

# Of the Book of Mormon

No one can know too much about the Book of Mormon

“Introduction to an Unknown Book,” *CWHN* 6:3

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The Book of Mormon is tough. It thrives on investigation. You may kick it around like a football, as many have done; and I promise you it will wear you out long before you ever make a dent in it.

“A Twilight World,” *CWHN* 5:153

## THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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A century and a quarter ago, a young man shocked and angered the world by bringing out a large book that he set up beside the Bible, not as a commentary or a key to the scriptures, but as original scripture—the revealed word of God to men of old—and as genuine history.

The book itself declares that it is an authentic product of the Near East. It gives a full and circumstantial account of its own origin. It declares that it is but one of many, many such books that have been produced in the course of history and may be hidden in sundry places at this day. It places itself in about the middle of a long list of sacred writings, beginning with the patriarchs and continuing down to the end of human history. It cites now-lost prophetic writings of prime importance, giving the names of their authors. It traces its own cultural roots in all directions, emphasizing the immense breadth and complexity of such connections in the world. It belongs to the same class of literature as the Bible, but, along with a sharper and clearer statement of biblical teachings, contains a formidable mass of historical material unknown to biblical writers but well within the range of modern comparative study since it insists on deriving its whole cultural tradition, even in details, directly from a specific time and place in the Old World.

The Book of Mormon is God’s challenge to the world. It was given to the world not as a sign to convert it but as a testimony to convict it. In every dispensation the world must be left without excuse. It is given without reservation or qualification as a true history and the word of God.

“Historicity of the Bible,” *CWHN* 1:15-16

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Where else [but in the Book of Mormon] will one find such inexhaustible invention combined with such unerring accuracy and consistency? To put it facetiously but not unfairly, the artist must not only balance a bowl of goldfish

and three lighted candles on the end of a broomstick while fighting off a swarm of gadflies, but he must at the same time be carving an immortal piece of statuary from a lump of solid diorite.

In an undertaking like this, merely to avoid total confusion and complete disaster would be a superhuman achievement. But that is not the assignment; that is only a coincidental detail to the main business at hand, which is, with all this consummately skillful handling of mere technical detail, to have something significant to say; not merely significant, but profound and moving, and so relevant to the peculiar conditions of our own day as to speak to our ears with a voice of thunder.

“Strange Things Strangely Told,” *CWHN* 7:141

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There is nothing extraneous or afterthought about the religious element in the Book of Mormon, to remove the religious parts of which would be equivalent to removing the rice from a rice pudding. There is really nothing else to it.

“Censoring the Joseph Smith Story,” *CWHN* 11:65

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It is a surprisingly big book, supplying quite enough rope for a charlatan to hang himself a hundred times. As the work of an imposter it must unavoidably bear all the marks of fraud. It should be poorly organized, shallow, artificial, patchy, and unoriginal. It should display a pretentious vocabulary (the Book of Mormon uses only 3,000 words), overdrawn stock characters, melodramatic situations, gaudy and overdone descriptions, and bombastic diction . . .

Whether one believes its story or not, the severest critic of the Book of Mormon, if he reads it with care at all, must admit that it is the exact opposite. . . . It is carefully organized, specific, sober, factual, and perfectly consistent.

“Good People and Bad People,” *CWHN* 7:337-38

## THE BOOK OF MORMON AND OTHER HOLY WRITINGS

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The first and foremost objection to the Book of Mormon was summed up in the first word of Alexander Campbell’s opening blast against it: “Blasphemy!” The first thing that would hit any Christian on opening to the title page was the claim of this book to be nothing less than the word of God—right beside the Bible! . . .

Again the Book of Mormon has the last word. Rare indeed is the Christian scholar today who would maintain that every word declared canonical in the past by committees claiming no inspiration whatever is the absolute word of God or that all the writing given noncanonical status by the same learned conclaves are, when they claim the status of scripture, to be condemned out of hand as fraudulent. That won’t do any more. Today religious journals are full of perplexed and controversial articles on “What is Scripture?”

“Howlers in the Book of Mormon,” CWHN 8:253

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The world today has forgotten that the most shocking and offensive thing about the Book of Mormon was what? For years and years, nobody could find any objectionable teachings in it. So what were they so upset about? It was this: It presented a completely unfamiliar set of scripture and revelation—a completely new idea of scripture. Nobody ever thought of the scriptures being open like that. They said, “Now look, we have the Bible, and this Bible was a concrete monolithic block written by the hand of God and there is nothing else.” Then came the Book of Mormon, not only butting into the picture, but giving a whole new conception of what scripture was, how it had been composed, and how it had been made, how things were built up; it tells us a lot about writing, about recording, about handing down traditions, about how the people thought of the book.

“Rediscovery of the Apocrypha,” CWHN 12:212

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In three ways the Book of Mormon by implication rejected the conventional ideas of what the Bible is supposed to be: (1) by its mere existence it refuted the idea of a “once-for-all” word of God; (2) by allowing for the mistakes of men in the pages of scripture it rejected the idea of an infallible book; (3) and by its free and flexible quotations from the Bible it rejected the idea of a fixed, immutable, letter-perfect text.

“A New Age of Discovery,” CWHN 7:20

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The idea of the holy book that is taken away from the earth and restored from time to time, or is handed down secretly from father to son for generations, or hidden up in the earth, preserved by ingenious methods of storage with precious imperishable materials to be brought forth in a later and more righteous generation, is becoming increasingly familiar with the discovery and publication of ever more ancient apocryphal works, Jewish, Christian, and others. But nowhere does the idea find clearer or completer expression than in the pages of the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price.

