

What I Believe About The Book of Mormon - by Neil Evans

I was given a copy of the Book of Mormon by a good friend who asked me to read it and share my thoughts with him. Because of the interest in the Book of Mormon I offer it to anyone else who may be interested.

Dear Friend:

The following is my answer to your request for me to read the Book of Mormon you sent, and tell you my thoughts.

First! Thank you very much for this expression of your concern for me. I know you to be a very caring and sincere person. Sharing this Book of Mormon, which represents your own highest dreams suggests that you really care about not merely my present life but my eternal life as well. Thank you for caring so much for me.

Because of your sincere concern, I felt you deserve a sincere, studied answer. I have read the copy of the Book of Mormon you sent me. I have an older copy which I purchased many years ago. I also have read the 1830 First Edition published by Wilford C. Wood in 1958. My comments will be based upon my reading of those three copies of the book of Mormon.

I will divide my answer into four parts.

- I. My General Impressions.
- II. The Claims made about the Book of Mormon
- III. My Evaluation
- IV. My Conclusions

I. Concerning My General Impressions.

I find the Book of Mormon to be difficult to read. It seems cumbersome and wordy. It is hard to follow the main ideas with lots of digressions. The phrase "and it came to pass" is repeated so often I ceased reading it. To me it lacks the elegance, simplicity, and straight-forwardness of the Bible.

I found many, many quotations from the Bible, even long passages. That made it seem familiar to me. It is somewhat puzzling to find so much direct quotation of the 1611 King James Bible in an 1830 book that claims to be a direct translation of ancient texts written centuries before the King James Bible was published. The use of Bible terms like God, Jesus Christ, Israel, Church, and many many Bible-sounding names and phrases makes it sound like it is connected to the Bible in some way.

II. The Claims made about the Book of Mormon

There are numerous claims which have been presented concerning the Book of Mormon. The first is in the Introduction to the Book of Mormon. All people are invited to read and ponder the Book of Mormon, then to ask God "if the book is true." Reference is made to Moroni 10:3-5 where it says "...ask God...if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ,..." The promise is made that those who "ask in faith will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost." The implications of this challenge are very interesting. Anyone not believing the Book of Mormon may be dismissed as simply lacking faith. Any specific reasons they may have for their unbelief may be disregarded.

Joseph Smith claimed that "The Book of Mormon is the most correct book on earth and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding its precepts than any other book."

Hugh Nibley in his book No Ma'am That's Not History (p61.62) says: "The gospel as the Mormons know it sprang full grown from the words of Joseph Smith. It has never been worked over or touched up in any way, and is free from revisions and alterations." This is a real challenge from one of the LDS foremost scholars.

Describing LDS belief about the incorrect translation of the Bible, James E Talmadge wrote in (The Vitality of Mormonism p. 127): "It is noticeable that we make no reservation respecting the Book of Mormon on the ground of incorrect translation. To do so would be to ignore attested fact as to the bringing forth of that book. Joseph Smith the prophet, seer, and revelator, through whom the ancient record has been translated into modern tongue, expressly avers that the translation was effected through the gift and power of God, and is in no sense the product of linguistic scholarship."

The objective of the section on the Book of Mormon in the Combination Reference (p. 13) by Eldin Ricks, is: "To show that the Book of Mormon is a scriptural record of God's dealings with a branch of the house of Israel that inhabited America anciently and that it contains the fullness of the everlasting gospel as delivered by the Savior to them."

By these and many similar statements people are challenged to evaluate the truthfulness, the integrity, the accuracy, and the completeness of the book of Mormon. Is it what it claims to be? Has it remained unchanged? Is it true? Is it complete?

I recognize that the primary challenge is a spiritual one. More recent LDS authorities have emphasized the importance of seeing the Book of Mormon as a spiritual text and the necessity of seeking the spiritual messages it conveys. However, from the beginning LDS authorities have claimed the absolute truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, and so it is also a historical and linguistic challenge. These claims put the credibility of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith, and the LDS Church itself on the line.

III. My Evaluation

Dear Friend, I have prayed and asked God to lead me to know the truth. (Yes, while reading the Book of Mormon) I ask God for that help in many areas. I ask His help in understanding the Bible, in being a good parent and husband, in serving the church. God's help is essential in discovering truth, especially since I know how easily we are deceived.

The thought I have is that praying with faith is only the first step in discovering truth. The next question is "how will I know God's answer?" The answer proposed by LDS teachings is that the Holy Ghost will make the truth known by a testimony, a burning in the bosom, or various similar experiences.

With all due respect to strong spiritual feelings, my experience is that feelings are often the least reliable senses we possess. You are familiar with the term "vertigo". An airplane pilot experiences vertigo when due to clouds or other problems he becomes disoriented and refuses to believe the planes instruments. Vertigo occurs when the pilot relies on only his feelings for the planes position. And, vertigo is often deadly for pilots. Additionally, I hope you would not say that the extreme fervency of Islam or the Klu Klux Klan is proof of the truthfulness of their beliefs.

I said all this simply to say that regardless of the feelings God may or may not give me concerning the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, there are other equally important things to look for. In the final analysis, I believe the real issue is "is it true?" And there are things more reliable than comparing feelings. I really appreciate that you asked for my "thoughts." (Although you may now be wondering why you ever asked me.)

Dear Friend, I am simply saying that in my evaluation of the Book of Mormon (and anything else for that matter) my procedure involves asking God for insight, and wisdom to discern the truth, and then evaluating the information to the best of my ability and resources.

In evaluating the Book of Mormon I asked two questions:

- 1- Is the story accurate history?
- 2- Are the claims about it true?

