NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

**Title**

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**Reference** *FARMS Review of Books* 8/1 (1996): 168–71.

**ISSN** 1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)

**Abstract** Review of *How to Get the Most from the Book of Mormon* (audio cassettes, 1987), by Daniel H. Ludlow.

**Daniel H. Ludlow, *How to Get the Most from the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987. Two audio cassettes, $13.95.**

Reviewed by Kay P. Edwards

This set of audio tapes requires approximately three hours of listening time—a significant commitment that might better be spent with the Book of Mormon itself. That said, however, the tapes may be somewhat useful to certain individuals. They are likely to be of more value to a neophyte Book of Mormon reader than to someone who has already taken the time to read, study, and ponder the book itself. Their benefit will be limited by the listener's previous experience with the Book of Mormon (an inverse relationship) and level of patience and motivation in plowing through the "chaff" of Dr. Ludlow's presentation to get to the "wheat" (a direct relationship).

Dr. Ludlow's presentation is built around eight major topics relative to the Book of Mormon: An overview of what it is and is not, the book's author (Jesus Christ), the various sets of plates mentioned in the book, the engravers of the plates, the book's prophets, its peoples, its purposes, and general do's and don'ts to follow when studying it. The presentation is technically satisfactory. Dr. Ludlow enunciates clearly and has a pleasant voice. The tapes appear to have been recorded during a series of lectures given by Dr. Ludlow.

Dr. Ludlow is a noted authority on the Book of Mormon, and the title of the recording raised my expectations about the content to a degree that wasn't met. An excessive amount of the content seemed more motivational than instructional. The useful nuggets of helpful information were scattered throughout the presentation, and I had to be very attentive not to miss them. I particularly liked Dr. Ludlow's suggestions of ways readers can relate the scriptures to themselves. I found his recommendation that we not worry about trying to prove the Book of Mormon to others or about how to deal with critical challenges to it both practical and

straightforward. It is advice that anyone reviewing anti-Book of Mormon literature might well keep in mind.

My primary criticisms of the tapes begin with the tedium of listening to them for the extended periods of time required to get anything from the experience. It seemed impossible to listen to more than one side at any one sitting. It was difficult to keep my attention focused for the forty-five minutes required to listen to each side, and the soothing qualities of Dr. Ludlow's voice lulled me to sleep before the end of each forty-five minute segment the first time I listened to the tapes. For both these reasons, plus the fact that each side is not self-contained in its message, I found it difficult to follow the thread of the entire presentation from beginning to end. The second time I listened to the tapes, I took detailed and copious notes of the entire presentation—still, however, in forty-five minute sittings. The notes helped, but why not just have the content in print to begin with?

The major difficulty is the organization, or perhaps more accurately the *disorganization*, of the content. The major points of help to a reader of the Book of Mormon get lost in the numerous digressions, references to extraneous material, and multiple lists within lists. If all the extraneous content were omitted, the listening time would be reduced to a manageable thirty—or at most sixty—minutes and the value of the content would be enhanced enormously.

The content that contributes little if anything to preparing the listener to get the most from the Book of Mormon includes (1) the recitation of Dr. Ludlow's credentials, which could be printed on the packaging materials; (2) the review of discouraging Church survey results about Book of Mormon readership experience among Church members and the excuses given by people for not reading it; (3) the numerous quotations of prophetic admonition to read the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon (one or two would suffice to make the point that it is important to study the Book of Mormon and to provide specific reasons why). And (4) the detailed recitations of page numbers and numbers of pages, the sequential naming of books in the Book of Mormon, and the repetitive references to the sealed portion of the plates received by the Prophet Joseph Smith for translation are interesting trivia as a time-filler, but add nothing to the listener's percep-

tive study of the Book of Mormon and are some of the most serious barriers to following Dr. Ludlow's avowed purpose and self-declared theme.

Other elements also caused me some irritation. One is the sometimes parochial orientation (the tapes are addressed to "Brothers and Sisters" and references to communism or communistic countries, along with a definite bias toward a United States perspective) at a time when Church membership is increasing worldwide[1] and interest in the Book of Mormon is growing among non-Church members. Another irritation is the tendency by Dr. Ludlow to make statements of personal conclusions he has drawn from his reading of the Book of Mormon as if they are factual rather than just plausible. His interpretations may be reasonable, but others might be equally valid based on the same evidence or lack thereof. (For example, Dr. Ludlow suggests that the reason there are so few pages in the Book of Mormon concerning the extended periods of time between the books of Jacob and Mosiah and between the books of 3 Nephi and Mormon is that the almost total wickedness of the people during the first period and their almost total righteousness during the second made a more extensive record unnecessary.) Another annoyance is the frequent digressions from the major points of the presentation into collateral material. These may be of some interest, but they rarely increase the listener's understanding of the Book of Mormon. For me, this aspect is the greatest weakness of this taped presentation. It could easily prevent anyone but the most devoted and discerning listener from gaining serious benefit from the tapes. On the other hand, this content may make listening to the tapes during a daily exercise routine more entertaining.

Generally, I found this taped presentation by Dr. Ludlow to have some useful ideas that may enhance a listener's experience in reading the Book of Mormon. However, it requires careful listening and rigorous editing to avoid getting lost in the superfluous material and to focus in on the content that will truly help listeners get more from their study of the Book of Mormon. Even then,

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[1] At the October 1995 general conference, Pres. Gordon B. Hinckley reported that Church membership outside of the United States would surpass that within the United States in February 1996. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Stay the Course—Keep the Faith," *Ensign* (November 1995): 70.

however, much more is required than the content of these tapes to help a reader "get the most from the Book of Mormon." "The most" comes only by reading, studying, pondering, and praying about the Book of Mormon, followed by receiving confirmation and enlightenment from the Holy Ghost. I would save the $13.95 and use the three hours to become personally involved with the Book of Mormon.