“Genesis of the Written Word,” CWHN 12:467-68

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Mark Twain accuses Joseph Smith of having . . . “smouched from the New Testament, and no credit given.” But since the Book of Mormon was written to be read by people who knew and believed the Bible—indeed, one cannot possibly believe the Book of Mormon without believing the Bible—it is hard to see why a deceiver would strew the broadest clues to his pilfering all through a record he claimed was his own.

But of course what Mark Twain did not know was that ancient writing is *formulaic* and that no writer was expected to cite chapter and verse for the word-for-word quotations and set expressions which made up his composition. For one thing, there would be no point to citing one’s immediate source for an idea or expression since that writer in turn was merely borrowing it from another. That was no more pilfering to the ancient mind than taking words out of the dictionary or thesaurus would be for a modern author. This should be obvious to anyone who has read

much of ancient authors in the original—translation, of course, completely effaces the original expressions and makes this kind of investigation clumsy and dubious if not impossible.

“The Bible in the Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 7:111-12

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What about “passages lifted bodily from the King James Version” about which the critics are clamoring? They are simply following the accepted ancient procedure, in which “holy men of God,” when they quote earlier scriptures, favor not the original language or their own translation, but whatever version of the scriptures is most familiar to the people they are addressing. The Book of Mormon was addressed to a society which knew only the King James Version.

“Howlers in the Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:254

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Just as the New Testament clarified the long misunderstood message of the Old, so the Book of Mormon is held to reiterate the messages of both testaments in a way that restores their full meaning.

“The Mormon View of the Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:259-60

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It is as if we were completing a jigsaw puzzle. There is a peculiarly shaped blank which calls for a missing piece designated as the stick of Judah. The Old Testament fits easily into the gap. Then there remains an adjacent blank space to be filled by a missing “stick of Joseph.” Naturally the first thing we do is to try to slip the New Testament into it. But turn it and push it and force it as we will, the New Testament simply does not belong there, for it is not the story of “Joseph and his associates” in contradistinction to that of “Judah and his associates,” which makes up the Bible. If anything it belongs to the latter class, to the stick of Judah.

Since the missing piece refuses to be found, the skillful jigsaw artist simply goes ahead and completes the rest of the picture; and then if the missing piece is still lost, he can infer from the shape of the last empty space and from the design and color of the surrounding areas almost exactly what the missing piece should be. This is what we are attempting here. When the Bible commentators failed to supply the missing piece or to agree on what it should look like, we simply continued to work out the puzzle, putting into position every piece we could find that had to do with sticks and covenants. As a result we are now in a position to make some pretty near guesses as to the shape, size, and color of the missing piece to our puzzle—the baffling “stick of Joseph.”

“The Stick of Judah,” *CWHN* 8:33

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Ezekiel . . . is talking sense when he speaks of the two sticks that become one. Not merely did the ancients have such sticks, but that they used them specifically in the situation described by Ezekiel for a summoning and gathering of the nation and for the establishment of identity and the renewing of contracts. The scattered tribes of Israel are described as apparently lost for good, smashed, dispersed, forgotten, nay, dead—dry bones. This all looks

to a *far future* time, for the *dry* bones show us not a sick nation, not a dying one, nor even one now dead, but one that has been dead for a long, long time. That the nations are depicted as scattered far and wide, having lost their identity and disappeared from history, is noted by the commentators—hence the need for a miracle of resurrection, hence the need for a sure means of identification, symbolized by the identification sticks.

The “extinct” nations are summoned to the great assembly by the Lord’s herald, who takes their marked rods and places them side by side. They fit together perfectly to become *one stick* as the herald performs the joining before the eyes of all the people (Numbers 17:9).

Judah and Joseph are thereby recognized beyond a doubt as parties to the original covenant long after separation and the original unity of the covenant people is thereby restored. The united scepter is then returned to the hand of the king (Ezekiel 37:19, 22-44), where it is to remain forever, all outstanding debts, the price of sin and transgression, having at last been paid off and all old scores settled.

“Stick of Judah,” *CWHN* 8:21-22

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We can say without hesitation that the first chapter of the Book of Mormon, the Testament of Lehi, has the authenticity of a truly ancient pseudepigraphic writing stamped all over it. It is a well-nigh perfect example of the genre.

“To Open the Last Dispensation,” 4

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The Book of Mormon is, as it often reminds us, a selective history. It deals with small groups of pious believers, intensely conservative by nature and tradition, consciously identifying themselves with their ancestors, Israel in the wilderness of long ago. It was this characteristic tendency of the sectaries to identify themselves with earlier trials and tribulations of Israel that at first made the Dead Sea Scrolls so hard to date. The same situations seem to obtain again and again through history, so that the Kittim of the Scrolls might be the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, or Romans.

Though carrying on in the New World, the Book of Mormon people preserve their ancient culture for centuries, which should not surprise us. Do not the present inhabitants of America speak the English, Spanish, and Portuguese and preserve the customs of the Old World after four hundred years? With this strong cultural carry-over, the Nephites are aware of being special and apart—as the sectaries always are—“a lonesome and solemn people” is the moving expression of Nephi’s brother. And strangely enough, they are peculiarly bound to the written word as are the people of Qumran. One of the most important discoveries of the Book of Mormon was the process and techniques of recording, transmitting, concealing, editing, translating, and duplicating ancient writings. Here is something the world refused to see in the Bible, the most sealed of books, but it has been thoroughly vindicated in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

“Churches in the Wilderness,” *CWHN* 8:302

## TEST AND EVIDENCES

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A young man once long ago claimed he had found a large diamond in his field as he was ploughing. He put the stone on display to the public free of charge, and everyone took sides. A psychologist showed, by citing some famous case studies, that the young man was suffering from a well-known form of delusion. An historian showed that other men have also claimed to have found diamonds in fields and been deceived. A geologist proved that there were no diamonds in the area but only quartz. The young man had been fooled by a quartz. When asked to inspect the stone itself, the geologist declined with a weary, tolerant smile and kindly shake of the head. An English professor showed that the young man in describing his stone used the very same language that others had used in describing uncut diamonds. He was, therefore, simply speaking the common language of his time. A sociologist showed that only three out of 177 florists' assistants in four major cities believed the stone was genuine. A clergyman wrote a book to show that it was not the young man but someone else who had found the stone.

