

LATTER-DAY HOPE

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**“THE TWO GREATEST
NUISANCES IN THE
CHURCH ARE:
THOSE WHO THINK
THEY KNOW ENOUGH
TO DISPROVE THE CLAIMS
OF JOSEPH SMITH,
AND THOSE WHO THINK THEY
KNOW ENOUGH TO
PROVE THEM.”
-HUGH NIBLEY**

Introduction

I guess the first thing to say is that if you've already decided you don't believe, this document isn't meant for you. Nor will this be particularly relevant to the person who feels a perfect confidence in the idea of "The Church" as we learned it growing up.

I don't want to offend you, but I think I should be clear right at the outset: This list is written for my friends and relatives who have said things to me like, "I don't know if I believe or not," or "there's just so much being said against our faith," or "I used to believe with all my heart, now I'm not so sure," or simply, "I really want to believe."

The point of this document isn't to "fix you" or correct a problem. The evolution of faith is a vital and beautiful process. Plus, I don't think I have any skill to restore belief, or a particular ability to answer complaints against the church. I firmly believe it's ok to say something like, "I can't say 'I Know.'" The point of this list is to help you feel like *it's ok to choose to believe* – that maybe there's some amazing truths about your faith that can give you reason to have hope, to keep moving forward, or to give faith another chance, even when you don't "know" some things.

In other words, there's plenty of people out there who are trying to answer criticisms. I think that's fine, but that's not my intent here. Instead, I think it's equally important to talk about all the amazing evidences for the faith, and reasons to believe, and things that make us say "wow, that's great!"

I'm hoping this stuff helps you the same way it helps me – that it makes me feel like I'm allowed to believe in the things I believe, that I don't have to try and justify or excuse my hope to every critic who comes along, that I can go to church if it makes me feel good, and that there's so much more that is beautiful, good, and true to learn. It helps me shift my thinking into a positive mental space that makes it easier for me to remember the times I've encountered the Holy Ghost, and less likely to jump to the most negative conclusions. It helps me open my spiritual eyes and see my religion with more than just a secular and pessimistic perspective.

It makes me excited to pray. And that's a big deal.

To that end, I'm going to try and present an easy-to-digest list of things that have made me say "wow!" in the past. Things that make me feel good, or excited to have the gospel in my life. Things that are true. I'll break these into categories and try to keep it concise so it's easy for you to digest.

Trust me when I say there's TONS more. I've been working on

compiling my “wow list” for over 5 years now, and there’s tons I have left out because it’s merely interesting, or too hard to explain in a simple way. So I also hope that you feel encouraged to know that there’s a mountain of research and evidence out there that’s constantly growing and giving us more and more reasons to hope.

I hope that this list might encourage you to write down your own personal experiences connecting with God, so you can also refer to those when you’re feeling low. That’s valuable.

Most of all, I hope it calms things down enough for you that your next experience in prayer or scripture study will be really great, cause it’s those connections with the divine that are really important.

Greg Hamblin

March 2019

"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" Matthew 7:16 (NIV)

P A R T O N E

PART 1: THE MODERN LDS CHURCH

Section 1.1: The Members

LOWER SUICIDE RATES - Greater activity in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints correlates with lower suicide rates among young men. (Hilton SC, 2002)

A BALANCE OF DEVOTION AND SATISFACTION - While adherents to some faith systems have greater reported life satisfaction or happiness, and adherents to other faith systems have greater reported religious devotion, only Latter-day Saints score highly in BOTH religiosity and life satisfaction. (Newbold, 2013)

A SHOCKINGLY LOW DIVORCE RATE - About 5.4 percent of LDS men who married in the temple were later divorced, and about 6.5 percent of the women. By comparison, some 27.8 percent of nontemple LDS marriages ended in divorce for men, and about 32.7 percent for women. (Heaton & Goodman, 1984) Experts estimate that the average divorce rate is actually around 45%. (O'Neill, 2012)

"God's extraordinary work is most often done by ordinary people in the seeming obscurity of a home and family."
— Neal A. Maxwell

A LONGER LIFE - Latter-day Saints tend to live longer than the general population, even when compared only to non-smoker, active persons. (Enstrom & Breslow, 2007)

IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH FOR GAY MEMBERS - According to a study in the Journal of Homosexuality which used a large population-based dataset, Gay Latter-day Saints have better mental health than their non-Mormon peers. (Cranney, 2017)

LIKELY TO VOLUNTEER, EVEN OUTSIDE OF CHURCH - Latter-day Saints are more likely to volunteer outside of their church-related activities than any other religious group (Zelophedad's Daughters / Pew Research Center, 2018)

FAMILY FIRST - Though one might suppose Latter-day Saints value religion over all else, data shows that Latter-day Saints consider family to be far more important than anything, inclu-

(Previous page)
Youth visit a temple.

[Image 1] Parents swing their daughter between them.



[Image 2] Neal A. Maxwell





[Image 3] Two brothers from the Philippines ride on a bike together.



[Image 4] A young woman reads from her scriptures



[Image 5] A family plays a board game together.

ding free time, income, and, yes, religion. (Pew Research Center, 2012) Even those members who don't have a high level of religious commitment still prioritize being a good parent and having a having a successful marriage far more than the general public. (Pew Research Center, 2012)

A THANKFUL PEOPLE - Latter-day Saints are also most likely to feel a strong sense of gratitude or thankfulness compared to all other major religious viewpoints. (Zelophedad's Daughters / Pew Research Center, 2018)

THE MOST WELL ADJUSTED TEENS - The National Study of Youth and Religion by Notre Dame finds that Mormon teens do better than all other demographic groups in coping with the challenges and risks of adolescence, even finding that not only does being LDS make it very unlikely teens will do drugs, smoke, or drink, but even decreases frequency at which you are offered drugs. (Smith & Faris, 2002) (Religion News Blog, 2005)

MOST LIKELY TO ACCEPT SPIRITUAL TRUTHS FROM OTHERS - Some like to paint us a closed-minded or strict in our beliefs, but Latter-day Saints are more likely than the average person to find spiritual value in tenets and practices of other religions, such as yoga or meditation. (Pew Research Center, 2012)

THAT "GLOW" IS REAL - A random sample of people was able to select "the Mormon" out of a photo lineup - even with some facial features distorted - significantly more often than by random guesses, showing that the long joked-about "Mormon Glow" is a real phenomenon. (Pincott, 2012)

FHE DOES WORLD-CHANGING GOOD - A major study of religious practices spanning four decades found that the Latter-day Saints' Family Home Evening program was one of "the most successful [religious] programs fostering intergenerational connections and the nurturing of families." (Bengston, 2013)

Section 1.2: Service

REMARKABLY GENEROUS - University of Pennsylvania researchers found that Latter-day Saints are not only generous in helping others, they volunteer seven times more than the average American, producing the equivalent of over \$9000 of social contributions annually per member, plus an average of \$1800 in money donations to social causes. (DiSanto, 2012)

A BREAKNECK PACE OF SELF-RELIANCE TRAINING - In its first three years, the church's self-reliance initiative trained over 700,000 people in 130 countries on topics like starting a business, finding a better job, managing finances, and getting an education. (Mormon Newsroom, 2018)

VACCINES AND VACCINATION TRAINING - The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the single largest religious donor to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations, and continues to donate \$1.5 million per year to provide immunization supplies. Our volunteers then educate local community members on how to perform their own vaccinations, so they need not rely on charity organizations. (Wrigley, 2012) LDS Charities has also contributed \$7.3 million to the Global Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Elimination Initiative, providing vaccines to women of reproductive age, health education, training of birth attendants and more.

COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFECTIVE SOCIAL WELFARE - Bloomberg reports that "Mormon Church... essentially runs the most comprehensive and effective social welfare system in the country...maybe in the world" (Mcardle, 2013)

MILLIONS OF POUNDS OF GRAIN DONATED ANNUALLY - The LDS Church keeps 9.1 million bushels of wheat on hand for emergencies at all times divided between 28 cities across the USA and Canada. That's 546 million lbs or \$72.8 million. As stores are replenished, this wheat is milled into flour and given away across the world as loaves of bread and boxes of pasta. (Swensen, 2014)

AN ESSENTIAL PARTNER IN DISASTER RESPONSE - The president of the Red Cross says: "Our partnership with the LDS church is absolutely essential for the Red Cross to fulfill its mission every day. With us, the church has been there in so many different parts of the world in large numbers... The most critical thing in disaster

[Image 6]

A young woman volunteers at an orphanage.





[Image 7] (left)

A young man helps an elderly woman carry groceries to her car.



