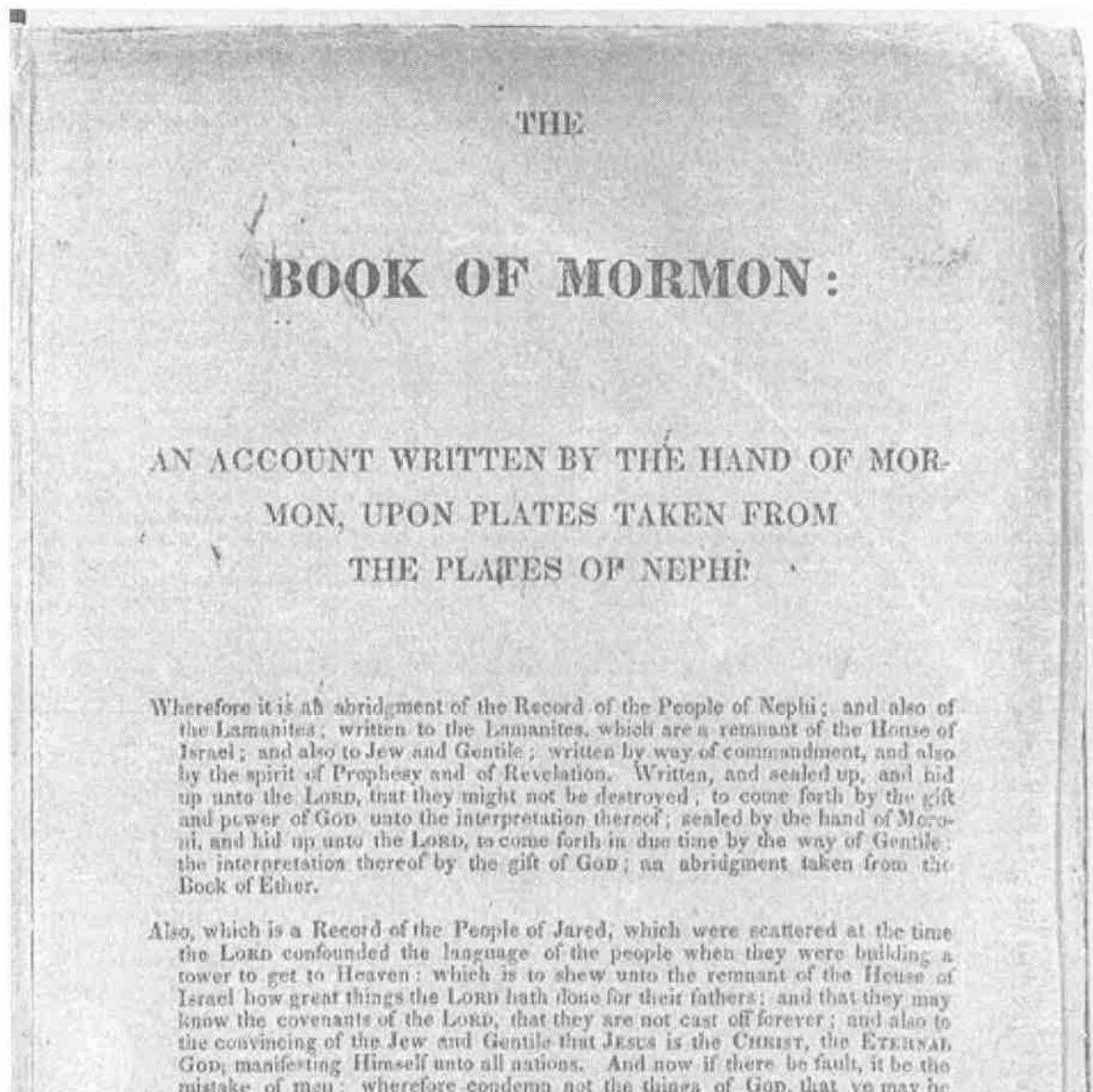


I Believe This Book Is True

by Jason L | Feb 16, 2017 | Book of Mormon, Compassion, Featured, Immigration | 9 comments



I often write critically here. I strive to do so in the spirit of community, as one who only wishes us to be our best.

Today, I want to write something different. I want to share what the Book of Mormon means to me. Because – in my own way that may not be so different from yours – I believe this book is true.