Finally an indigent jeweler named Snite pointed out that since the stone was still available for examination the answer to the question of whether it was a diamond or not had absolutely nothing to do with who found it, or whether the finder was honest or sane, or who believed him, or whether he would know a diamond from a brick, or whether diamonds had ever been found in fields, or whether people had ever been fooled by quartz or glass, but was to be answered simply and solely by putting the stone to certain well-known tests for diamonds.

Experts on diamonds were called in. Some of them declared it genuine. The others made nervous jokes about it and declared that they could not very well jeopardize their dignity and reputations by appearing to take the thing too seriously. To hide the bad impression thus made, someone came out with the theory that the stone was really a synthetic diamond, very skillfully made, but a fake just the same. The objection to this is that the production of a good synthetic diamond 120 years ago would have been an even more remarkable feat than the finding of a real one.

“Lehi the Winner,” *CWHN* 5:121-22

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A revealed text in English is infinitely to be preferred to an original in a language that no one on earth could claim as his own. It frees the members and leaders of the Church as it frees the investigating world from the necessity of becoming philologists or, worse still, of having to rely on the judgment of philologists, as a prerequisite to understanding this great book. At the same time, it puts upon the modern world an obligation to study and learn, from which that world could easily plead immunity were the book in an ancient language or couched in the labored and pretentious idiom that learned men adopt when they try to decipher ancient texts.

“New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study,” *CWHN* 8:97

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It is our conviction that proof of the Book of Mormon *does* lie in Central America, but until the people who study that area can come to some agreement among themselves as to what they have found, the rest of us cannot very well start drawing conclusions. . . . The documents may be already reposing unread in our libraries and archives, awaiting the student with sufficient industry to learn how to use them.

## INTERNAL EVIDENCE

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It is rarely necessary to go any further than the document itself to find enough clues to condemn it, and if the text is a long one, and an historical document in the bargain, the absolute certainty of inner contradictions is enough to assure adequate testing. This makes the Book of Mormon preeminently testable, and we may list the following points on which certainty is obtainable.

1. The mere existence of the book is a powerful argument in favor of its authenticity.

2. In giving us a long book, the author forces us to concede that he is not playing tricks.

3. This writer never falls back on the accepted immunities of double meaning and religious interpretations in the manner of the Swedenborgians or the schoolmen. This refusal to claim any special privileges is an evidence of good faith.

4. Shysters may be diligent enough, in their way, but the object of their trickery is to avoid hard work, and this is not the sort of laborious task they give themselves.

5. Upon close examination all the many apparent contradictions in the Book of Mormon disappear. It passes the sure test of authenticity with flying colors.

6. The style is *not* that of anyone trying to write well. . . . Here is a book with all the elements of an intensely romantic adventure tale of far-away and long-ago, and the author turns down innumerable chances to please his public!

7. There are few plays on words, few rhetorical subtleties, no reveling in abstract terms, no excess of esoteric language or doctrine to require the trained interpreter.

8. Whoever wrote the book must have been a very intelligent and experienced person; yet such people in 1830 did not produce books with rudimentary vocabularies. This cannot be the work of any simple clown, but neither can it be that of an able and educated contemporary.

9. The extremely limited vocabulary suggests another piece of internal evidence to the reader. The Book of Mormon never makes any attempt to be clever.

10. Since it claims to be translated by divine power, the Book of Mormon also claims all the authority—and responsibility—of the original text. The author leaves himself no philological loopholes, though the book, stemming from a number of nations and languages, offers opportunity for many of them.

“New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study,” CWHN 8:65-69; ellipses omitted

## EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

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Whatever external evidence [a researcher] finds must fulfill three conditions:

1. The Book of Mormon must make clear and specific statements about certain concrete, objective things.
2. Other sources, ancient and modern, must make equally clear and objective statements about the same things, agreeing substantially with what the Book of Mormon says about them.
3. There must be clear proof that there has been no collusion between the two reports, i.e., that Joseph Smith could not possibly have knowledge of the source by which his account is being “controlled” or of any other source that could give him the information contained in the Book of Mormon.

“New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study,” *CWHN* 8:69-70

## CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

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Entirely apart from the contents of the Book of Mormon and the external evidences that might support it, there are certain circumstances attending its production which cannot be explained on grounds other than those given by Joseph Smith. These may be listed briefly:

1. There is the testimony of the witnesses.
2. The youth and inexperience of Joseph Smith at the time when he took full responsibility for the publication of the book—proof (a) that he could not have produced it himself and (b) that he was not acting for someone else, for his behavior at all times displayed independence.
3. The absence of notes and sources.
4. The short time of production.
5. The fact that there was only one version of the book ever published (with minor changes in each printing). This is most significant. It is now known that the Koran, the only book claiming an equal amount of divine inspiration and accuracy, was completely re-edited at least three times during the lifetime of Mohammed.
6. This brings up the unhesitating and unchanging position of Joseph Smith regarding his revelations. . . . From the day the Book of Mormon came from the press, Joseph Smith never ceased to spread it abroad, and he never changed his attitude towards it. What creative writer would not blush for the production of such youth and

inexperience twenty years after? What imposter would not lie awake nights worrying about the slips and errors of this massive and pretentious product of his youthful indiscretion and roguery? Yet, since the Prophet was having revelations all along, nothing would have been easier, had he the slightest shadow of a misgiving, than to issue a new, revised, and improved edition, or to recall the book altogether, limit its circulation, claim it consisted of mysteries to be grasped by the . . . initiated alone, say it was to be interpreted only in a “religious” sense, or supersede it by something else. The Saints who believed the Prophet were the only ones who took the book seriously anyway.