[Image 8] (right)

A senior missionary helps tie a quilt at a humanitarian center.

response is moving large groups of people to the site of the disaster. There is no one who can mobilize groups of people better than the LDS Church.” (Mormon Newsroom, 2013)

FIGHTING HOMELESSNESS - The LDS Church support of Utah’s “Housing First” initiative helped reduce chronic homelessness in Utah by over 90% (Carrier, 2015)

RESOURCE CENTERS AND PERPETUAL EDUCATION - The LDS Church operates over 1,100 Self-Reliance Resource Centers which includes access to the Perpetual Education Fund which gives disadvantaged people access to education loans to learn new skills for a better life. This project was so well funded by members that the church is not even accepting donations for it any more. (LDS Church, 2018)

"It is a time-honored adage that love begets love. Let us pour forth love—show forth our kindness unto all mankind, and the Lord will reward us with everlasting increase."
-Joseph Smith

IMPROVING THE WORLD, NOT JUST REPAIRING IT - As an example of disaster response philosophy: when disaster struck, Latter-day Saints didn't just rebuild homes for victims of Typhoon Haiyan, they bought them tools, taught people how to build their own houses, then gave them trade certificates in construction that helped them qualify for better jobs. (Walch, Perpetual Education Fund's success led to massive expansion of LDS effort to lift the poor, 2016)

DOING MORE THAN JUST TITHING - Members and supporters of the LDS Church donate an additional \$50 Million per year on average to humanitarian assistance such as emergency response,

clean water efforts, wheelchairs, developing country neonatal care, and immunization projects ON TOP of donations made for Tithing, food storehouses, employment assistance, thrift stores, and other welfare efforts. 100% of these funds are used to help those in need, rather than a percentage due to overhead or management. (LDS Charities, 2011) (Wenger, 2012) (LDS Church, 2018)

BILLIONS SPENT SUPPORTING THE NEEDY - According to the Economist Magazine, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints spends at least \$50,000 per congregation (that's 1.2 billion worldwide) per year on direct cash aid to local congregations to buy food, pay for housing, cover medical bills, assist in substance abuse recovery, provide food and clothing, and other welfare benefits. (The Economist, 2002)

MORE THAN JUST BISHOPS AVAILABLE TO HELP - The Church has programs to train and support employment specialists, disability specialists, and community service specialists on global, area, stake, and ward levels.

Most of the troubles of the world come because of human greed. What a therapeutic and wonderful thing it is for a man or woman to set aside all consideration of personal gain and reach out with strength and energy and purpose to help the unfortunate, to improve the community, to clean up the environment and beautify our surroundings. How much greater would be the suffering of the homeless and the hungry in our own communities without the service of hundreds of volunteers who give of their time and substance to assist them. -Gordon B. Hinkley "I Believe," Ensign, Aug. 1992, 5.

HELPING OTHERS SERVE - The LDS Church created and continues to support JustServe.org – a free service that uses the power of the internet to connect volunteers with needy individuals and organizations around the whole world, increasing the amount and efficiency of service done globally. (Lloyd, 2018)

THE FAITH OF OPPORTUNITY - Bloomberg reports that Utah's upward mobility – that is, the ability a person has to change their own economic status from bad to good – is not just good for a US

[Image 9] Gordon B. Hinkley



[Image 10] A young man carries dirt to clear out a home for a service project.



state, but is nearly the best in the entire world. This is attributed to a number of factors, but especially to how the Church mobilizes, encourages charity and social programs, tears down political walls, and builds the community. (McArdle, 2017)

REFUGEE HELP – When the refugee crisis in Syria grew to extreme levels, the Church expanded its existing infrastructure in neighboring Jordan, sent a letter to all congregations instructing them to give more generously to humanitarian aid, and launched a program called “I was a stranger” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2019) designed to assist members in finding ways to help with humanitarian crises from their own communities. When the U.S. Government moved to reduce refugee aid, the Church issued a strong statement calling on all governments to instead focus on meeting human needs and relieving suffering. (Walch, LDS Church issues statement after Trump orders ban on refugees, 2017)

PROVIDING SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD – LDS Charities partners with One Acre Fund seeking to provide people in under-developed countries with the training and resources needed to provide their own food through sustainable farming in dozens of countries around the world. (One Acre Fund, 2019)

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT FUNDING - In 2018, LDS Charities provided the seed funding for Learning for Life, a multi-country program designed to meet the Early Childhood Development (ECD) and education needs of children affected by the South Sudan and other regional refugee crises. Thanks to the support of LDS Charities, these programs are being supported and scaled up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. (UNICEF, 2019)

Section 1.3: Education

KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT RELIGION, EVEN OUTSIDE THEIR OWN FAITH - Latter-day Saints score higher than all other Christian faiths on Religious Knowledge tests. (Pew Research Center, 2010)

THE MORE EDUCATED, THE MORE FAITHFUL - As religious persons become more educated, they tend to become LESS devout and their religious commitment declines. The Latter-day Saints are the exception to this pattern. Church attendance, affiliation, and religious observance increase as Latter-day Saints become more educated. (Albrecht & Heaton, 1984) (Pew Research Center, 2012)

A LOVE FOR LEARNING - Latter-day Saints are significantly more likely than the population overall to get some advanced education. (Pew Research Center, 2009)

You have a mandate from the Lord to educate your minds and your hearts and your hands. The Lord has said, "Teach ye diligently ... of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—that ye may be prepared in all things" (D&C 88:78–80). - Gordon B. Hinkley

PROVIDING HIGHER EDUCATION TO THE WORLD - In addition to the perpetual education program, the church also operates BYU Pathway Worldwide which provides a highly subsidized, fully accredited college education to people around the world, with pricing adjusted based on local cost of living (for example, a student in, say, Argentina can pay as little as 67 dollars for a full semester of classes). (Mormon Newsroom, 2017)

INVESTING HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS PER YEAR INTO EDUCATION - Given the average cost of tuition at church-owned schools, and the average cost of neighboring comparable schools, and a student population of roughly 100,000 at all of its campuses,



[Image 11] A young woman writes in a journal.



[Image 12] A man reads his scriptures from a tablet.



[Image 13] A young woman studies in an institute building.

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is spending something like \$420,750,000 per year to subsidize the education of its membership and those who choose to learn with us.

BRINGING ISLAMIC TEXTS OUT OF OBSCURITY - The Church and BYU established the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative: an effort to bring the intellectual and political writings of classical Islam to the whole world, with the highest academic standards, allowing the majority of Muslims to read them for the first time ever. (Davis M. , 2013)

STUDYING FAITH AND FAMILY FOR ALL RELIGIONS - The church university, BYU, has supported the creation of the American Families of Faith project to engage in rigorous scholarship to explore faith and family life in order to share research-based ideas about how to encourage faith in marriage, family, and to facilitate human joy and stability in relationships. (American Families of Faith, 2017)

Section 1.4:

Some other cool stuff:

100 YEARS OF FAMILY FOCUS - The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints introduced Family Home Evening – a program to encourage regular family togetherness and shared experiences – over 100 years ago. (Smith, Lund, & Penrose, 1915)

WORKING WITH OTHER FAITHS TO ENCOURAGE BELIEF - The Church has joined with several other religions to form faith-counts.com – a program dedicated to enhancing the faith of all people, no matter their religious background. (Faith Counts, 2019)

OPPOSED TO SLAVERY FROM DAY 1 - Joseph Smith ran for president on a platform to abolish slavery 17 years before the civil war. (Blacklds.org, 2018)

PIONEERS IN WOMEN'S RIGHTS - Women's right to vote in Utah was given to them by a Mormon-dominated legislature 50 years before the right was given nationally. The church and its members continued to push women's suffrage in the Utah territory and state even after the Federal government disenfranchised women. (Ulrich, 2017) The first female state senator in the US was a Mormon woman, (Wikipedia, 2018) and the first all-female town council was in a Mormon settlement. (Davis & Fields, 2018)

EMPOWERING WOMEN - Women in the church were taught they had the right to choose who they wanted to marry, and the territory of Utah was the first place in the US to grant women the right to “no fault” divorce, along with the right to own their own property and income, giving women unprecedented freedom and flexibility in determining their own destinies in a time when most women could only have security through their husbands. (Ulrich, 2017)

BRINGING IMMIGRANTS HOME - The church created the perpetual emigration fund, used to help even the poorest of people make the trip to America to fulfil their dreams. This fund assisted over 26,000 immigrants come to the United States from other nations and kept operating for over 30 years. (Jensen, 2018)

FOCUSED ON FAIRNESS FOR ALL - When an lgbtq-focused non-discrimination bill seemed doomed to failure in the traditionally conservative Utah legislature, the church used its political influence to revive the bill and help it pass. (Bever, 2015)



[Image 14] (left)
Church leaders frequently preach tolerance, service, and love.



