



## Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

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Volume 2 | Number 1

Article 4

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1990

### *A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions*

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#### **BYU ScholarsArchive Citation**

Gillum, Gary P. (1990) "A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 2 : No. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol2/iss1/4>

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**Title**

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**Reference** *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2/1 (1990): 26-30.

**ISSN** 1050-7930 (print), 2168-3719 (online)

**Abstract** Review of *A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions* (1988).

*A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions.*  
Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988. xi + 233 pp., with index.  
\$10.95.

Reviewed by Gary P. Gillum

It is not at all surprising to me that Peter warned all readers of scripture that what they read should not be interpreted privately (2 Peter 1:20). The Book of Mormon is the purest and most correct example of divine thought and meaning clothed in human words and language. This difference in God's and man's communication is the reason scriptures often serve as ambiguous catalysts to discover not our own private and temporary meaning, but—through sincere communication with deity—the Lord's eternal message, given in his own language which only the spiritual man can understand. In this way, our scriptures serve as testing grounds for our faith and free agency. As for semantic, historical, and other difficulties with scriptures, *A Sure Foundation* is a good beginning to understanding some of the more difficult questions which Mormons and non-Mormons alike puzzle over.

*A Sure Foundation* contains some of the best of the "Questions & Answers" from issues of the *Ensign* and *New Era*. A collection whose selections have apparently been chosen by a committee, it suffers from the same problem recognized by other reviewers with this type of book: whom to blame or praise. One wonders who the compiler or editor was. Fortunately, an index was included, listing both contributors and subjects. On the debit side, however, there is no bibliography in the book telling in which issues of the Church magazines these pieces originally appeared. Only painstaking research will reveal these things; to wit, that none of these articles is any newer than the September 1987 *Ensign*.

Secondly, like other books with many contributors, the literary quality is uneven. In this case, however, the editors chose the best and most helpful responses for this volume. And I must admit that this compilation is the least uneven I have yet read. I looked at other pieces which were left out in the past few years. What kinds of questions were they? Mostly descriptive and exegetical types, or those which any scripture-reading Latter-day Saint could discover with his own efforts.

*A Sure Foundation* consists of answers to questions on six other topics besides the Book of Mormon—Doctrine and

Covenants, New Testament, Old Testament, the Church, Church History, and Doctrines and Principles. Yet the Book of Mormon questions comprise 30% of the book. Authors dealing with the Book of Mormon range from my children's favorite Mormon novelist, Jack Weyland, to Robert J. Matthews, Daniel H. Ludlow, and John W. Welch. This is not to say, however, that any of them have a better writing style than another. Rather, each author of the forty-some pieces handled the difficult questions in his own unique way. The fact that Welch's piece on B. H. Roberts was approved by the correlation committee and included is significant. It probably would not have been twenty years ago. I feel that this is due to Welch's sensitive handling of this delicate subject. Some pieces did not come to the point as quickly as I would have liked, but they left none of my own questions unanswered. The following fourteen pieces on the Book of Mormon are enough reason to have this book in your library—unless, of course, you are willing to wade through ten years' worth of Church magazines.

**Why does the Book of Mormon say that Jesus would be born in Jerusalem? (see Alma 7:10)** D. Kelly Ogden. This is one of the earliest questions of a convert, and it is ubiquitous in anti-Book of Mormon literature. What Ogden offers is not proof, but convincing evidence and scholarly sources to assuage the concerns of any audience, no matter what the level of educational sophistication.

**Some passages in the Book of Mormon seem to indicate that there is only one God and that he is a spirit only. How can we explain this?** Roy W. Doxey. There was an uncomfortable amount of time following my own conversion when this question popped into my mind often. I now realize that my earlier confusion over the belief of the Trinity in my former Lutheran background made resolution more difficult. Brother Doxey explores the question very well and proceeds even further: Is there more than one God? Is the Son of God the Eternal Father? Is God a Spirit?

**Why do we say that the Book of Mormon contains "the fulness of the gospel" (D&C 20:9) when it doesn't contain some of the basic teachings of the Church? Why doesn't it include such doctrines as the three degrees of glory, marriage for eternity, premortal existence of spirits, and baptism for the dead?** Daniel H. Ludlow summarizes his explanations in one simple sentence: "The fulness of the gospel means that it

contains those instructions a person needs to observe in order to be worthy to enter the presence of God in the celestial kingdom” (p. 15).

**Why are the words *adieu*, *Bible*, and *baptize* used in the Book of Mormon?** These words weren't known in Book of Mormon times. Edward J. Brandt. His answer is also easily summarized: “The intent of the message in the ancient record is clear, because it is after the manner of our language so we might understand” (quoting D&C 1:24; p. 18). His is the type of article which elicits the response: “Why didn't I think of that?”