7. There has never been any air of mystery about the Book of Mormon. There is no secrecy connected with it at the time of publication or today.

8. Finally, though the success of the book is not proof of its divinity, the type of people it has appealed to—sincere, simple, direct, highly unhysterical, and nonmystical—is circumstantial evidence for its honesty. It has very solid supporters. . . .

When one considers that any one of the above arguments makes it very hard to explain the Book of Mormon as a fraud, one wonders if a corresponding list of arguments against the book might not be produced. For such a list one waits with interest but in vain. At present the higher critics are scolding the Book of Mormon for not talking like the dean of a divinity school. We might as well admit it, the Victorian platitudes are simply not there.

“New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study,” *CWHN* 8:71-72

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The great boldness and originality of writings attributed to Joseph Smith are displayed in their full scope and splendor in the account, contained in what is called 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon, of how the Lord Jesus Christ after his resurrection visited some of his “other sheep” in the New World and set up his church among them. It would be hard to imagine a project more dangerous to life and limb or perilous to the soul than that of authoring, and recommending to the Christian world as holy scripture, writings purporting to contain an accurate account of the deeds of the Lord among men after his resurrection, including lengthy transcripts of the very words he spoke.

Nothing short of absolute integrity could stand up to the consequences of such daring in nineteenth-century America. We know exactly how his neighbors reacted to the claims of Joseph Smith, and it was not (as it had become customary to insist) with the complacent or sympathetic tolerance of backwoods “Yorkers,” to whom such things were supposedly everyday experience: nothing could equal the indignation and rage excited among them by the name and message of Joseph Smith.

“Christ among the Ruins,” *CWHN* 8:407

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The Liahona was (1) a gift of God, the manner of its delivery causing great astonishment. (2) It was neither mechanical nor self-operating, but worked solely by the power of God. (3) It functioned only in response to the faith, diligence, and heed of those who followed it. (4) And yet there was something ordinary and familiar about it. The thing itself was the “small means” through which God worked; it was not a mysterious or untouchable object but strictly a “temporal thing.” It was so ordinary that the constant tendency of Lehi’s people was to take it for granted—in fact, they spent most of their time ignoring it; hence, according to Alma, their needless, years-long wandering in the desert. (5) The working parts of the device were two spindles or pointers. (6) On these a special

writing would appear from time to time, clarifying and amplifying the message of the pointers. (7) The specific purpose of the traversing indicators was “to point the way they should go.” (8) The two pointers were mounted in a brass sphere whose marvelous workmanship excited great wonder and admiration. Special instructions sometimes appeared on this ball. (9) The device was referred to descriptively as a ball, functionally as a director, and in both senses as a “compass,” or Liahona. (10) On occasion, it saved Lehi’s people from perishing by land and sea—“if they would look they might live” (Alma 37:46). (11) It was preserved “for a wise purpose” (Alma 37:2, 14, 18) long after it had ceased to function, having been prepared specifically to guide Lehi’s party to the promised land. It was a “type and shadow” of man’s relationship to God during his earthly journey.

“Some Fairly Foolproof Tests,” *CWHN* 7:253-54

## RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER RECORDS

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The idea that the Book of Mormon was simply a product of its time may be a necessary fiction to explain it but it is fiction nonetheless. If they may be trusted in nothing else, the voluminous writings of the anti-Mormons stand as monumental evidence for one fact: that Mormonism and the Book of Mormon were in no way a product of the society in which they arose.

“Just Another Book?” *CWHN* 8:165-66

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In trespassing on scientific grounds or rather, in timidly peeping over the fence, we are only seeking enlightenment. We have heard so often that “science” has disproved, nay “disemboweled,” the Book of Mormon, that we are naturally curious to have a look at some of the more spectacular havoc. Where is it?

We have tiptoed into the archaeology museum and there found nothing that could not be interpreted many ways. We have entered the house of the anthropologists, and there found all in confusion—and the confusion is growing. We have consulted with the more exact or authentic scientists and found them surprisingly hesitant to commit themselves on the Book of Mormon. A definitive refutation must rest on definite conclusions, and of such conclusions scientists are becoming increasingly wary.

“Forever Tentative . . .,” *CWHN* 7:226-27

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Today the literary condemn the Book of Mormon as not being up to the standards of English literature that appeal to them, social scientists condemn it because it fails to display an evolutionary pattern of history, and the exponents of pure thought are disgusted with it because it entirely ignores the heritage of medieval scholasticism and fails to display the Victorian meliorism which should be the mark of any nineteenth-century history of humanity.

“Introduction to an Unknown Book,” *CWHN* 6:7-8

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The writer of 1 Nephi was confronted by a hundred delicately interrelated problems of extreme difficulty. The probability of coming up with a plausible statement by mere guesswork once or twice is dim enough, but the chances of repeating the performance a hundred times in rapid succession are infinitely remote. The world through which Lehi wandered was to the westerner of 1830 a quaking bog without a visible inch of footing, lost in impenetrable fog; the best Bible students were hopelessly misinformed even about Palestine.

“Lehi the Winner,” *CWHN* 5:117

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First Nephi cannot possibly be explained on the grounds of mere coincidence. To illustrate this, let the reader make a simple test. Let him sit down to write a history of life, let us say, in Tibet in the middle of the eleventh century A.D. Let him construct his story wholly on the basis of what he happens to know right now about Tibet in the eleventh century—that will fairly represent what was known about ancient Arabia in 1830, i.e., that there was such a place and that it was very mysterious and romantic.