[Image 15] (right)
The monument at the site of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

FACING THE DARKNESS - In the spirit of transparency and truth the church published the most thorough and accurate book on the Mountain Meadows Massacre ever written through Oxford University Press, even though it would more fully bring to light the darkest period of Latter-day Saint history. (Walker, Turley, & Leonard, 2008)

EMBRACING THE HIGHEST SCHOLASTIC STANDARDS - Unwilling to accept faith-positive histories only, the Church initiated the Joseph Smith Papers project and sought endorsement by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, a division of the National Archives, to ensure research is conducted according to the highest scholarly standards and is free of bias. It has been called a “model of modern documentary editorial practices” by the Chief of the Library of Congress’ Manuscript Division, and received accolades from scholars all over the world. (The Joseph Smith Papers Project, 2019)

“...The Joseph Smith Papers Documents series is a triumph of meticulous scholarship... This project remains the gold standard in the field of historical documentary editing.”

—Thomas P. Slaughter, Arthur R. Miller Professor of History, University of Rochester

PREACHING AGAINST PREJUDICE - Multiple members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have spoken out against prejudice in general conference, calling on members to “eliminate any prejudice, including racism, sexism, and nationalism.” (Anderson, 2017)

REJECTING THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE - The church officially opposed and spoke out against the MX Missile program and the nuclear arms race during the height of the Cold War. (the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981)

BRINGING AN END TO SLAVERY IN UTAH - When it became clear that the territory of Utah would need to allow slavery in order to become a state, they submitted to the requirement, but Brigham Young and the state leadership enacted a law that would require families to be kept together, the children of slaves to be set free and their education to be provided for by their parents owners, a roundabout way to attempt to end slavery within a generation. Moreover, the law said that if an owner abused his slave that slave would be set free immediately. (Christopher B. Rich, 2012)

"Our task is to become our best selves. One of God's greatest gifts to us is the joy of trying again, for no failure ever need be final." -Thomas S. Monson

PROTECTING THE NATIVE AMERICANS WITH THEIR LIVES - Even when slavery was allowed in the territory, Brigham Young banned slave traders from entering the territory and mobilized the militia to enforce the ban, driving out some slave traders who commonly raided the Ute tribes for slaves. (Nichols, 1995)

ANTI-WAR - Through political leaders of all stripes, the church has repeatedly and clearly opposed war. (Grant, Clark, & McKay, 1942)

FAMILY AND LOVE COME BEFORE POLITICS - The church has repeatedly called for compassion in immigration laws, encouraging laws that keep families together and condemning aggressive and racist statements by officials. (Church News, 2018)

REHABILITATION, NOT JUST PUNISHMENT - Joseph Smith campaigned to abolish debtors' prisons, and instead replacing such institutions with an educational system that would help people become more enlightened and able to support themselves. (Roberts, 1900)

[Image 16]
Thomas S. Monson



OBEY THE LAW - When Same-Sex Marriage was legalized, church leaders immediately condemned those who chose to break the law through civil disobedience fighting against such marriages. Instead we are instructed to obey and uphold the law and seek fairness for all. (Walch, Elder Oaks makes national news with statement on gay rights, religious liberty, 2015)

TOLERANCE OF ALL FAITHS - When Nauvoo was built, one of the first city ordinances passed was one which required equal privileges and toleration for any and all religions, not just Mormonism. (Church, 1845)

[Image 17]

A young woman at an intersection.



What do we do with this information?

You'll notice I'm not trying to confront criticisms of the church or to address any of the perceived wrongs done by church members or church policy. There's plenty of sources out there to do that already. The point I'm trying to make is that there is far more to the story than just the attack and the defense.

Think of it this way: a wonderful woman raises a family of 8 children. Imagine, perhaps, your own mother. She teaches them, loves them, and does her best. After her death a biographer writes the story of her life and decides he will only list "facts." For some reason, he focuses on all the times she yelled, how she punished the children, and all the times she broke with modern parenting standards.

There is nothing factually incorrect about his biography. You might hear a defender say something like "point to one place where there is a lie!" So, what's wrong with it? This biography might be considered "true," but it's not really "the Truth." It has no *explanatory power*.

We could choose to spend our time trying to refute all these claims made by the biographer, arguing whether or not a spanking really happened, whether the yelling was justified, or whatever, but neither the accusations nor their defense can explain how generations grew up to call this woman beloved, nor does it mention all the times she read them stories, went to their sporting events, supported them, taught them, loved them, and sacrificed so much of herself for them. It can't explain how children then dozens of grand and great-grandchildren grew up as good contributors to society and loving, decent human beings. If we only used that slanted biography or the responses to it as our research, we would be missing the more important and no-less true story: The story of a good woman, doing her best, failing sometimes, but overall succeeding in what was most vital.

*"Indeed, faith is a response to evidence, not a rejoicing in the absence of evidence."
— John Lennox*

When we see those slanted biographies of the church, that claim to be "just the truth," we need to ask ourselves if there's explanatory power behind their

claims. I hope that this brief list of amazing facts about our faith will remind all of us that the divine organization of the church, despite its many flaws and flawed members, is succeeding in what is most important and produces generation after generation of good, faithful human beings who change the world for the better. People who serve more than any other population, who fight discrimination and lift the downtrodden and the refugee. People who have a drive for education and who create economic mobility in the communities where they live. People who want to improve and be changed by the grace of God. People who are truly Christian.

In the next section, I want to talk about some really amazing points that give evidence not only that the church is good, but that there may be more to the Book of Mormon than the antagonists to faith would share.

P A R T T W O

PART 2: THE BOOK OF MORMON

“Without admitting the possibility, you can never honestly test the hypothesis: “Is the Book of Mormon true?”” - Bruce E. Dale



Section 2.1: Archaeology

While the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints takes no official stance on possible locations for the events depicted in the Book of Mormon, you'll see a remarkable number of correspondences between the Book of Mormon narrative and ancient Mesoamerican history, culture, and archaeology. This section examines just a few of those correspondences, along with old-word correspondences. It's worth noting that other people, including professional anthropologists, have noted hundreds of these sorts of connections beyond what I list here.

GOLDEN PLATES WITH WRITING IN THE AMERICAS - Golden plates with writing (Mayan hieroglyphs) have been found in Meso America. The people of that time would throw the plates into the deep sinkholes filled with water, believing them to be gateways to the afterlife. (Johnson D. , 2011)

PLATES HIDDEN IN STONE BOXES - Joseph Smith reported recovering the “Gold Plates” from which the Book of Mormon was translated from a stone box hidden in the ground. Writing on metal plates, then hiding the metal in stone boxes was completely unheard of in Joseph Smith’s time. Beginning in 1926, so many metal documents secured in stone have been discovered that it’s now considered commonplace, particularly in the time and location of Lehi. (Wright, 1981)

LARGE POPULATIONS - The Book of Mormon predicts large populations at the peak of Nephite / Lamanate civilizations. For a long time, people assumed the population in Mesoamerica was not large enough to support these claims, but only recently technology means just one area of Guatemala could have held 15 million people alone during the periods described as the height of the Lehiite cultures after Christ. (Clynes, 2018)

COMMON STRUCTURES - The Book of Mormon predicts raised roads and towers as commonplace structures. These structures are now detected in high-tech scans of the Mayan ruins in Guatemala. (Clynes, 2018)

THE LANDS OF __ - Ancient Mayan “maps” or place names differentiated between the settled places, “lands of __,” and all else as “wilderness” just as Book of Mormon authors do. (Tokovinine, 2013)

(Image 19 - *Previous page*)
Strip of the Copper Scroll from Qumran Cave 3 written in the Hebrew Mishnaic dialect, on display at the Jordan Museum, Amman. Shared under a CC BY-SA 4.0 licence. Author: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP(Glasg) - Own work

[Image 20] La Danta at the Mayan site of El Mirador - Dennis Jarvis from Halifax, Canada [CC BY-SA 2.0]



[Image 21] *Guatemalan volcano* By Stan Shebs, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=51265>

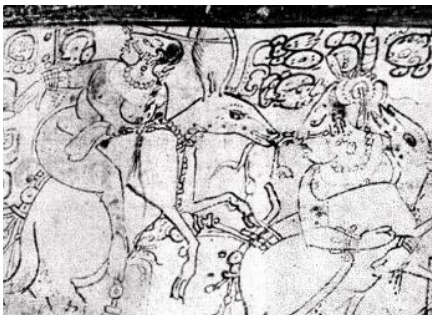




[Image 22] Sun Stone Rosemania [CC BY 2.0
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)]



[Image 23] The ancient fortified city of Tulum.
By Popo le Chien - Own work, CC BY-SA
3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=52139443>



[Image 23] An ancient Mayan depiction of
somebody saddling and riding a deer.

