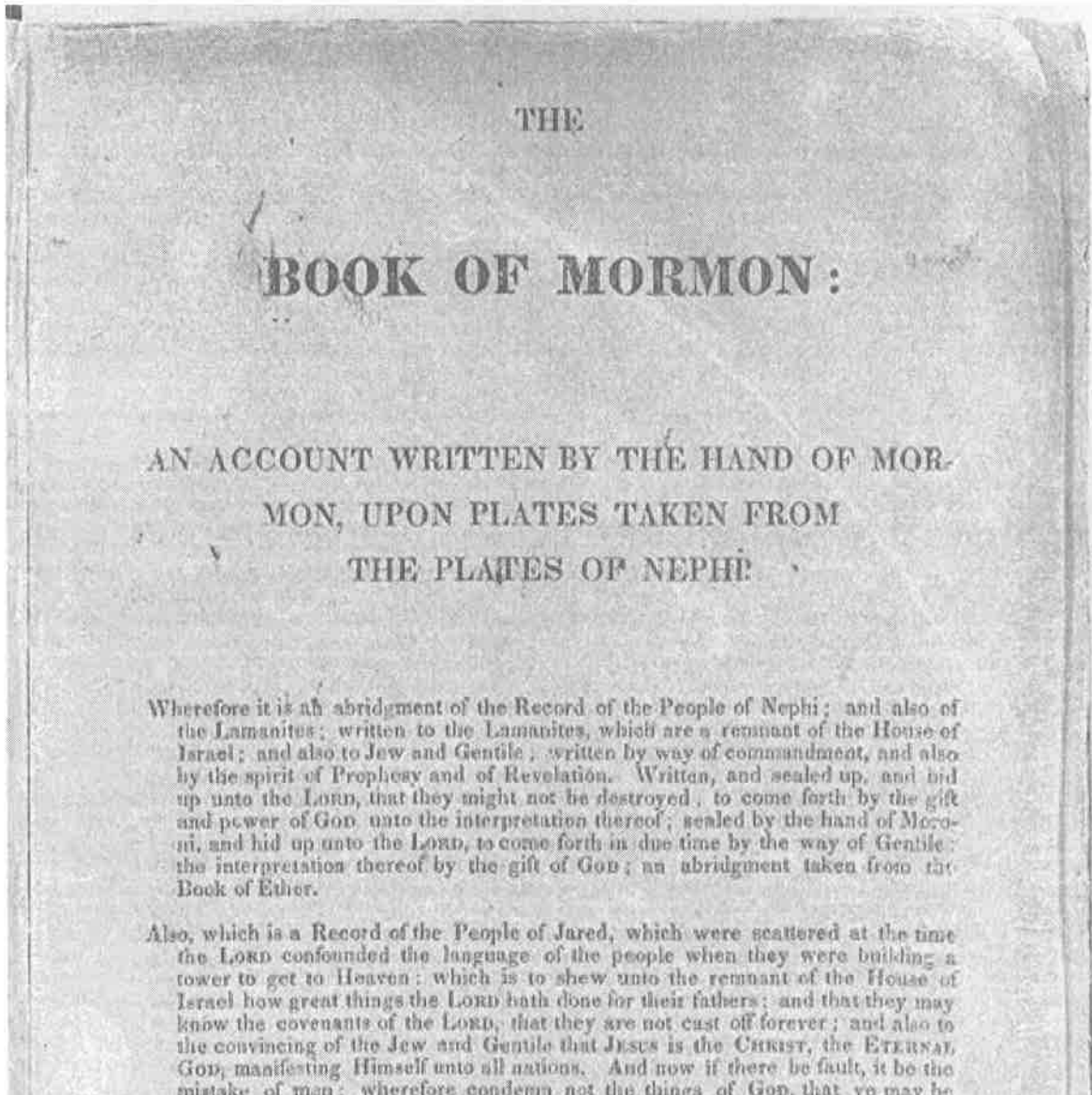


# I Believe This Book Is True

by Jason L | Feb 16, 2017 | Book of Mormon, Compassion, Featured, Immigration | 13 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.

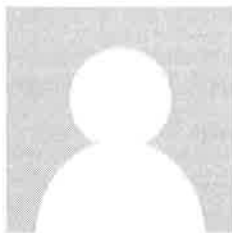
The Book of Mormon is the tale of refugees. The Jaredites, Lehi's family, and Zarahemla's people were all refugees from the Holy Land. Nephi's family, Mosiah's people, Limhi's people, and Alma's people are all refugees from the Land of Nephi. Lamoni's people flee their brother Lamanites and receive sanctuary 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.

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**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](#)

## 13 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



**Tim Bone** on February 20, 2017 at 9:30 am

Eric, I thank you for the referral to the Mormon Expressions podcast. It was quite instructive – instructive to the point that it will become for me a prime exhibit in the limitations and follies of Mormon criticism.

The podcast takes 90 minutes to describe a ship Nephi could not build and shipbuilding methods he could not have employed. The bad news for believing Mormons is that in this the podcast is correct; Nephi could not have built the ship so described.

But that's OK, because the good news is that the ship described is not the ship Nephi built.