In composing your Tibetan fantasy you will enjoy one great advantage: since the canvas is an absolute blank, you are free to fill it with anything that strikes your fancy. . . .

But . . . we must insist that you scrupulously observe a number of annoying conditions.

1. You must never make any absurd, impossible, or contradictory statements.
2. When you are finished, you must make no changes in the text—the first edition must stand forever.
3. You must give out that your “smooth narrative” is not fiction but true, nay sacred history.
4. You must invite the ablest orientalists to examine the text with care and strive diligently to see that your book gets into the hands of all those most eager and most competent to expose every flaw in it.

The “author” of the Book of Mormon observes all these terrifying rules most scrupulously.

“Lehi the Winner,” *CWHN* 5:119

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From what oriental romance, then, was the book of 1 Nephi stolen? Compare it with any attempts to seize the letter and the spirit of the glamorous East, from Voltaire to Grillparzer, nay, with the soberest oriental histories of the time, and it will immediately become apparent how unreal, extravagant, overdone, and stereotyped they all are, and how scrupulously Nephi has avoided all the pitfalls into which even the best scholars were sure to fall. There is no point at all to the question: Who wrote the Book of Mormon? It would have been quite as impossible for the most learned man alive in 1830 to have written the book as it was for Joseph Smith.

“Lehi the Winner,” *CWHN* 5:123

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Few people realize that in Joseph Smith's day *no* really ancient manuscripts were known. Egyptian and Babylonian could not be read; the Greek and Latin classics were the oldest literature available, preserved almost entirely in bad medieval copies no older than the Byzantine and Carolingian periods.

"Genesis of the Written Word," *CWHN* 12:453

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There is only one direction from which any ancient writing may be profitably approached. *It must be considered in its original ancient setting and in no other.* Only there, if it is a forgery, will its weakness be revealed, and only there, if it is true, can its claims be vindicated.

"Introduction to an Unknown Book," *CWHN* 6:8

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To the trained eye, every document of considerable length is bound to betray the real setting in which it was produced. This can be illustrated by something Martin Luther wrote two days before his death: "No man can understand the *Bucolics* and *Georgics* of Virgil who has not been a herdsman or farmer for at least five years. And no one can understand Cicero's letters, I maintain, who has not been concerned with significant affairs of state for twenty years. And no one can get an adequate feeling for the Scriptures who has not guided religious communities by the prophets for a hundred years."

What is the world of experiences and ideas that one finds behind the Book of Mormon? What is the real *Sitz im Leben* [milieu]? We can start with actual experiences, not merely ideas, but things of a strictly objective and therefore testable nature. For example, the book describes in considerable detail what is supposed to be a great earthquake somewhere in Central America, and another time it sets forth the particulars of ancient olive culture. Here are things we can check up on; but to do so we must go to sources made available by scholars long since the days of Joseph Smith. Where *he* could have learned all about major Central American earthquakes or the fine points of Mediterranean olive culture remains a question.

"Some Fairly Foolproof Tests," *CWHN* 7:231

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If [the Jaredite story] is fiction, it is fiction by one thoroughly familiar with a field of history that nobody in the world knew anything about in 1830. No one's going to produce a skillful forgery of Roman history, for example, unless he actually knows a good deal of genuine Roman history. So if Ether is a forgery, where did its author get the solid knowledge necessary to do a job that could stand up to five minutes of investigation? I have merely skimmed the surface, . . . but if my skates are clumsy, the ice is never thin. Every page is loaded with matter for serious discussion—discussion that would fizzle out promptly in the face of any palpable absurdity.

"A Permanent Heritage," *CWHN* 5:259

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The idea of stones shining in the darkness of the ark was not invented by Joseph Smith or anybody else in the nineteenth century, but can be found in very ancient sources that were for the most part completely inaccessible to Joseph Smith and unknown to his contemporaries. The few sources that might have been available to the prophet were obscure and garbled accounts in texts that not half a dozen men in the world could read, eked out by classical sources that were entirely meaningless until the discovery of the key—the great Gilgamesh Epic—long *after* the appearance of the Book of Mormon. That key ties the Pyrophilus stone, the Alexander Cycle, the Syrian rites, the Babylonian Flood stories and the Urim and Thummim together in a common tradition of immense antiquity and makes the story of the Jaredite stones not only plausible but actually typical.

“Strange Ships and Shining Stones,” 149-50

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The first rule of historical criticism in dealing with the Book of Mormon or any other ancient text is, never oversimplify. For all its simple and straightforward narrative style, this history is packed as few others are with a staggering wealth of detail that completely escapes the casual reader. The whole Book of Mormon is a condensation, and a masterly one. It will take years simply to unravel the thousands of cunning inferences and implications that are wound around its most matter-of-fact statements. Only laziness and vanity lead the student to the early conviction that he has the final answers on what the Book of Mormon contains.

“They Take Up the Sword,” CWHN 5:237

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It is not enough to show, even if [critics] could, that there are mistakes in the Book of Mormon, for all humans make mistakes. What they must explain is how the “author” of the book happened to get so many things right.

“Lehi the Winner,” CWHN 5:122

## LACHISH LETTERS

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What are the chances of the many parallels between the Lachish Letters and the opening chapter of the Book of Mormon being the product of mere coincidence?

1. First consider the fact that only one piece of evidence could possibly bring us into the Lehi picture, and that one piece of evidence happens to be the *only* first-hand writing surviving from the entire scope of Old Testament history. Lehi’s story covers less than ten years in the thousand-year history of the Book of Mormon, and the Lachish Letters cover the same tiny band of a vast spectrum—and they both happen to be the *same* years!
2. Not only in time but in place do they fit neatly into the same narrow slot, and the people with which they deal also belong to the same classes of society and are confronted by the same peculiar problems.