VOLCANISM IN THE RECORDS OF NATIVE AMERICANS - The Book of Mormon describes a massive volcanic eruption and earthquakes associated with the time of the death of Christ (roughly 35 AD.) Followed by a period of rapid peaceful growth. Spanish explorers found the Mayans' records included a description of a massive earthquake and darkened sun in the first century AD, (Veytia & Hemingway, 2000) while modern researchers also find ample evidence of the eruption and a rapid increase in building afterward. (Fash & Lujan, 2009)

FOUNDING FAMILY ORIGIN STORY - Mayan legend tells of a family with 7 who settled Guatemala and who were stuck at the waters' edge until the younger brother encouraged them to cross: (Maxwell & Hill, 2006) "In its mytho-heroic origin narrative, the Xajil Chronicle recounts this conversation as the seven founding families of highland Guatemala were at the seashore wondering how to cross the ocean to their promised land: "We are two of the children, we are the top, we are the head, we are the first warriors, the seven amaq's. And you are my younger brother." The younger brother urges his elders to cross the ocean and seize their destinies rather than collapse and sleep (suffer defeat) at the water's edge." (Magleby, 2015)

INFANT BAPTISM AMONG NATIVE AMERICANS - At the end of the Book of Mormon, Mormon writes to his son, Moroni, about infant baptism which had begun among the people. Friar Diego de Landa wrote about his observations in the region of central America where the events of the Book of Mormon are thought to have taken place. De Landa reports witnessing the baptism and blessing of children, and that he only saw it in that region and nowhere else in the new world. (Landa, Sec. XXVI. Method of Baptism in Yucatan; How it Was Celebrated, 2012)

SCRIPTURES ON METAL PLATES - People in ancient Israel writing scriptures on metal plates was an unheard-of absurdity in Joseph's time, but in modern times, metal plates or scrolls with religious writing dating to precisely Lehi's time have been discovered. (Lopez-Ruiz, 2015)

ELEPHANTS KNOWN TO NATIVE AMERICANS - The oldest texts in the Book of Mormon mention Elephants present in their

lands. Elephants were once thought to be non-existent in the Americas, then extinct 10000 years ago, then 7000 years ago, then 6000 years ago. However, native American tradition from people around the Gulf of Mexico tell of giant beasts with long noses that could trample people and uproot trees. (Swanton, 1911) With similar traditions among groups from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, some scholars have been persuaded elephants and man were interacting in the Americas as recently as 1000 B.C., falling squarely into Jaredite times. (Johnson L. H., 1952)

STEEL IN ANCIENT TIMES - Nephi describes having “Steel.” Even in Joseph’s time it was a well-known “fact” that Steel was a modern invention. However, in modern days Joseph Smith has been supported again by the discovery of “steeling iron” as far back as the 10th century BC, including at least one discovery of such hardened iron in northern Israel, long believed to be the home of Lehi. (Maddin, Muhly, & Wheeler, 1977) and a carburized iron sword near Jericho. (Shanks, 1986)

FORTIFICATIONS IN THE AMERICAS - The Book of Mormon describes walled fortifications. This was nonsense to Joseph’s contemporaries who often berated Mormonism for believing what they saw as self-evident – that no such structures existed. In 1970 Tulane University researchers discovered huge defensive fortifications around Mayan cities dating to Book of Mormon times. (Webster, 1976)

CEMENT STRUCTURES IN THE AMERICAS - The Book of Mormon describes “Cement” structures. Yet again, antagonists ridiculed Latter-day Saints for believing what was “well known” for being false. Native Americans lived in tents and hogans, after all. However, once again, time proves Joseph Smith’s translation right as widespread cement use has been discovered in Mesoamerica. (Hyman, 1970)

CORRESPONDING CALENDARS - By Nephite reckoning and by prophesy, the Nephites says it was 600 years from Lehi’s departure during Zedekiah’s first year as king and the birth of Jesus Christ. However, our best historical estimates show around 592 - 593 years between those dates. However, if the Nephites used Mayan counting for their years, 600 years would be about 592 solar years – the correct interval between Zedekiah and Christ,



[Image 24] (left)

Lake Atitlan - site of the discovery of an ancient sunken city.



[Image 25] (right)

Stingless Bees work on their hive. By Bernard DUPONT <https://www.flickr.com/photos/berniedup/6788207763/>

and a strong connection between Nephites and the larger Mayan culture in which they may have been operating. (Sorenson, 1985)

SUNKEN CITY PREDICTED AND DISCOVERED IN MESOAMERICA - Anthropologist John Sorensen long championed the Meso America theory of the Book of Mormon. In 1985, As part of his publications, he suggested that for his theory to be right there would need to be a sunken city (the one the Nephites called Jerusalem) that had been submerged around the time of Christ on the south side of lake Atitlan. It was a very audacious claim in its specificity. In 1999 archaeologists discovered a sunken city off the southern shore of Lake Atitlan, where recovered artifacts place it from around the time of Christ, when a sudden eruption likely caused a rapid change in the level of the lake, just as described in the Book of Mormon. (Sorensen, 2013)

"I have wondered whether the first dislodged stone, in what is becoming almost an avalanche of scholarship, was not Nibley's gutsy determination to see what could be made of the available historical evidence by assuming (at least the possibility of) the truth of LDS claims, rather than by assuming their falsehood" - Terry Warner

MAYAN EXPERT IDENTIFIES CORRESPONDENCES WITH BOOK OF MORMON - The Book of Mormon describes a people who use a complex writing system (possibly hieroglyphic), books, a calendar, specialized markets, and which eventually descended into a pantheistic religion, state institutions, cities, public works, a shift in popular religion around 250 AD, record keeping for rulers, and a group of foreign kings ruling over a larger, established population. Dr. Michael Coe, in his book on the Maya, identifies all of

these circumstances in Meso America during the appropriate time periods. (Dale, 2018) (Coe & Houston, 2015)

TOWERS AND PRIESTLY GARDENS IN THE AMERICAS - The Book of Mormon tells of a prophet named Nephi who visits his garden off a main road in a city, where he climbed into his personal tower and began preaching to people on their way to the central market. This is incongruous to our western standard of urbanization pushing agriculture out to the edges of the city and beyond, with no referential cross-section for preachers on towers and personal gardens. However, again in Mesoamerica we find not only homes with towers built on them, (Idell, 1956) but also that the center of the cities (where the chief markets would be) were home to special “gardens” which were kept especially for medicinal and ornamental plants related to offerings and healing and which were managed by the priests and noble class, such as Nephi. (Mora, 2012) Here we find the cross section of priest, tower, and garden perfectly realized.

Believing that God has revealed and yet will reveal many great and important things commits us to approach some things differently from the rest of the world, and for me that's okay. There will always be worldly things that will make it difficult to be a Latter-day Saint by making some Mormon beliefs objectionable, frustrating, or awkward. And we won't always have all the answers to these difficulties, certainly not the moment they first arise. But this too invites further stretching and expansion. Our ongoing task as Latter-day Saints is to locate defensible answers that are also consistent with our scriptures, doctrines, and assumptions and to understand how opposing views often depend principally upon other fundamentally different assumptions. - John W. Welch

CITY OF BOUNTIFUL IN AMERICAS - The people of Lehi use the name “Bountiful” for their cities twice. Once in the old world and once again in the new. The Pre-Columbian drama, Rabinal Achi, places an ancient Mayan city named “Bountiful” in the center of its map. (Tedlock, 2003)

BEEKEEPING IN ANCIENT AMERICA - The Book of Mormon claims that the people in ancient America would keep bees. Critics call this an anachronism because it is widely believed that the Europeans brought honey bees to the Americas in the 1600s and taught Native Americans how to keep bees, which they called “White Man’s Fly.” However, very recent discoveries show Native Americans in Guatemala were keeping bees during Book of Mormon times after all. (Zralka, Helmke, Sotelo, & Koszku, 2018)

THE SEAL OF MULEK – The book of Mormon describes a people called “Mulekites” who are descended from the son of a Hebrew King. An ancient Judean stamp seal has been found which seems to bear one possible form of the name Mulek, saying, “Malkiyahu [Mulek] son of the king.” (Chadwick, Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?, 2003)

THE BOOK OF 1 NEPHI GIVES A LOT OF GEOGRAPHIC DETAIL THAT IS REALLY UNNECESSARY FOR A SCRIPTURAL NARRATIVE, AND WHICH PROVIDES PLENTY OF CHANCES FOR JOSEPH SMITH TO BE PROVEN A FRAUD. HOWEVER, THESE ODD DETAILS HAVE TURNED OUT MORE AND MORE TO HAVE BEEN CORRECT – AS IF JOSEPH WAS REALLY TRANSLATING A RECORD WRITTEN BY PEOPLE WHO HAD ACTUALLY BEEN IN ARABIA AROUND 600 BC. EXAMPLES:

THE “STREAM” OF LAMAN - Lehi and his group discover a valley with a “continually running” stream which reached to the red sea, and with fruit and grain seeds. (1 Nephi 2:5-10) That’s a lot of detail. It wasn’t till 1995 that a “continually running” stream was discovered in a valley, located the right distance and direction from Jerusalem, with fruit and grain, and which emptied into the red sea around the time of Lehi. (Potter, 1999) This is significant since, until then, it was thought that all rivers in that area were seasonal, and none emptied into the red sea.