**A friend of mine says he has prayed about the Book of Mormon but has not received a testimony of its truthfulness. Shouldn't Moroni's promise *always* work?** Daniel H. Ludlow. This question is probably the most difficult of all to explore, a difficulty which a Lutheran friend of mine experienced. He talked to me in frustration several times about his inability to get an answer concerning the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. After reminding him of some of the theological roadblocks inherent in the Lutheran background we shared, he tried the Moroni 10:4 formula again—and succeeded.

**Since the Book of Mormon is largely the record of a Hebrew people, is the writing characteristic of the Hebrew language?** John A. Tvednes pulls out all the linguistic stops in this excellent, scholarly article. It is an interesting contrast with Brandt's answer concerning *adieu*. Tvednes, however, makes a deeper foray into the Hebrew language: What can be said about the literary style of the Book of Mormon? What about Hebrew idioms and syntax? Word-play and range of meaning? New words? Isaiah variants?

**What are the best evidences to support the authenticity of the Book of Mormon?** Ellis T. Rasmussen. His article is consistent with his deep spirituality and contains one of the truest statements in the entire book: “The best support for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is the testimony of the Holy Spirit” (p. 27). He then elaborates with seven subpoints, a list which could serve for anyone searching for the truth in the Book of Mormon.

**Why have changes been made in the printed editions of the Book of Mormon?** Robert J. Matthews. Those who complain about this problem irritate me the most. None of the changes are theologically significant, except for those who like the medieval game of trying to discover how

many angels could dance on the head of a pin. This subject is one area of Dr. Matthews's expertise, and he handles it thoroughly. He includes the Book of Mormon documents, the printed editions, and the editing of biblical texts. Drawing from my many years of experience with the Bible as a ministerial student, I feel that the Book of Mormon has changed very little compared to the Bible. Moreover, the 1981 edition is the most correct yet.

**Did Oliver Cowdery, one of the three special witnesses of the Book of Mormon, express doubt about his testimony?** Richard L. Anderson. The quintessential expert on the three witnesses has answered this question admirably, leaving no subquestions in my own mind. In fact, the story of evangelist R. B. Neal and his "Confession of Oliver Overstreet" in 1906 was news to me.

**What is the meaning of the Book of Mormon passages on eternal hell for the wicked?** H. Donl Peterson. I was brought up on heaven and hell. This article's discussion of the two types of hell should convince any doubter that the traditional views are as outdated as the Catholic church's denunciation of Galileo.

**What is the approximate weight of the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated?** Roy W. Doxey. Joseph Smith himself called them "golden," not "gold." Interesting how a little change in a short word can get so many people worked up! Doxey's discussion of the possibility of lightweight tumbaga, an alloy of gold and copper, is an extremely plausible explanation.

**Why were the Book of Mormon gold plates not placed in a museum so that people might know Joseph Smith had had them?** Monte S. Nyman. Yet another fitting summary: "Those who lack faith are usually the same ones who want or expect material or physical evidence. That evidence will come, but only after they have passed the test of faith" (p. 54).

**Would you respond to the theories that the Book of Mormon is based on the Spaulding manuscript or on Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*?** Bruce D. Blumell. It is as absurd for anyone to argue that the Book of Mormon was derived from either of these sources, as it is to explain the origin of the Bible or the Bhagavad-Gita by each other. Blumell points out many of the historical and factual differences.

**What is B. H. Roberts's "Study of the Book of Mormon" and how have critics used it to discredit the Book of Mormon?** John W. Welch. This piece is the *magnum opus* of the volume. This study was made both possible and necessary because of Truman G. Madsen's watershed work, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts' Story*.<sup>1</sup> Much could be said about this "lightning rod" of the General Authorities and his feelings about the Book of Mormon. But I will allow the reader to feast at this banquet of words on his or her own, giving only a small appetizer from B. H. Roberts himself:

This [power of the Holy Ghost] must ever be the chief source of evidence for the truth of the Book of Mormon. All other evidence is secondary to this, the primary and infallible. No arrangement of evidence, however skillfully ordered; no argument, however adroitly made, can ever take its place; for this witness of the Holy Spirit to the soul of man for the truth of the Nephite volume of scripture, is God's evidence to the truth; and will ever be the chief reliance of those who accept the Book of Mormon, and expect to see its acceptance extended throughout the world.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the answers I have received in my study of the Book of Mormon have come in spiritual ways. A *Sure Foundation* has helped to answer others. Furthermore, it has reminded me that the number of problems in the Bible is considerably greater than those in the Book of Mormon. Twenty years of study have convinced me that if the Book of Mormon isn't the word of God, then neither is any other sacred writing. That is sufficient evidence for me.

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<sup>1</sup> Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts' Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 2:vi-vii.