3. With the Book of Mormon account being as detailed and specific as it is, it is quite a piece of luck that there is nothing in the Lachish Letters that in any way contradicts its story—that in itself should be given serious consideration. Is it just luck?
4. Both documents account for their existence by indicating specifically the techniques and usages of writing and recording in their day, telling of the same means of transmitting, editing, and storing records.
5. The proximity of Egypt and its influence on writing has a paramount place in both stories.
6. Both stories confront us with dynastic confusion during a transition of kingship.
7. Both abound in proper names in which the *-yahu* ending is prominent in a number of forms.
8. In both, the religious significance of those names gives indication of a pious reformist movement among the people.
9. The peculiar name of Jaush (Josh), since it is not found in the Bible, is remarkable as the name borne by a high-ranking field officer in both the Lachish Letters and the Book of Mormon.
10. In both reports, prophets of gloom operating in and around Jerusalem are sought by the government as criminals for spreading defeatism.
11. The Rekhabite background is strongly suggested in both accounts, with inspired leaders and their followers fleeing to the hills and caves.
12. Political partisanship and internal connections cause division, recriminations, and heartbreak in the best of families.
13. The conflicting ideologies—practical vs. religious, materialist vs. spiritual—emerge in two views of the religious leader or prophet as a *piqqeah*, “a visionary man,” a term either of praise or of contempt—an impractical dreamer.
14. For some unexplained reason, the anti-king parties both flee not towards Babylon but towards Egypt, “the broken reed.”
15. The offices and doings of Laban and Jaush present a complex parallel, indicative of a special military type and calling not found in the Bible.
16. Almost casual references to certain doings by night create the same atmosphere of tension and danger in both stories.
17. Little Nedabياهو fits almost too well into the slot occupied by the Book of Mormon Mulek, “the little king,” who never came to rule but escaped with a party of refugees to the New World.
18. The whole business of keeping, transmitting, and storing records follows the same procedure in both books.

## CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

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I intend to take Moroni as my guide to the present world situation. Why him? Moroni and his father are the principal definitive editors of the Book of Mormon. They not only compiled and edited; they went through and picked out things they felt would be important for us; then they evaluated that and applied it to us and explained everything to us. . . . And both Moroni and his father were concerned with . . . the questions . . . of prosperity and security—the great inseparably related issues of wealth and war.

“Gifts,” *CWHN* 9:88-89

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In my youth I thought the Book of Mormon was much too preoccupied with extreme situations, situations that had little bearing on the real world of everyday life and ordinary human affairs. What on earth could the total extermination of nations have to do with life in the enlightened modern world?

Today no comment on that is necessary. Moroni gives it to us straight: This is the way it was before, and this is the way it is going to be again, unless there is a great repentance.

“Prophetic Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:468

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Readers of the Book of Mormon often express disgust or at least weariness and impatience at having to wade through 170 pages of wars and alarms in a religious book. This writer must confess to having suffered from the same prejudice. After surviving three years of military intelligence at every level from company to army group, with frequent visits to Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) on the one hand and a muddy foxhole on the other, and after reading and writing thousands of reports on enemy dispositions and tactics from company sector to army front, I have always been inclined to rush through the military parts of the Book of Mormon as painful reminders of an unpleasant past. In twenty years of writing about the Book of Mormon we have studiously ignored the war stories. But that is where we were wrong.

The whole point of Alma’s (or rather Mormon’s) studies in “the work of death” as he calls it, is that they are supposed to be revolting—they are meant to be painful.

“A Rigorous Test: Military History,” *CWHN* 7:291

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In the Book of Mormon, the very questions that now oppress the liberal and fundamentalist alike, to the imminent overthrow of their fondest beliefs, are fully and clearly treated. No other book gives such a perfect and exhaustive explanation of the eschatological problem. Here we learn how the Christian and Jewish traditions fit into the world picture, and how God’s voice has been from the very beginning to all men everywhere. Here alone one may

find a full setting forth of the exact nature of scripture and of the vast range and variety of revelation. Here you will find anticipated and answered every logical objection that the intelligence or vanity of men even in this sophisticated age has been able to devise against the preaching of the world. And here one may find a description of our own age so vivid and so accurate that none can fail to recognize it.

“Historicity of the Bible,” *CWHN* 1:18

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The Book of Mormon is the history of a polarized world in which two irreconcilable ideologies confronted each other. [It] is addressed explicitly to our own age, faced by the same predicament and the same impending threat of destruction. It is a call to faith and repentance couched in the language of history and prophecy; but above all it is a witness of God’s concern for all his children and to the intimate proximity of Jesus Christ to all who will receive him.

“The Mormon View of the Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:262

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When a person suffering from diabetes consults a doctor, the doctor does not prescribe a treatment for cancer, even though cancer is today considered *by far the more dangerous disease*. What we read about in the Book of Mormon is the Nephite disease—and we have it!

We should be glad that we do not have the much worse diseases that infect some other societies and that there is greater hope for us. But diabetes if neglected can kill one just as dead as cancer—after all, the Nephites were terminated. We can be most grateful, therefore, regardless of how sick others may be, that God in the Book of Mormon has diagnosed our sickness for our special benefit and prescribed a cure for us.

It is into our hands that the Book of Mormon has been placed: after more than a century, many people still do not know of its existence. Plainly it is meant for us, as it reminds us many times; it is the story of what happened to the Nephites—and we are the Nephites: “It must needs be that the riches of the earth are mine to give; but beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old” (D&C 38:39). There it is in a nutshell. It is the fate of the Nephites, not of the Lamanites, Greeks, or Chinese, that concerns us; and [their] doom was brought on them by pride which in turn was engendered by the riches of the earth.