When I say the Book of Mormon is true, that is first a historical statement. I believe it is a real account, written by men named Nephi and Mormon and Moroni (and others). I believe they really lived and wrote. In the next life, I hope to meet some of them. In particular, I would like to talk with Zeniff and King Benjamin and Alma the Younger and Helaman the Elder. These men (and, unfortunately, the authors were all men) put together a book that testifies of Christ, the center of their worship and mine. As such, it has been invaluable to me.

I recognize that declaring the historical truth of the Book of Mormon is a bold claim. It is nothing that I can prove. But it is nothing that I have seen sufficient evidence to disprove either. It is, for me, a matter of faith that accords with my historical training. That historical training is substantial, including a doctorate in U.S. history. Though not an expert in ancient history, I understand historical argumentation and have not encountered persuasive evidence in either direction on the historical question. I expect that will always be the case.

My faith in the Book of Mormon comes as a matter of personal testimony. It is a testimony I began to develop as a child. My family was devoted but not devout. We attended our meetings, filled our callings, and believed. But we weren't very good at those Mormon patterns of Family Home Evening or family scripture study. So I first encountered the Book of Mormon in depth in seminary. I was a studious student, so I embraced religious study like I did my other subjects. My early love for the book led me to pass out copies to many friends as an awkward Christmas present when I was a sophomore in high school.

It really wasn't until college, my mission, and beyond that I developed a deeper appreciation for the book. I began to turn to it when I needed solace or direction. I used it to help others tackle their own challenges. I felt and saw the power that a testimony of the book could have in the lives of others.

I have read the Book of Mormon enough that I had to search beyond the simple stories we tell about it for the complexity within its pages. I learned to approach Nephi and the other writers not as simple ventriloquy puppets for God, but as living people who were doing their best to make sense of the world and to teach others (especially their own family) of the solace to be found in Christ. They aren't perfect but then one perfect example (Christ) is enough. I need imperfect models to help guide me in my own imperfection.

Often, I find this testimony frustrating as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It seems to me sometimes as though we're afraid of the complexity within the Book of Mormon. In our Gospel Doctrine class (designed for adult, mature members) our curriculum is still full of some of those simple, incomplete stories we might tell our children. Our sacrament meeting talks are often delivered as though to the least common denominator, peddling self-affirming aphorisms instead of the challenges given by Christ. We focus on the heroic Nephi and the courageous Captain Moroni, forgetting the sorrowful, sinful Nephi and the angry, self-centered Captain Moroni. In serving up such caricatures, week after week and decade after decade, I fear we're stifling ourselves and perhaps inviting dangers of which the Lord warned.

In particular, right now my heart is filled with sorrow not only for refugees around the world seeking to enter the safety of my nation, but how little we are doing as a Church to stand against those who would sow fear instead of love for those in need.

The Book of Mormon is the tale of refugees. The Jaredites, Lehi's family, and Zarahemla's people were all refugees from the Holy Land. Nephi's family, Mosiah's people, Limhi's people, and Alma's people are all refugees from the Land of Nephi. Lamoni's people flee their brother Lamanites and receive sanctuary from the Nephites, notwithstanding the danger that trails them. The Book of Mormon speaks invitingly of those who will flee to the promised land in the last days and Moroni and Jacob both speak movingly of the plight of the wanderer.

Given all this, how can the Church not take a firm moral stand against all those who would seal borders against the oppressed? How can the institutional guardian of the Book of Mormon fail to see this as a moral issue that transcends party politics? How can the restored Church of Christ not stand up for those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and imprisoned (often all at once) and say "We will stand with these. For that is where Christ would stand, whether they worship him or not!"?

I believe this book is true. I hope my life will reflect that conviction.

Share This Post! Because Sharing Really is Caring!



Jason L

Jason L grew up in Arizona as a Mormon Democrat with a lawyer father – and heard all the jokes. Now he's got a Ph.D. in history, is married to a sugar sorceress, and enjoys raising their sweet son.

All posts by Jason L

9 Comments



Eric Herman on February 16, 2017 at 7:31 am

"I recognize that declaring the historical truth of the Book of Mormon is a bold claim. It is nothing that I can prove. But it is nothing that I have seen sufficient evidence to disprove either. It is, for me, a matter of faith that accords with my historical training. That historical training is substantial, including a doctorate in U.S. history. Though not an expert in ancient history, I understand historical argumentation and have not encountered persuasive evidence in either direction on the historical question. I expect that will always be the case."

