

Experiences in Guatemala

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My dear brothers and sisters, I humbly ask an interest in your faith and prayers that the Spirit of God will direct what I may say. The Book of Mormon prophets made numerous predictions regarding the Indians, or the Lamanites, promising many great blessings that would come to them in the latter days. Some of the prophecies regarding the Indians have been fulfilled; others are being fulfilled; and eventually all of the predictions of the holy prophets will come to pass.

I would like this afternoon to tell two marvelous experiences had by the Indians in Guatemala, Central America. These experiences were related to me while I was visiting that country.

I toured the Central American Mission in January 1956, in the company of President and Sister Edgar Wagner. We were on a train coming from Guatemala City to Quirigua, Guatemala. Riding in the same car with us was a very lovely Indian woman, **a Quiche Maya from Quezaltenango, Guatemala**. She was accompanied by her husband. President Wagner introduced them to me, stating that the Indian woman was the Relief Society president in Quezaltenango. I sat in the adjacent seat and had a conversation with them. The woman told me the following story:

"When I was a girl," she said, "a marvelous thing happened in my home town. One day two strangers came to Quezaltenango. They were tall men-much taller than the Indian men of our country-and their skin was white in color. They were handsome men. Their clothing differed greatly from that worn by the Quiche Mayas. Nobody had any idea as to who they were or whence they came. They just suddenly arrived in the middle of the city and began to preach to the people. A large group of Indians soon assembled in the street to listen to the instructions given by these strangers. Many of the things they told us were predictions of what would occur in the future

"The thing that impressed me most," she said, "was the statements they made regarding our ancestors once having had the true gospel of Jesus Christ. They had lost it through wickedness and apostasy, resulting in the gospel being taken from the earth. They then said that God had caused the true gospel to be restored to earth again, and that in the near future that gospel would be brought to our people. Those two messengers said that we would be able to recognize the true gospel of Jesus Christ when it came, and the sign by which we would know it would be that young men, traveling two by two, would bring it to us."

A few years passed, and she had grown to womanhood. Finally Mormon missionaries came to Quezaltenango. As she observed them, and listened to them preach, she recalled the things that were predicted by the two messengers when she was a girl. She recalled that the bearers of the true gospel were to be young men, traveling two by two, and these Mormon missionaries completely fitted the predictions. Thereupon she invited them to her home and received the gospel from them.

This Indian woman bore a very strong and fervent testimony to me that she knew that these missionaries had brought her the true gospel of Jesus Christ. She said:

"I know that God sent those two strangers, his messengers, to Quezaltenango to prepare the hearts and the minds of the Quiche Mayas in this part of the country to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. I and a number of others of our people who saw those messengers and listened to their predictions are now Mormons."

I asked her to give me the names of other Lamanites who were present when the two messengers visited Quezaltenango. This she did. I had one of the missionaries, the supervising elder, check with them for the purpose of verifying her story. These other Indians also gave similar accounts of those two tall, white strangers visiting Quezaltenango some years ago.

This past January (1959) I was again assigned to tour the Central American Mission in company with President and Sister Wagner. Sister Hunter accompanied me on this tour.

Shortly after we arrived in Guatemala City, President Wagner told us about some very important events which had occurred in the life of a certain Cakchiquel Maya man named Daniel Mich. This good Lamanite or Indian had joined the Church not long before our arrival in Guatemala. After becoming a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and just prior to our arrival in the Central American Mission, Brother Mich came to Guatemala City and attended a Sacrament meeting. He bore his testimony at this meeting and told the wonderful story of his experiences which I shall retell to you today. In describing Daniel Mich's telling of his experiences and bearing his testimony, President Wagner said:

"The tears rolled down Brother Mich's cheeks. There was not a dry eye in the house. The Spirit of God was there in great abundance."

The following is Daniel Mich's story. He lived in Patzicia, Guatemala, a small town not far from Lake Atitlan. A few years ago an Indian rebellion against the government officials, who were primarily of Spanish blood, took place in Patzicia. The government officials decided to put to death all the Indians who had participated in this rebellion and especially those who instigated it.

Daniel Mich had taken no part in the rebellion; however, the government officials thought he was guilty. The Spirit of God whispered to him and told him and his brother to flee to the mountains and hide in a certain place. If they did not, they would be killed. They did as the Spirit instructed. As they arrived at the hiding place suggested by the Spirit, they lay on a ledge and looked over the precipice. Below them they could see the government officials searching for them along the mountainside.