There are four portentous danger signals in the Book of Mormon, three internal and one external. . . . The external threat is of course the Lamanites; the internal danger signals are (1) the accumulation of wealth, (2) the appearance on the scene of ambitious men, and (3) the presence in the society of “secret combinations to get power and gain.”

“Good People and Bad People,” *CWHN* 7:354-55

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Since the first step in the Nephite disease is exposure to wealth, the only sure cure or prevention would seem to be strict avoidance of wealth. One can avoid almost any disease by giving up eating altogether, but there must be a better way.

One of Satan's favorite tricks is to send ailing souls after the wrong cure, leading them by his false diagnosis to "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." In this he is ably abetted by those physicians who would force us to choose between their own violent, extreme, and sometimes fantastic remedies and a sure and agonizing death. Either accept the Wackleberrry Cure, they say, or resign yourselves to a frightful and certain end—no other alternative is conceivable. And so by instilling fear with one hand and offering an only hope with the other such practitioners gain a following.

But the Book of Mormon is against violent remedies. It prescribes the gentlest of treatments—charity, accompanied by strong and steady doses of preaching of the gospel. The final analysis of Mormon and Moroni was that the fatal weakness of the Nephites was lack of charity. And whenever the worst epidemics of Nephite disease were brought under control and even stamped out, it was always through a marvelous display of charity and forbearance by such great souls as Alma, Ammon, Moroni, or Nephi or his father Helaman, and specifically through the preaching of the word, which Alma knew was more effective than any surgery.

"Prophecy in the Book of Mormon," *CWHN* 7:392-93

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The wickedness and folly of Israel do not consist of indolence, sloppy dressing, long hair, nonconformity (even the reading of books), radical and liberal unrealistic ideas and programs, irreverence toward custom and property, contempt for established idols, and so on.

The wickedest people in the Book of Mormon are the Zoramites, a very proud, independent, courageous, industrious, enterprising, patriotic, prosperous people who attended strictly to their weekly religious duties with the proper observance of dress standards. Thanking God for all he had given them, they bore testimony to his goodness. They were sustained in all their doings by a perfectly beautiful self-image.

Well, what is wrong with any of that? . . . The Jews observed with strictest regularity all the rules that Moses gave them—"and yet they cry unto thee." *And yet*—they are really thinking of something else. "Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, . . . all their precious things . . .; their hearts are set upon them, *and yet* they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are chosen people" (Alma 31:27).

"Great Are the Words of Isaiah," *CWHN* 1:221-22

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I have always thought in reading the Book of Mormon, "Woe to the generation that understands this book!" To our fathers, once the great persecutions ceased, the story of the Nephites and the Lamanites was something rather strange, unreal, and faraway—even to the point of being romantic. The last generation did not make much of the Book of Mormon. But now with every passing year this great and portentous story becomes more and more familiar and more frighteningly like our own.

"The Book of Mormon as a Witness," *CWHN* 3:214

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God was their “DEW-line,” their radar, and warning system, and that saved them the need of constant and costly vigilance on all fronts, to say nothing of expensive and wasteful war-plans and war-games. This was Moroni’s policy of preparedness. . . . The keystone of all defense was unity at home.

“A Rigorous Test: Military History,” *CWHN* 7:307

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Why do you think the Book of Mormon was given to us? Angels do not come on trivial errands, to deliver books for occasional light reading to people whom they do not really concern. The matter in the Book of Mormon was selected, as we are often reminded, with scrupulous care and with particular readers in mind. For some reason there has been chosen for our attention a story of how and why two previous civilizations on this continent were utterly destroyed.

Let the modern reader of this sad and disturbing tale from the dust choose to pass lightly over those fearful passages that come too close to home, the main theme is repeated again and again so that almost any Latter-day Saint child can tell you what it is. The people were good so God made them prosperous, and when they were bad, they got wiped out. What few people can tell you are the steps by which the fatal declension took place, without which the story is jejune and naive.

“Freemen and King-men,” *CWHN* 8:365-66

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An extremely important lesson [is] driven home repeatedly in the Book of Mormon, that righteousness does not consist of being identified with this or that nation, party, church, or group. When you find a particularly wicked society in the story, look back a few pages and you will probably find that not many years before those same people were counted righteous. Or, when you find a particular godless and ferocious lot of Lamanites, if you look a few pages ahead you may find them among the most blessed and favored of God’s people.

“Freemen and King-men,” *CWHN* 8:337

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Repeated echoes from the remote past keep reminding us that the office and calling of the bee was to bring about the stirrings of life, reviving the biological cycle in a world that had been totally ravaged by cosmic forces of destruction. Is, then, Deseret waiting in the wings, held in reserve against the day, soon to come, when its salutary services will be required again?

From the first, the symbol of the bee captivated the imagination of the Latter-day Saints in their migrations and their settlements. The emblematic hive became the seal of the territory and state and adorned every important edifice within the vast expanse of “our lovely Deseret.” Finally, by what strange coincidence does the *History of the Church* end with the sign of the bee? After the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, “the bodies . . . were removed . . . at Emma’s request, to near the Mansion house, and buried side by side, and the bee house was then moved and placed over their graves.”

## BELIEVING THE BOOK OF MORMON

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How could anyone put up a halfway decent defense of the Book of Mormon without being prejudiced in its favor?

There is nothing wrong with having and admitting two sides in a controversy. By definition every theory is controversial, and the better the theory the more highly controversial. There can be no more constructive approach to a controversial issue like this one than to have each side present the evidence which it finds most convincing, always bearing in mind that authority is not evidence and that name-dropping is as futile as name-calling. Sweeping statements and general impressions are sometimes useful in the process of getting one's bearings and taking up a position, but they cannot serve as evidence because they are expressions of personal impressions which are nontransferable. . . .