According to the Book of Mormon the Jaredites, Nephites and Lamenites were vast in number and occupied large portions of North and South America. In that process they built cities, established great civilizations, built elaborate temples and systems of worship, all patterned after their Israelite and Egyptian ancestors. The stories mention all sorts of domesticated animals, and manufactured goods. With all of this activity, over the last 2000 years, you would expect to find significant traces of their presence.

In all my readings about Ancient Americans there have been absolutely no references to anything specific that connects the known history of the Americas with the Book of Mormon stories. Several years ago I invited some LDS missionaries to my home. In the context of our visits they showed me a video tape that claimed to demonstrate the archeological evidence for the Book of Mormon. They showed the ruins of various Central American locations and discussed the vanished civilizations of the ancient Americas. I really was quite amazed that they viewed the information as proof since no specific Book of Mormon geographical locations or artifacts were presented.

Realistically, if the Bible were supported by only this vague sort of archeological data it would have been discredited centuries ago. Not only does American archeology not support the Book of Mormon, it contradicts it. Researchers have yet to find any credible evidence of Israelite or Egyptian Culture in the ancient Americas. I have read several quotes from LDS scholars to the effect that there is virtually no geographical data available to support the Book of Mormon. What little evidence is presented is speculative rather than specific.

I realize that the LDS position is that the truth of the Book of Mormon is discovered by faith. That would be fine, IF, subsequent investigations revealed significant historical support. It is not as if just a few sites are inconsistent, for that would be tolerable. But, there is NO valid evidence of geographical/ archeological accuracy in the Book of Mormon. It is a book that claims to record specific history, yet that history is absolutely unknown and unfound in the natural world.

The first claim, that the Book of Mormon is an accurate history of the ancient inhabitants of the Americas, is false unless one completely ignores the evidence.

The second question I asked is: "Are the claims about the Book of Mormon itself true?"

The claim is made repeatedly that the Book of Mormon contains the "fullness of the gospel." In reading the Book of Mormon I looked in vain to find: baptism for the dead, celestial marriage, eternal progression, plurality of gods, preexistence of man, three degrees of glory, and other crucial LDS doctrines.

It seems that many LDS doctrines come not from the Book of Mormon but from the Doctrine and Covenants, The Pearl of Great Price, and subsequent revelations. Doesn't that strike you as strange when the Book of Mormon is claimed to be the "fullness of the gospel"? In fact the Book of Mormon seems to contradict some of these key doctrines.

Hugh Nibley and many others have claimed that no changes were necessary or have ever been made in the Book of Mormon. That claim is clearly not true. I have myself compared my copies of the original 1830 and the 1981 editions. I have found many changes throughout the text. The bulk of the changes are spelling and grammar. But there are also changes of remarkable substance which clearly alter the meaning of passages.

One brief example addresses the key LDS belief that Jesus Christ is NOT co-equal with God the Father. Current Book of Mormon editions teach that Jesus is the "Son of the Eternal Father" Considerable explanation is needed to explain why the original reading of 1 Nephi 11:21

"Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father!"

has been changed to say, in the 1981 edition:

"Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!"

By the way, there is no notation in the new editions when such changes have been made.

I have not given many specifics in my observations. (I have not given many documented illustrations.) My desire is not to get into a point by point discussion of the fallacies I see in the Book of Mormon. I simply want to let you know that I have read the Book of Mormon and found what I believe to be many issues that undermine its credibility.

I realize, that my comments may imply that I am amazed that an intelligent person like yourself, (and many other LDS) believe the Book of Mormon. I don't believe it is a matter of intelligence. However, I am also aware that the LDS attitude toward me is that I obviously do not have faith to believe and I am thus

blinded to the truth.

I realize, too, the seriousness of my conclusions. An early LDS Apostle Orson Pratt once wrote: "The nature of the Book Of Mormon is such, that if true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it.."

Dear Friend (I guess I'm getting into the conclusion part of my letter) I sincerely value your friendship and respect you as a person. I really don't want these comments to become a barrier between us.

I care about you and your personal relationship with God. I certainly don't want to hold myself up as the final authority on this topic. I just want you to know that, after prayer, reading and investigation, I confidently believe that God has led me to the conclusion that the Book of Mormon is NOT true.

I accepted the challenge to pray and read the Book of Mormon to discover its truthfulness, I hope you would be curious about what I believe IS true concerning God and His dealing with mankind. I would challenge you to read the Bible, or even just the Gospel of John, with the same open hearted prayer to know the truth.

Dear Friend, I want to respectfully, joyfully, and briefly share my testimony.

I believe the Bible is God's true and complete written communication to men. I believe that Jesus Christ, Who is part of the One Eternal God, became a human being for the express purpose of totally paying the death penalty of sin for everyone who wanted Him to do so. I have by faith received Christ's payment for my sin and confidently look forward to spending eternity in the very presence of God. I openly declare that were it left to my obedience, a million years would not be sufficient for me to become worthy of God's love for me. I am overjoyed and indebted by the facts that "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His Name;" (John 1:12) and "when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:4-7) The greatest joys of my life come in serving the God Who loves me so. Any good works I may do for Him I do out of simple gratitude realizing that I could never earn all that He has given and will give me.

I believe the Bible teaches that there is only one way to eternal life and if it is refused in this life there is only an eternal separation from God that remains. If this is true these issues are extremely important and not simply a matter of religious disagreement. God will have the final word.
I hope you will consider these things very seriously.

I would be more than willing to discuss these things further if you wish.

Thank you again for your friendship
and your sincere caring for me,

Your friend,

Neil Evans