I expect that some day, instead of compartmentalizing the hundreds of individual critical issues against the BoM as a historical work, with individual answers or vague possibilities for each, you will be willing to see them collectively and acknowledge the overwhelming evidence that it is not even

remotely historical. That's what happened for me, but it took a long time of being exactly where you are and holding onto some threads of belief and weak FAIR explanations and insignificant "evidences" like chiasmus and NHM.

I finally realized that in order for the BoM to be true, dozens of incredibly edge case and highly unlikely things all had to somehow work out in totality and complete harmony with each other... But for it to not be true, I merely had to accept everything at face value. There was a distinct "ding ding ding" when I allowed the latter. (Merely allowing the latter as a possibility was a huge step, though, and one that took years of mental gymnastics to avoid.)

Have you heard the Mormon Expressions podcast called "How to Build a Transoceanic Vessel?" Try to listen to that as an objective and scholarly historian with a doctorate would, and see if you can still claim that the BoM has any basis at all in a historical reality.

Reply



Jason L on February 16, 2017 at 10:25 am

I'm curious -- Why is it important to you that I see this as you do? My belief in the Book of Mormon has helped me develop qualities that I value. It informs my thinking in ways I recognize as positive. So why respond to my statement of belief by suggesting ways to tear down that belief?

Reply



Eric Herman on February 16, 2017 at 11:34 am

I was responding specifically to the paragraph I quoted, where you flex your historical doctorate and then claim that you find no persuasive evidence against the BoM, and expect that to always be the case. It would be like a neurologist looking at a CAT scan showing a large mass and saying they don't find persuasive evidence of a tumor. Nothing to see here, folks.

Believe in it as "scripture" or inspired poetry, fine. If reading it has value and positive aspects for you, great. Focus on that. But as history and claimed as a true account of actual people, it is verifiably wrong in dozens of ways.

Reply



Jason L on February 16, 2017 at 3:37 pm

Fair enough. I didn't see myself as 'flexing my historical doctorate' as much as trying to be true about how I think of the book. I certainly wouldn't try to convince someone of its historical veracity based on my historical knowledge. If it came across that way, I can understand how you felt compelled to respond to that claim.

I don't particularly follow your metaphor, which assumes I'm in denial (I see the mass but refuse to see it) - especially from someone who doesn't know me (as far as I'm aware). But, again, if you're certain about your perspective, I can understand how it would look like that and how you would want to correct the mistake. I do the same thing in my own fields.

Reply



Tim Bone on February 17, 2017 at 9:17 am

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters . . . And now, if the Lord has such great power, and has wrought so many miracles among the children of men, how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship? (1 Nep 17:8,51)

How, indeed. I'm guessing God knows how to build a transoceanic vessel.

(And Michael Barker, once again, change the margins of the responses. Jason L's second response looks like a stalactite.)

Reply



Eric Herman on February 17, 2017 at 9:54 am

Have you listened to the podcast referenced? It's not just the "how" of building it, but more of the "what" and "when" and so forth. If it was declared to be a miracle, with a boat pre-built and waiting for them on the shore, that would make more sense within the context. But Nephi specifically mentions his efforts to get and construct all of the materials, to smelt ore, etc. The actual logistics of that effort are not even remotely realistic. But they do a much better job of conveying that on the podcast than I am

relaying here. I'd be impressed if someone can listen to that and retain a certain testimony of BoM historicity. (challenge)

Reply



Eric Herman on February 16, 2017 at 11:54 am

I should have added that much of the rest of the message of your article is well stated and meaningful. So yes, I shouldn't have focused so heavily on that one part. I apologize for that.

Reply



Jason L on February 16, 2017 at 3:38 pm

Thanks. I appreciate that. And I hope you'll continue to read in the future. I've found your response helpful for continuing my thinking.

Reply



Mayte on February 16, 2017 at 6:11 pm

Well said. I am a convert to the LDS church. If it was not because of the Book of Mormom I would not be a member. Your questions are my questions. But reading D&C 112: 24-28. I can see that we are in the times that the Lord is going to start to "clean up" the great corruption of times and it is insude if His church that He is going to start "detox" and then out. I also believe that He is going to start from "the top" of His church. But the bottom will have to loise the " fear" and speak UP. OUT and LOUD!!

Reply

Search RationalFaiths

Subscribe to RationalFaiths via Email

Want to get the latest RationalFaiths posts on the (near) daily? Subscribe below to get an email notification in your inbox when we publish something new!