THE PLACE CALLED NAHOM - Nephi describes the burial of Ishmael at a place “called” Nahom. In the late 1990s altars were discovered which identified a region called “NHM” (pronounced nahom, nahim, nihim, or similar) around the 7th – 6th century BC (Simpson, 2002) which was notable in that the tribe would accept anybody for burial, not just members of their own tribe. (Aston, 2012) Additionally, this NHM location correlates precisely with

[Image 26] An altar with the “Nahom” inscription on it



the “eastward turn” described in the Book of Mormon narrative and the following location, Bountiful.

THE EASTWARD TURN - Nephi describes a turn at Nahom to travel “nearly eastward.” However, Joseph Smith could not have known that the ancient incense trail turned there, as no source ancient or contemporary to Joseph described such a turning. Only a person who had traveled there would have known that the only East/West path on the incense trail was at Nahom. (Brown, New Light: Nahom and the “Eastward” Turn, 2003)

“True knowledge never shuts the door on more knowledge, but zeal often does.”
— Hugh Nibley

RAW MEAT WHILE TRAVELING - Nephi describes eating raw meat, remarking that it was “sweet.” This seems odd to us, but in ancient Arabia it was common to refrain from cooking meat, instead leave it “raw” out to sun-dry, preserving it for the long difficult journey. While we might call it “jerky,” in Arabic this is called “bastern” which is literally translated as “raw meat,” just as Nephi called it, and “sweet” is another word for “unspoiled.” (Chadwick, An Archeologist's View, 2006)

A NICE PLACE TO BUILD A SHIP IN ARABIA - Nephi describes “Bountiful” with several measurable requirements: “Nearly East” of Nahom, on the coast, having timber enough for a seagoing vessel, much fruit and wild honey, ore for tools, and a mountain nearby. In Joseph’s time, Arabia was seen as a barren wasteland. However, in modern days a region has been found which matches all the criteria required for Bountiful. (Brown, Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights, 2004)

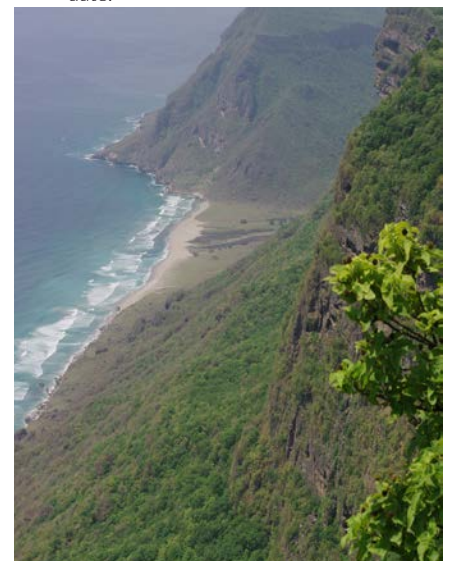
WOOD FOR A BOW AND ARROWS - According to the ancient Arab writers, the only wood suitable for bows in all of the Arabian Peninsula was the “nab” wood that grew in only one region – roughly where we would expect to find Lehi’s group around the time Nephi described making his own bow and arrows in 1 Nephi. (approach to the book of Mormon, 231-32)

THE BOOK OF MORMON IS WRITTEN IN THE STYLE OF the

[Image 27] Hugh Nibley and his hair.



[Image 28] Khor Kharfot at the end of Wadi Sayq, Oman: a “Bountiful” candidate.

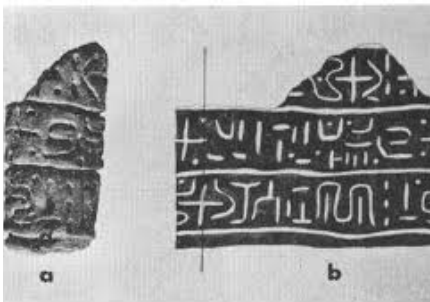


Section 2.2: Linguistics

King James Version of the Bible but contains many linguistic clues that indicate it has an ancient Hebrew source. Importantly, many of these clues are linguistic patterns missing from the Bible or undetected for generations, meaning the translators couldn't have just "made it up."

IF... AND STATEMENTS - The BOM contained many "If this.. and that..." statements instead of "If this... then that.." as is normal in English. Recently, scholars have discovered Joseph edited these out, changing them to "If.. then". But it turns out "If... and" is correct - in Hebrew. If Joseph had known, why edit out an evidence for the authenticity of his claim? (Skousen, *The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?*, 1994)

CHIASMUS - These poetic parallelisms went unnoticed in the BoM for a century. Again, if planted deliberately, why not reveal them yourself to add to your claim of authenticity? Turns out Chiasmus were nearly unrecognized in western literature in 1829, and Joseph and his scribes probably never heard of them. (Welch J. W., *How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated*, 2003)



[Image 29]

A cylinder seal, apparently from the Olmec occupation at Tlatilco, is inscribed with what may be the oldest writing known from Mesoamerica. The writing system is unlike any previously known and is typologically more advanced than other Mesoamerican systems.

THE PROPHETIC PERFECT - The Book of Mormon prophets oddly sometimes speak about events in their future as if they were already in the past. Early prophets Lehi and Nephi seemed to do it out of rote when they said "I have obtained a land of promise" before arriving in the land of promise, or "the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove" before the birth of Christ. It turns out this speech pattern was a way ancient prophets would indicate a prophecy was so certain that it might as well be spoken of in past tense. As generations of Book of Mormon prophets became more removed from ancient Israel's culture, this pattern apparently became more unusual, until it reached the point that when Abinadi used it, he had to explain its usage to people. (see Mosiah 16:6) (Parry, *Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon*, 2002)

PLURAL AMPLIFICATIONS - Ancient Hebrew would "emphasize" an idea by pluralizing it - salvation becomes "salvations" etc. The English translation of the Bible, however, makes it singular. The Book of Mormon contains many instances of plural amplifi-

cation instead of the expected singular - a trick Joseph couldn't have known from copying the Bible or other alleged source texts. (Parry, Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon, 2002)

MISTAKES OF MORMON: THE CONSTRUCT STATE - Another Hebraism, the construct state can sometimes sound wrong in English, but correct in Hebrew. Sometimes Mormon "corrects" himself into the construct state (making it sound wrong to English speakers) instead of leaving it sounding perfectly fine in the English grammar pattern. (example: Alma 54:3) The construct state appears hundreds of times in the Book of Mormon and is used more often than the regular English syntax. (Parry, Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon, 2002) (Tvedtnes J. A., The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon, 1991)

ALMA AND SARIAH - Alma was thought of as a female name in Joseph's time. Only a century after the publishing of the Book of Mormon was it discovered to be a valid male name in ancient times. (Yadin, 1965) Similarly, Sariah was known from the Bible as a male name, until the discovery of the Elephantine papyri. (Tvedtnes, Gee, & Roper, 2000)

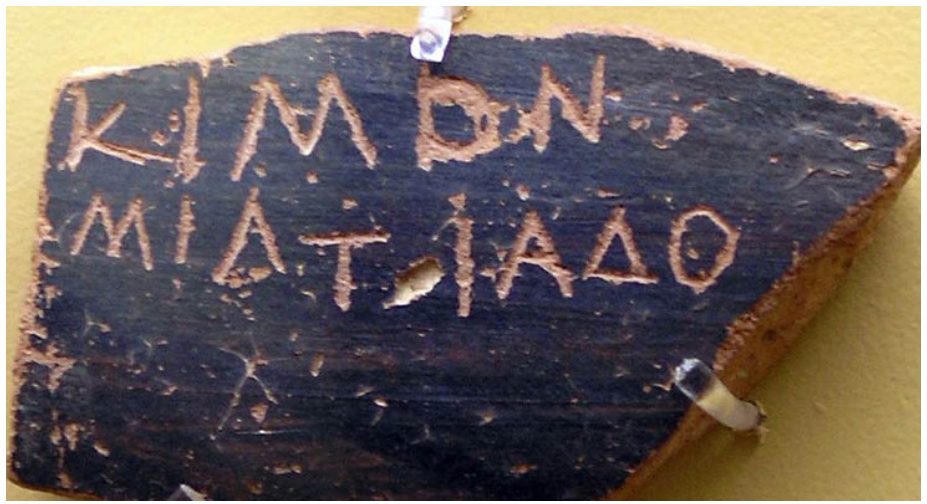
There are no language barriers in the Church. There is a mighty power that transcends the power of messages conveyed by words alone, and this is the power of messages communicated by the Spirit to our hearts.
-Joseph B. Wirthlin

