own Tongue

Mojca Zheleznikar is one of those members

who joined the Church in Slovenia before the Slovenian Book of Mormon was available. Her testimony of the gospel came by listening to the missionaries and studying the Book of Mormon in Croatian and English. After the Slovenian translation was complete, Mojca read the translated text and felt the power of the words in her native language. “I felt the truth expand before me in clear simplicity and profound purity,” she recalls. “It was like the voice of my Creator speaking to me in my own language, the language that my mother spoke to me.”

Members around the world experience similar feelings when they receive the Book of Mormon in their language. In 2003, after the Book of Mormon was translated into Kekchi, a language spoken by the Maya people of Guatemala and Belize, translators reviewed the translation with groups of local members. One translator recalls, “We had assembled a group of pioneer members in the Senahú chapel to do the reading, and as we completed each passage, a reverent silence settled over the room. The





A PROPHET TESTIFIES

“By the gift and power of God [Joseph Smith] translated this book (the Book of Mormon) from its original language, and from the engravings upon the golden plates into the language which we now read within the lids of this book; and it contains the fullness of the everlasting Gospel. It will lead men to the obtaining of the knowledge of truth whereby they may be saved and brought back again into the presence of God and partake of His glory and of endless lives.”

President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918), *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 42.

understanding was complete, and the Spirit was powerfully present. It was a sacred experience.”

One of the members in that meeting, Elvira Tz’i, is grateful for the Kekchi translation of the Book of Mormon because of the blessings it will bring to the rising generation. She says the translation will allow younger members to “gain a thorough understanding of the Lord’s word and have respect for what the Lord requires.”

For members of the Church, studying the Book of Mormon in their own language is a source of countless blessings. As members “prayerfully learn and teach from the scriptures,” the First Presidency has said, “their testimonies will grow, their knowledge will increase, their love of family and others will expand, their ability to

serve others will enlarge, and they will receive greater strength to resist temptation and defend truth and righteousness.”¹

Far-Reaching Blessings

The rich blessings that the Book of Mormon brings into the lives of those who study it result in a strong motivation to share the book with others, further fulfilling prophecy. Every year about four million copies of the Book of Mormon are distributed worldwide in over 100 languages as one by one, members and missionaries share their testimonies of Jesus Christ. The “wise purpose” Alma spoke of in ancient times is being revealed in the global reach of the Book of Mormon and in each changed life. ■

NOTE

1. First Presidency letter, Oct. 15, 2008.

FORMATS AVAILABLE

The Book of Mormon is available in formats other than the printed word, accommodating the diverse ways people study and learn.

Internet and Mobile Editions

The Book of Mormon can now be read on the Internet (scriptures.lds.org) and on mobile devices (mobile.lds.org). Currently, 21 languages are available online with more soon to come. Online cross-referencing and search features make it possible to study the scriptures in a different way, resulting in new insights.

Audio Editions

Currently, there are audio editions of the Book of Mormon in English, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish. You can download the recordings from scriptures.lds.org at no cost or purchase CDs through Distribution Services (store.lds.org). Select chapters are also available on audiocassette in Cakchiquel, Mam, Navajo, Quiche, and Tzotzil. Work is under way to produce audio editions in other languages.



Other Editions

Featuring colorful illustrations and simplified text, *Book of Mormon Stories* emphasizes visual learning for those who are learning to read. It is printed in more than 70 languages. *Book of Mormon Stories* is also available online at scripturestories.lds.org.

Also available through Distribution Services are a set of DVDs in American Sign Language, a large-print version (in English, Portuguese, and Spanish), and an English Braille edition.