A number of Indians were captured at this time and put to death. Daniel Mich and his brother stayed in seclusion for two years, but finally they were also captured. Conditions had changed during the two years to the extent that the Mich brothers were not killed but were thrown into prison. For four long years they lay in prison, living under the most terrible conditions. Their clothing wore out. They had a scant amount of bedding. It was very cold and the jail was unheated. The caretakers of the prison gave them very little food; in fact, they practically starved to death. And to make matters much worse, Daniel Mich received word from his wife that she and the children were practically starved to death. During the six years' time that he was in hiding and in prison, they had not been able to make a livelihood.

In desperation, and, of course, in great grief, Daniel Mich kneeled down and prayed to God, pleading that the Eternal Father would be merciful unto him and let him die. He also prayed that the Lord would extend his mercy unto his wife and children, that they all might soon die. He pleaded with the Lord to release him and his family members from the misery and suffering that they were enduring.

But God did not let them die. Instead, Daniel Mich had a vision, or a dream, or whatever it might be called. He was going up the side of a steep mountain on a definitely defined trail. He came to a place where a side trail forked off the main trail. A man stood on the side trail and said, "Follow me."

Daniel Mich replied, "No, I cannot follow you. I must follow this trail straight ahead."

He went some distance farther, and another man stood on another side trail. He also said, "Follow me."

And again Daniel Mich replied, "No, I cannot follow you. I must go straight ahead." This experience repeated itself three or four times.

Daniel Mich explained, "Finally I came to the summit, and there standing in front of me was a tall, handsome man, with beautiful white hair. He had a very kindly and beautiful smile. This man said to me, 'Daniel, follow me.' I replied, 'I will follow you,' because as I made that remark, the Spirit of God whispered to me and said, 'That man has the truth.'"

Shortly after having this dream or vision, Daniel Mich and his brother were released from jail. They returned to their home town. Soon thereafter, and possibly about a year before I visited Guatemala, missionaries came to Patzicia, Brother Mich's home town. They had not been working there long until one day the mayor sent for them to come to his office. When the missionaries arrived, they saw a large crowd of Indians, perhaps 200 or more, collected in front of the mayor's office. As the missionaries approached, according to the description given by the missionaries, "The crowd of Indians opened as the Red Sea opened for the Israelites to go through. We walked between two columns of Indians and on into the mayor's office."

The elders said to the mayor, "You sent for us?"

"Yes, I did," was the reply.

"What do you want?" they asked.

The mayor answered, "I have here in front of me a petition signed by two hundred citizens of our community in which they demand that you young men leave town immediately and that you refrain from teaching your religion any more in our community. Will you go?"

"No, we will not go," the missionaries replied. "We will not leave this town until our mission president tells us to leave."

The elders sat silently in the mayor's office for several minutes, and then one of them asked, "What do you intend to do?"

The mayor replied, "I do not know."

Thereupon one of the missionaries suggested that he telephone the governor and perhaps the governor could instruct him.

The mayor immediately picked up the telephone, called the governor, and explained the situation.

The governor emphatically instructed, "Let those Mormon missionaries alone. They have a right to teach their religion in your town or in any other town or city in Guatemala, because we have religious freedom in our country."

After this favorable solution of the problem, the missionaries came out of the mayor's office. Once again they described the crowd, stating that it opened as the Red Sea opened for the Israelites. The elders passed between those two long lines of Indians. As they arrived at the edge of the crowd, two men approached them and said, "Will you come to our homes and talk to us?" One of the men was Daniel Mich.

The missionaries were happy to accept the invitation. They went to Daniel Mich's home and taught him the gospel. He received all they taught with much faith and sincerity. They taught him only three or four lessons when a very important event occurred. One day while in the midst of one of the lessons, one of the missionaries opened his book, and Daniel Mich saw a photograph of a tall, handsome man with beautiful white hair.

Brother Mich immediately and excitedly exclaimed, "This is the man! It is he whom I saw!"

Of course the missionaries wondered what he was talking about, and so they questioned him. In response he told them the wonderful story which I have just told you good people today.

Then Daniel Mich asked, "Who is this man whose photograph you have in your book?"

"His name is David O. McKay," the missionaries replied. "He is the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He is God's holy prophet, seer, and revelator upon the earth at the present time. He is the man who holds the keys of the kingdom of God and stands as Christ's representative in the true Church and the leader in spreading the true gospel of Jesus Christ."

In deep sincerity Daniel Mich replied, "I know that all of the things you have told me are true. I know that you missionaries have the true gospel of Jesus Christ." Then he asked, "Do you know why I invited you to come to my home that day as you came out of the mayor's office?"