OTHER NAMES - The BoM contains authentic Hebrew names including Sariah, Alma, Abish, Aha, Ammonihah, Chemish, Hagoth, Himni, Isabel, Jarom, Josh, Luram, Mathoni, Mathonihah, Muloki, and Sam—none of which appear in English Bibles. (Tvedtnes, Gee, & Roper, 2000)

PATRISTIC NAMES - The naming of a son after his father (Nephi son of Nephi, Alma son of Alma, etc.) was unknown in the Old Testament, however an ostrakon from the time of Lehi has proved that such naming conventions happened in the area of Jerusalem from the appropriate time period. (Deutsch & Heltzer,



[Image 30] (left)
A youthful Joseph B. Worthlin



[Image 31] (right)
An example of an ostracon, Ostrakon of Cimon, an Athenian statesman, showing his name (as "Kimon [son] of Miltiades")

1995) (Tvedtnes, Gee, & Roper, 2000) Moreover, the appellation "the younger" to patristic names was used in Mesoamerica, just as it is seen in the Book of Mormon. (Palka, 2010)

EModE - The Book of Mormon is written in "Early Modern English" which is the language of the King James version of the Bible. While it's easy to assume that Joseph was just copying the style, the BoM contains some EModE syntax NOT contained in the Bible and therefore inaccessible to Joseph. (Skousen, *The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?*, 1994)

UTO-AZTECAN - One researcher reports finding over 1500 shared "cognates" between ancient Hebrew, Egyptian, and the Uto-Aztecan family of languages. For a language to be considered a part of the same "family" historically it has only required a few hundred shared cognates. By that standard, one would say that perhaps some of the languages in the Uto Aztecan family should be considered a family born of an earlier Hebrew Egyptian hybrid. Even if the author has let his enthusiasm get away from him, the sheer VOLUME of commonalities should give pause to any serious researcher. (Stubbs, 2015)

ROBBERS AND THIEVES, OH MY - The King James Bible makes no distinction between "thieves" and "robbers," but, according to the editor of *Jewish Law Annual*, ancient Jewish law makes it clear that robbers are typically organized groups, rivaling local governments, attacking towns and extorting ransoms with sworn oaths. Thieves are just people who steal. Unlike the Bible, The Book of Mormon is perfectly distinct in how it treats each class of criminal, as if it were written by somebody very clear on Jewish Law. (Welch J. , 1992)

REFORMED EGYPTIAN – Book of Mormon writers use the phrase “reformed Egyptian” to describe their writing style and explain that it is the Hebrew language written with Egyptian characters. Anybody who has learned Japanese and had to transliterate their name into katakana knows what this is like, but was this a valid ancient practice? Only in modern times have scholars realized that some ancient discoveries, such as the Papyrus Amherst 63, were exactly what the Book of Mormon describes – Egyptian text used to write Hebrew words. (Tvedtnes & Ricks, Notes and Communications: Jewish and Other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters, 1996)

WITHOUT A CAUSE – In 3 Nephi when Jesus gives the Book of Mormon rendition of the Sermon on the Mount, it removes “without a cause” from the phrase “Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause [eikei] shall be in danger of the judgment.” This doesn’t match the King James Version of the Bible, but after Joseph’s death, older Greek manuscripts of Matthew 5:22 were found with the phrase “without a cause” missing – just like in the Book of Mormon rendition. (Welch J. W., A Steady Stream of Significant Recognitions, 2002)

AN ANCIENT LITERARY GENRE: THE FAREWELL ADDRESS – Recent biblical scholars have identified a previously unknown type of literary genre called the farewell address. There are 20 specific elements that can be used in a farewell address. While this tradition was apparently well known and widespread in ancient times, that knowledge was lost. Therefore, somebody simply copying the style of the Bible would not know to include these elements appropriately since this is a new field of study. In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin’s speech has been found to contain 16 of the farewell elements. That’s more than the farewell addresses by Paul or Socrates. (Welch J. W., A Steady Stream of Significant Recognitions, 2002)

ONE IN A TRILLION ODDS – Scientists and researchers at Berkeley and BYU developed a method for identifying authors by their stylistic choices, phrases, etc. This statistical analysis is sometimes called “wordprint” and this method has been used to identify previously unknown writing by Thomas Hobbes, as well as to identify the true authors behind some of the Federalist Papers, or modern works published under pseudonyms such as when J.K.

[Image 32]

Sermon on the Mount by I.Makarov



Rowling secretly wrote under the name Robert Galbraith. This analysis shows that the individual books in the Book of Mormon are written by different authors, and that those authors were definitely NOT any of the people associated with the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon. (Hilton, 1990)

Words are a form of personal expression. They differentiate us as well as fingerprints do. They reflect what kind of person we are, and tell of our background, and depict our way of life. They describe our thinking as well as our inner feelings.

-Elder Charles Didier

[Image 33] Elder Charles Didier



Section 2.3: Cultural

SINGING ARABIC POETRY – Did you notice the poem in 1 Nephi? No? That's probably because you aren't familiar with ancient Arabian poetry. Lehi is moved to a spontaneous exhortation to his sons at a notable camp site in the Book of Mormon. These verses correspond exactly with the precise pattern of an ancient Arabic poetic form called a "qasid" which required 7 steps to be complete: inspired by water, addressed to two traveling companions, praise of the scene, urge the traveler to be like the object inspiring the poem, is an extemporaneous reciting of great emotion, are very short, each couplet must be followed by it's "brother" making a matched pair. (Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 1988) This just blows my mind.

OFFERINGS IN TRAVELS – The Book of Mormon highlights three times Lehi offered sacrifices and twice when he offered burnt offerings. No big deal, right? Well, it turns out the ancient Israelites had rules about that sort of thing and these offerings and sacrifices correspond exactly with ancient Mosaic law in regards to travelers specifically – the kind of detail it would be easy to get wrong. (Brown, New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail, 2002)

SHEREM'S DIVINE DEATH - Sherem's death seems harsh to modern readers, but it turns out his accusation against Jacob was a capital offense in pre-exilic law - something Joseph probably never knew - making his death sentence appropriate to the law of the age exactly. Did you know that falsely accusing somebody of blasphemy was a capital offense? I sure didn't. (Welch J. W., The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon, 2008)

THEM VALLEYS ARE STRONG - The Book of Mormon people use phrases like "strong valleys" instead of what 1800s Americans would say, like "strength of the hills" or "strong mountains." In ancient Araby, the valleys were shelters and "strong" places of refuge. (Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 1988)

I DEMOCRATICALLY APPOINT MY BLOODLINE AS JUDGE FOREVER - The Book of Mormon, allegedly created by a red-blooded patriotic American, has more in common with Meso-American political systems than those with which the people in 1830 would have been familiar. Councils, hereditary leaders, hereditary "judgeships," and, especially, parts of the story of Ammon. (Bushman, 2012) Even before that point, Jacob records that the kings were given



[Image 34] (left)
A well-known landmark in Wadi Rum.