That's right – the podcast spends an hour and a half providing elaborate details about a ship Nephi did not build and did not claim to have built, and nothing about the ship Nephi did build.

The podcast constructs a straw man (or in this case, a straw boat) to knock down, which blow is intended to leave us bereft of faith. Nephi (and by extension, Joseph Smith) are roundly mocked throughout – it's a real hoot for the podcasters, plenty of laughter all around – and scorn is further cast by the regular use of the "f" word ("How the "f" would Nephi know. . .?")

God knew that Nephi could not build the podcaster's ship, which is why the ship was NOT built "after the manner of men". The podcasters cannot tell us about the ship Nephi built because they have never seen anything like it. They have nothing to compare it to. So they can take their Viking ship – built after the manner of men – and sail it and Leif Erikson up the nearest fjord.

The Book of Mormon does not say that Nephi's ship needed "thousands of nails" or that a "blast furnace" was needed or that earth was excavated below the water line with accompanying pumps and gates – only the podcasters say this. The Book of Mormon says nothing about the keel or mast or steering or sails appertaining to a ship NOT built after the manner of men. Rather, the Lord's blueprints, adapted to the resources available to Nephi, produced a ship of "curious workmanship". Unspecified ore is only used in reference to tool making. The timbers were NOT worked "after the manner that was learned by men". The entire ship was NOT built after the manner of men. Even Laman and

Lemuel (anticipating this very podcast) initially heaped derision upon the boat-building venture, but later had to admit that the finished product was of “fine workmanship”.

The podcasters cannot tell us about the timber or other resources available to Nephi 2,600 years ago. As for water, the party could replenish it with rain and/or by stopping along the way. The Liahona/compass, remember, told them things. We don't know if the ship sailed around Africa and so across the Atlantic or eastward across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. We don't know what they encountered or saw en route. We simply do not know the itinerary, only that it took “many days”.

But this is what you get from unbelievers: The impotent God.

Here's what I say: At a future time, we will see Nephi's ship and how it was constructed, as well as the latitude and longitude of its landfall in the Americas. At that time, chagrined critics will be compelled (by themselves) to say; “Oh, so that's how it was done. Now I understand. What an elegant design.” What's more, they will also be able to discuss the matter with Nephi himself as he will, per his testimony, be engaging them face-to-face at the judgment bar.

Until then, I suppose we'll keep getting podcasts like this one, which is a house of cards.

The Book of Mormon is true.

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 Mormon 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 inside of 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 lose the "fear" and speak UP. OUT and LOUD!!

Reply



**deacon blues** on February 17, 2017 at 6:32 pm

Jason, Thanks for sharing your thoughts on the Book of Mormon. Like you, I feel discussions in church classes gloss over the characters like Nephi and Captain Moroni. I have wondered about Alma the younger. What kind of apostate was he before he was converted? As a reformed apostate, why was he seemingly indifferent to Korihor's plea for forgiveness? I hope we can each continue our search for Truth. God bless us, every one.

Reply



**alamogal** on February 19, 2017 at 2:48 pm

Thank you for your thoughts in this post, Jason. I realize that it's a brave thing to post your heartfelt thought in a public forum like this, especially when so many others are of different states of mind or have divergent interpretations.

The only comment I would like to add is the following: When you state that: "My faith in the Book of Mormon comes as a matter of personal testimony." I am a bit troubled. Since 'faith' is based on the trust existing within a relationship, it would seem to me that 'faith' cannot be placed in any physical thing or institution (e.g. can you have faith in a car, or in a grocery store?).

We put our faith in God and in Jesus Christ (-and in other meaningful people placed in our lives for good), and have faith in the Gospel of Christ (which is the manifestation of that relationship). Perhaps better said, it is belief in the veracity of the Book of Mormon that inspires the individual toward a greater faith in Christ, not with the book itself.

I'm not sure if this is coming across the way I genuinely intend it, but for what it's worth, I remain cautionary with regard to misplacing our 'faith' in anything but relationship. Whether the Book of Mormon is true or not, if your faith resides in Christ, you are numbered with Him.

Again, thank you for your thoughtful comments.



Reply



**Craig Morris** on March 5, 2017 at 8:40 pm

Jason, I recently read *Understanding the Book of Mormon* by Grant Hardy. This more than any other book I have read confirmed my belief in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It is not a religious or historical but rather a literary examination. You mention the sorrowful, sinful Nephi. Hardy's depiction of Nephi portrays a somewhat tragic person. This heightens the role that faith in Christ must have played in Nephi's life. His descriptions of Mormon, Moroni and other figures are equally as powerful (including Zeniff). Reading *Understanding the Book of Mormon* was fascinating and a great pleasure.

Reply

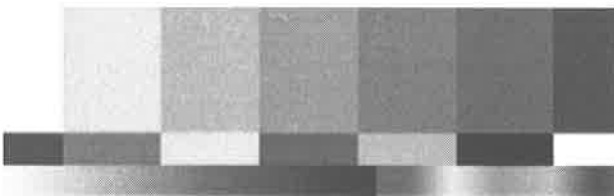
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