"Of course we do not know but would certainly like to know," they replied.

Then Daniel Mich explained, "At the time that the tall, handsome man with beautiful white hair-whom you have told me was President David O. McKay-said to me, 'Daniel, follow me,' the Spirit of the Lord whispered to me and said, 'This man has the truth.' The Spirit also said, 'Two young men will bring you the truth', and when you came into our town recently and began to teach your religion, I became curious. I had been watching you and attempting to find out all about you that I could. When the citizens of Patzicia signed the petition to have you thrown out of town and when you called to see the mayor, I joined the crowd in front of the mayor's office to see what would take place. And now," he said, "all the things that I believed have been verified. I know that David O. McKay is a prophet of God. I also know that you have the true religion of Jesus Christ."

These two important stories demonstrate the fact that the Lord is touching the hearts of the Lamanites, and they are receiving the gospel. He is opening the way for the fulfillment of the promises made to the Lamanites or Indians by the Book of Mormon prophets.

The last meeting of our mission tour was held at Chimaltenango, Guatemala, in the evening of January 30, 1959. Missionary work was opened in this district only two years earlier. There are four towns in the district, having a Church membership of 141 people.

There were 425 people in attendance at the conference, practically all being Indians. Based on the Church population in the district, we had 300 percent attendance. Practically every Indian mother was carrying a baby wrapped in a shawl and tied to her body. Most of the people were barefoot; they were humble, God-fearing, faithful people, poor in economic goods, but rich in spirituality and their love for the Lord.

Brother Daniel Mich from Patzicia was present. We called on this humble Indian to talk. When I listened to his testimony for thirty to forty minutes and felt the spiritual influence of God which emanated from him, I could understand why the Lord loved this humble intelligent, and spiritual-minded Lamanite enough to give him the marvelous experiences of which I have told you. I shall always remember our conference at Chimaltenango and the beautiful testimony given by Brother Daniel Mich from Patzicia, one of the towns in the Chimaltenango district. I am convinced that God loves the Lamanite people.

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to bear my testimony. I know that God lives as I know that I am alive. I know that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. I know that Joseph Smith is one of the greatest prophets that has been upon the earth. I bear witness that the true gospel of our Master was restored upon the earth through him. Also, I testify that each of the presidents of the Church from Joseph's time to the present has held the keys of the kingdom. Each one, up to and including President David O. McKay, was divinely selected to be the President of the Church, each being a prophet, a seer, and a revelator.

I feel as Daniel Mich explained, I am willing to follow President David O. McKay at all times and to do anything that he asks me to do. I pray to God that I will have the strength, the faith and the understanding that I might follow all the things that he tells me to do, because I know that he will not tell me to do anything that will be to my detriment or to the detriment of the people with whom I work.

I also humbly plead with all Latter-day Saints that we will have the same spirit and testimony that this humble Indian had. May all of us follow at all times the leadership of President David O. McKay and do all that he asks us to do. We accept him as God's holy prophet. If we will follow his leadership in all things, we will work out our eternal exaltation. May this be our happy lot, and may our Eternal Father bless us with sufficient faith and strength of character to keep all of his commandments always, I humbly pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Milton Reed Hunter (October 25, 1902 – June 27, 1975) served as a member of the church's First Council of the Seventy from 1945 until his death in 1975. He attended Brigham Young High School, and Brigham Young University, receiving a bachelor's degree in 1929 and a master's degree in 1931. He married Ferne Gardner in Logan, Utah in 1931, and the couple later had six children. For several years he worked as a public school administrator in Nevada and Utah. His first education job was as principal of a school in St. Thomas, Nevada, a city since flooded by Lake Mead. He later taught LDS seminary courses while living in Provo, Utah.

In 1935, Elder Hunter earned Ph.D. in history from the University of California, Berkeley. Although his professors in Berkeley, California encouraged him to take a university position in history, he chose to continue as a teacher of religion and moved to Logan, Utah to teach at the Institute of Religion. Hunter spent the next 17 years as a seminary teacher.

Hunter was called to serve on the LDS First Council of the Seventy and was sustained on April 6, 1945. Assignments as a General Authority for the LDS Church took him to many parts of the world. During this time, he visited Mexico, Central America, and South America to study archaeological ruins in the context of accounts found within the Book of Mormon. He was a co-founder of the New World Archaeological Foundation (NWF), and is co-author with Thomas Stuart Ferguson of the book *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon*. First published in 1950, the book focuses on the writings of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (see chapter 11 of *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*). During his career as a teacher and church leader, Hunter wrote 23 books, principally on religious and history oriented topics.