[Image 35] (right)
Friar Diego de Landa

the same name as their predecessors, being called second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth. An odd way of doing things, but precisely the pattern observed by Diego de Landa during the Spanish conquest, who recorded that the rulers were validated by their genealogy, and that "The name of the father is transmitted to his son." (Landa, *Yucatan Before and After the Conquest*, 2012)

CURSING AN OPPONENT WITH SPEECHLESSNESS – In the Book of Mormon, in the midst of a heated legal dispute, Alma curses Korihor to be struck dumb. It turns out ancient legal records from the Mediterranean area around the time of Lehi show that asking god to curse your opponent with speechlessness while in a lawsuit was a common practice. After all, if they can't speak, they can't win the lawsuit! This ancient practice would have, of course, been totally unknown to Joseph Smith. (Welch J. W., *A Steady Stream of Significant Recognitions*, 2002)

"Some of men of Yucatan say that they have heard from their ancestors that this country was peopled by a certain race who came from the East, whom God delivered by opening for them twelve roads through the sea."
- Diego de Landa

HUMILIATION THROUGH BEATINGS – When Laman and Lemuel become frustrated with Nephi after their failed attempt to retrieve the brass plates, they yell at Nephi and Sam, and beat them – not with their fists, but with a rod. In ancient near-eastern culture every free man carried a stick as a badge of independence and authority, and they use the stick to assert their authority and superiority over the workman or day-laborers by beating them. This was so common that their underlings are even called 'stick servants.' (Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 1988) Clearly Laman and Lemuel were trying to put Nephi in his place

for his disastrous plan which cost them their precious property. But how would Joseph Smith know this cultural tradition, and why would he make such an odd choice when he grew up in the era where fistfights were a main way used to settle disputes? (Ungar, 2010)

LAWYERS AND JUDGES -The Book of Mormon people adopt a legal system that uses “Judges” who not only rule on the law, but carry out the law, make the law, judge a case, and so on, acting more as kings than judges as we know them. Moreover, they had “lawyers” in their system – certainly an unheard-of development for groups such as the plains Indians or the tribes of the northeast United States. Once again, we find Mesoamerican culture matches the Book of Mormon prediction, with laws, judges, and lawyers. (Tarlton Law Library, 2018)

“The Book of Mormon is not a conventional American book. Too much Americana is missing. Understanding the work requires a more complex and sensitive analysis than has been afforded it. Historians will take a long step forward when they free themselves from the compulsion to connect all they find with Joseph Smith’s America and try instead to understand the ancient patterns deep in the grain of the book.”
- Richard L. Bushman

SUPER COMPLEX POLITICAL STRUCTURE - The Book of Mormon describes the peoples as living in individual political states with varying relationships from trade, subjugation, alliance, or larger political hierarchies. Leadership is legitimized through political connection and lineage, and sub-leaders can be independent or part of the hierarchy. Each of these “states” had a ruler, but also a supreme military commander responsible for strategy and bringing troops to battle. That’s a LOT of cultural guesswork, and once again, it’s all borne out precisely in the cultures of ancient Mesoamerica. (Tarlton Law Library, 2018)

OW, MY ARMS – One especially disturbing story from the Book of Mormon describes soldiers presenting severed arms to a king as evidence of the impressive act of Ammon. This is a

[Image 36]

A depiction of Ashera dating from around 900 BC.



[Image 37] Historian Richard Bushman



shocking display, but the tradition of displaying severed arms as trophies of valor continued on for centuries, as Spanish conquerors discover native people displaying severed arms to impress women or gaining the right to dress in fine clothing by cutting off the arms of an enemy. (Yerman, 1999)

SKIN COLOR AND CANNIBALISM – The Book of Mormon authors assert that the Nephite people were “fair” and that this group of lighter-skinned people eventually became horribly evil, even resorting to cannibalism, and are eventually all wiped out. Multiple Native American tribes hold an oral tradition of a group of “white giants” who arrived by boats, expanded from the west and who were or became cannibals until they were wiped out. (Macisaac, 2015)

THE BROKEN BOW - In the Book of Mormon, when the family of Lehi struggles in the wilderness, Nephi's fine bow breaks. The bows of his older brothers have lost their spring and are therefore useless. Nephi ends up making his own new bow and submissively goes to his priesthood leader, his father, to ask where to hunt. From that point on, Nephi begins to be the leader of the “tribe,” receiving the revelations that will guide the family, acting as authority. It's only after this point that his brothers begin to accuse him of usurping authority as well. Nephi would have recognized this symbolism and likely seen it as an omen or even a divine approval of his right to lead. Joseph Smith, on the other hand, would have had no idea of the symbolism of the bow. (Goff, 1989)

ASHERAH – The Book of Mormon includes an extended vision focused around the Tree of Life and those who seek after the fruit of the tree. When the young prophet Nephi asks for an interpretation of the meaning of the images he sees he is shown Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, as the meaning behind the tree. To modern readers who don't worship Mary, this seems odd. Yet to Israelites of the time of Lehi, worship of the divine feminine- the mother of God – called Asherah was both widespread and fairly conservative. What was Asherah's symbol? The white tree with fruit glowing like flames. (Petersen, 2002)

Section 2.4: Translation

I CAN DO IT WITH MY EYES CLOSED! - Most of the translation of the BoM was done by Joseph keeping his eyes covered by a hat, into which he had placed one of his seer stones. He would put the hat upside down in front of him, then put his face on it to block out light to help see the light from the seer stone more easily. This, of course, has the side effect of preventing him from reading from any prepared notes. Translation would continue for 6 - 8 hours per day, nonstop, with Joseph picking up where he left off without reference to the transcription. This was done in the presence of people coming and going, including witnesses who never joined the church. Keep that in mind while considering the MASSIVE complexity of the work. In other words, all those all those linguistic, cultural, and archaeological consistencies listed above, as well as all the narrative and doctrinal complexity were produced over tens of thousands of words with Joseph's eyes obstructed. (Skousen, *How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript*, 1998)

The fact is, it was just as though Joseph, Oliver and I were sitting just here on a log, when we were overshadowed by a light. It was not like the light of the sun... but more glorious and beautiful. It extended away round us . . . [We saw] many records or plates . . . besides the plates of the Book of Mormon, also the Sword of Laban, the Directors . . . and the Interpreters. I saw them just as plain as I see this bed (striking the bed beside him with his hand), and I heard the voice of the Lord, as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life, declaring that the records of the plates of the Book of Mormon were translated by the gift and power of God.
-David Whitmer

AN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH NATIVE? - The Book of Mormon is written in "Early Modern English" which is the language of the King James version of the Bible. While it's easy to assume that Joseph was just copying the style, the BoM contains some EModE syntax NOT contained in the Bible and therefore inaccessible to Joseph. In other words, wherever the translation came from it arrived as if created by a native 1600s writer, not just an 1800s aping of "King James Style." (Skousen, *The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?*, 1994)

Bonus Section: Book of Abraham

WHO EVER HEARD OF OLISHEM? - The Book of Abraham mentions a location named "Olishem" near Ur and Haran. Nobody had ever heard of such a place until over a century later when records contemporary to Abraham described Olishem near Haran. The odds of Joseph making up a fictional place that turned out to be accurate in name, time and place are astronomical. (Muhlestein, 2018) The fact that this is the SECOND such occurrence (see: Nahom) should shock us.

LAYERS ON LAYERS OF STARS - Abraham's description of cosmology found in the Book of Abraham more closely matches ancient perspectives of layers upon layers of heavens, NOT the 1830s version of things. (Gee, Hamblin, & Peterson, And I Saw the Stars - The Book of Abraham and Ancient Geocentric Astronomy, 1999)

"ABRAHAM UPON" A LION COUCH - The thought was that the Lion Couch sacrifice scene was hilariously wrong for including Abraham and indicating he was being sacrificed, but recently at least one Lion Couch depiction including Abraham has been discovered, as well as non-biblical descriptions of Abraham's relationship with his father, and the latter's attempt at sacrificing Abraham. A combination of facts Joseph could not have known of. (Gee, Research and Perspectives: Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts, 1992)

A FAKE ARTIFACT FAILS TO BE TRANSLATED - Joseph's associates tried to create an Egyptian dictionary from his work on the Book of Abraham but failed spectacularly. However, when challenged to translate a secretly faked "ancient" plate, Joseph tried and only "translated" the single character on the plates which matched a symbol in that dictionary. Were he a fake, he would either not have bothered with the dictionary, since he would have known it was false anyway, or translated the whole thing with his "fake" powers. Instead he used only what he felt confident was accurate based on his experience with the Book of Abraham, showing his complete confidence in the Book of Abraham as authentic. (Bradley, 2019)

A painting of Joseph Smith, a religious leader, speaking to a crowd. He is shown in profile, facing right, with his mouth open as if speaking. He has light brown hair and is wearing a dark blue coat over a white shirt. The background is a dense crowd of people, mostly men, looking towards him. The style is a realistic oil painting with visible brushstrokes.

PART THREE

PART 3: THE THINGS JOSEPH SHOULD HAVE GOT WRONG.

“How easy to prophesey [sic] of the past or of the present time!! But he is better skilled in the controversies in New York than in the geography or history of Judea... Nephi knew all about steam boats and the compass 2400 years ago.” – Alexander Campbell, Anti-Mormon, 1832.

Section 3.1: An Explanation

This is a bit of a... “reverse proof” I suppose. The idea is simple: Our testimony can be enhanced by considering all the ways things really should have gone wrong, yet miraculously didn't.

When examining the Book of Mormon, we take note of the use of obscure names, Hebrew syntax, location names, poetic patterns, and more. All these things provide some evidence that the Book of Mormon has an ancient source. But, of course, we could ask: “Couldn't Joseph Smith have just been a genius who researched all that and put it in deliberately?”