The evidence that will prove or disprove the Book of Mormon does not exist. When, indeed, is a thing proven? Only when an individual has accumulated in his own consciousness enough observations, impressions, reasonings, and feelings to satisfy him personally that it is so. The same evidence which convinces one expert may leave another completely unsatisfied; the impressions that build up the definite proof are themselves nontransferable.

Preface to *Since Cumorah*, CWHN 7:xiii-xiv

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The Book of Mormon, like the Bible, is an organic whole. We are asking the literary experts to produce just one modern work which resembles it as such. There are, we believe, plenty of *ancient* parallels, but if the Book of Mormon is a fraud, a cheat, a copy, a theft, and so on, as people have said it is, we have every right to ask for a sampling of the abundant and obvious sources from which it was taken. Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* is no more like the Book of Mormon than a telephone directory. All attempts to find contemporary works which the Book of Mormon even remotely resembles have been conspicuous failures.

So it has been necessary to explain the book as a work of pure and absolute fiction, a nonreligious, money-making romance. But one need only read a page of the book at random to see that it is a religious book through and through, and one need only read the title page of the first edition to see that it is given to the world as holy scripture, no less. Here we come to the crux of the whole matter.

The whole force and meaning of the Book of Mormon rests on one proposition: that it is true. It was written and published to be believed.

People who believe the Book of Mormon (and this writer is one of them) think it is the most wonderful document in the world. But if it were not true, the writer could not imagine a more dismal performance.

There is nothing paradoxical in this. As Aristotle noted, the better a thing is, the more depraved is a spurious imitation of it. An imitation nursery rhyme may be almost as good as an original, but a knowingly faked mathematical equation would be the abomination of desolation. Curves and equations derive all their value not from the hard work they represent or the neatness with which they are presented on paper, but from one fact alone—the fact that they speak the truth and communicate valid knowledge. Without that they are less than

nothing. To those who understand and believe Einstein equation that  $E=mc^2$  [Energy equals mass times the speed of light squared], that statement is a revelation of power. To those who do not understand or believe it (and there are many!) it is nothing short of an insolent and blasphemous fraud. So it is with the Book of Mormon, which if believed is a revelation of power but otherwise is a nonsensical jumble. . . .

It will be said that this merely proves that the greatness of the Book of Mormon lies entirely in the mind of the reader. Not entirely! There are people who loathe Bach and can't stand Beethoven. It was once as popular among clever and educated people to disdain Homer and Shakespeare as barbaric as it is now proper to rhapsodize about them in Great Books clubs. Different readers react differently to these things—but they must have something valid to work on.

We are not laying down rules for taste or saying that the Book of Mormon is good because some people like it or bad because others do not. What we are saying is that the Book of Mormon, whatever one may think of it, is one of the great realities of our time, and that what makes it so is that certain people believe it. Its literary or artistic qualities do not enter into the discussion. It was written to be believed. Its one and only merit is truth. Without that merit, it is all that nonbelievers say it is. With that merit, it is all that believers say it is.

“New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study,” *CWHN* 8:84-86

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Our prophets spare us the usual clichés about higher spiritual values, the brotherhood of man, and how our problems would be solved if everybody only did this or that. The way out is not to be found in the self-consoling merry-go-round of philosophy, the heroic self-dramatization of literature and art, or the self-reassuring posturings of science and scholarship. Men have tried everything for a long time and the idea that their condition has improved rests entirely on an imaginary reconstruction of the past devised to prove that very proposition. Not that the theory may not be right, but at present we just don't know; and for a world in as dire a predicament as ours that can guarantee no long centuries of quiet research ahead and seems to need some quick and definite assistance if it is to survive at all, it might pay to consider what Mormon and Moroni have to offer.

If mankind is to get any real help it must come from outside, and it does. First of all, *angels*, yes, angels, must come to explain and establish things.

“Momentary Conclusion,” *CWHN* 7:402-3

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An angel is a messenger; when he visits he not only talks with people, he converses with them—that is the word used both in the Book of Mormon and in the Bible. The angels circulated among men, women, and especially the children and chatted with them. That is how they carry out their mission or ministry. Why don't we see angels? The people raise that question in the Book of Mormon, and the answer there is very clear. Angels do not pose ornamental fixtures; they come only to deliver important messages and at moments of crisis. Throughout the Book of Mormon, when things reach a hopeless condition, it is the visit of an angel which moves things off dead center and invariably inaugurates a new turn of things. They appear only to specially qualified persons—men, women, and children—not high officials. But if angels do not come, we are left on our own resources in a perilous condition.

How fortunate that the whole Book of Mormon story begins with Moroni, the clinically specific and detailed account of an angel's visit to Joseph!

“The Book of Mormon: Forty Years After,” *CWHN* 8:549

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This is not a handing down of testimony, for each of these messengers calls upon the others to seek testimony for themselves by faith and prayer; there are no second or third-hand testimonies. . . .

Is there anything to this? You will never find out, say our prophets, if you begin denying everything. . . . All that Mormon and Moroni ask of the reader is, don't fight it, don't block it, give it a chance! If it does not work, then you can forget it; but it is not asking too much that men invest a little of their time and effort in an enterprise in which they stand to win everything and lose nothing—especially now, when so many *know* that as things are they stand to win nothing. Let the hesitant consider that the way of faith is the way of science, too: “Ye receive no witness until *after* the trial of your faith,” says Moroni (Ether 12:6). First we “make the experiment” (Alma 32:27) in which it is fair game to hope for results, since without hope nobody would go through with the thing at all (Moroni 10:22), and then we get our answers. That is the way it is done in the laboratory; what could be fairer?

“Momentary Conclusion,” *CWHN* 7:403-4

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Learning is of immense value, and careful study of the Book of Mormon is of *eternal value*. Rather than wasting valuable time reading so much empty drivel, we should be studying things of the eternities.

“F.A.R.M.S. Letter,” 1