But if we accept that idea as true, we must then logically follow it to the conclusion: If Joseph was getting correct information from outside sources, wouldn't he have also gotten incorrect information from those same sources when they were wrong?

As a specific example, some people suggest Joseph relied on “View of the Hebrews,” a contemporary text which suggested that all Native Americans were “Jews,” and thus has several natural parallels with the Book of Mormon. But if we accept this as true, and “View of the Hebrews” was relied on for information, how do we explain all the things in that text which Joseph failed to use in his alleged creation of the Book of Mormon? For example, “View of the Hebrews” claims that Native Americans carried an ark into battle, that they called God “Yohewah,” that they don't worship multiple gods or any idols, and so on. “View of the Hebrews” got much wrong about Native Americans. How did Joseph manage to avoid falling into the same trap if he was really using it as a resource, or drawing from the same data that Ethan Smith used? (Smith E. , 1823)

3.2: Some Random Examples

ILLITERATE NATIVES - Joseph's contemporaries believed in an illiterate population of Native Americans and some mocked him for missing such a well-known fact. (Stevenson, 1839) Only later was writing systems discovered dating back to the time of the Jaredites. (Coe & Houston, 2015) Why risk having your made-up “Lehites” be readers when it's common knowledge that Native Americans don't read?

BASIC BIBLE STUDY GONE WRONG - Joseph was intensely mocked for including the birth of Jesus as taking place in “the Land of Jerusalem” rather than Bethlehem. How could he have



[Image 38] - One of the Amarna letters.
British Museum [CC BY-SA 3.0]

missed such an obvious and essential point as a member of a very Christian community? (Bacheler, 1838) 70 years later the Amarna letters - tablets dating to a few hundred years before Lehi - are discovered and they reveal that indeed, Bethlehem was considered part of the “Land of Jerusalem.” (Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 1988)

ARABIAN RESOURCES - Had Joseph done research on the Arabian Peninsula, he likely would have found the most up-to-date and scholarly work of the time described the entire coastline as “a rocky wall ... as dismal and barren as can be; not a blade of grass or a green thing.” (Conder, 1830) And that “There is very little timber in Arabia of any kind.” (Dwight, 1805) Yet the Book of Mormon describes locations which are lush paradises with fresh water, wood suitable for boat building, bow making, and food to support a large family, which is what we find today.

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE? - Early critics pointed out that nobody had ever heard of hundreds of thousands, much less millions of Native Americans in a single nation. (Parsons, 1842) They were known to be a small population in Joseph’s day, yet the Book of Mormon describes populations comparable to Rome or other ancient capitals at its height. Joseph would have been even more embarrassed if he would have had to explain a story about a tiny population when we’ve discovered the remains of cities with populations in the millions in the right time frame and probable locations as described in the Book of Mormon. (Clynes, 2018)

STEEL SHOULD HAVE BEEN EASY TO GET “RIGHT.” - To even the layman of the early 1800s, it was a notorious fact that steel is a modern invention. (Howe, 1834) A scholar or layperson creating the Book of Mormon should have never used the word. Yet Joseph did. Once again time bore out the claim of the Book of Mormon as steeled swords have been discovered dating back not only to Lehi’s day, but to his geographic area. (Muhly, 1982)

WAIT... IS THIS BOOK GETTING MORE TRUTHY AS TIME PASSES? - Recently, some researchers compiled a list of 60 items 19th century skeptics claimed were anachronisms or mistakes in the Book of Mormon. Were the author of the Book of Mormon a scholar, he should have caught these – at least the obvious ones. But then, just a few years later, 13% of those items turned out to

be true. By 2005, 58% of those things once seen as mistakes had been confirmed as true, with another 17% being plausible. (Clark, 2005) Today the confirmed number is even higher. A fraudulent creation should not be confirmed by historical findings, it should become more and more evidently false.

SOCIAL DRIFT TOWARDS MORMONISM - A doctrinal treatise invented of pure fantasy should become more and more spiritually obsolete as time passes. For example, 19th century practitioners of “automatic writing” created a buzz with letters from Martians, or messages from beyond the grave. (Carroll, 2015) However, as time passed these hoaxes were denounced not only by science and research, but by their failures to inspire durable faith, and their increased divergence from the ever-evolving faith of the human race. Joseph Smith, on the other hand, made several dramatic doctrinal predictions which were so heretical at the time that people were excommunicated from their churches for teaching them. These doctrines included the re-opening of the canon (scripture), God as a personal being, a social model of the trinity, deification, the divine feminine, God as eternally self-surpassing, postmortem evangelization, the promise of children being saved by the atonement even without baptism, the pre-existence, and marriage beyond death among others. If we were to somehow graph the distance between the world’s perspective on these beliefs, we would see them coming closer and closer to matching those of Latter-day Saints. (Paulsen, 2006) Even modern pop-culture moves towards Mormon Doctrine as TV shows about the afterlife describe a three-tiered existence after death! (see “The Good Place”) To put it another way, shouldn’t Joseph’s doctrines about, for example, avoiding addictive and harmful substances such as tobacco, alcohol, tea, coffee, and, yes, excessive meat consumption, have turned out just as absurd seeming as his contemporary Sylvester Graham’s claims that graham crackers would help you avoid masturbation and cholera? Yet Joseph’s doctrines become more and more relevant as our society continues to learn and improve, and the churches of the Christian world are moving towards the Restored Gospel rather than marching away from it.

THE PROBLEM RESEARCHING CHIASMUS - Chiasmus are an impressive literary evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. But couldn’t Joseph have learned about Chiasmus in

texts of his day? That's a fine claim to make, but if you accept it you must explain how Joseph knew that in Chiasmus the important idea resides at the center of the form, when sources available to Joseph taught the important idea goes at the edges of the poem. (Jebb, 1820) If he was doing research, why didn't his research lead him astray?

NO WARRIOR CEREMONIES? - Any research on social order and class structure would have led Joseph to discover that the Native Americans had no class structure to speak of, rather that status was achieved through merit and indicated by ceremony or celebration. (The Illinois Society at the Illinois State Museum, 2000) Alternatively, one might have copied the European perspective of property ownership distinguishing a person, or perhaps even the ancient Israel perspective of a priesthood class. However, the Book of Mormon describes social class distinction marked by "fine clothing," a perfect match to ancient Mesoamerican culture. (Looper, 2013)

BUCKING THE RELIGIONISTS' VIEWS - In Joseph's day the contemporary view of the universe from religionists was "creation from nothing" that God caused all matter to exist. In fact, some critics claim that Joseph copied the Book of Abraham from a book called "The Philosophy of the Future State," which also makes this claim of creatio ex nihilo. Joseph didn't just reject that idea, he made a scientific claim that hadn't even been seriously considered: that all matter was eternal – not created or destroyed. (see D&C 93:33, 131:7-8, Abraham 3) To put another way, Joseph predicted the law of conservation of mass while texts he supposedly stole from argued against it and scientists had only just found out that chemicals didn't change weight during reactions. (Golinski, 1994)

Section 3.3: The Miracle that Defies Dismissal

What I keep coming back to with the Book of Mormon is all the attempts to explain it away tend to come down to 2 main categories. Either Joseph was a “religious genius” and aped the style of the Bible, or somebody meticulously researched and created the text of the Book of Mormon using outside sources. The problem is, if you suggest Joseph is a genius, then you have to explain all the things he couldn’t have got from copying the Bible – in other words, all the details he could have only got through immense research and astounding luck. However, if you suggest somebody researched it, you have to explain how such a well-researched person managed to use contemporary research but not fall victim to the errors of that day, while making other “errors” that contradicted contemporary data but later turned out to be totally accurate, all while under intense scrutiny by family, friends, and antagonistic visitors during the translation process. (Skousen, *How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript*, 1998) Neither “religious genius” nor “meticulous scholar” can explain the miracle of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

[Image 40] - A family kneels together in prayer before scripture study.

PART 4: MORE WORDS

"And having all these witnesses
we obtain a hope" (Jacob 4)

What do we do with this information?

I've wondered about this a lot. What do you do when the faith you knew is gone? I don't think there is a universal, answer, but there's always a chance to choose our reactions.

First, you take a breath, you look inside yourself, and decide who you want to be. Do you want to pretend all this negative is just a lie and "all is well in Zion?" Fine. I don't think that's you, but it's a choice many make in order to reach their goals. Do you want to become the cynic who says there is only evil in the church and immerse yourself into that view? Lots of people do that.

Do you want to be the person who will see both the bad AND the good? Who recognizes that there are both problems and tremendous good in our past, present and future? It's hard, because it means dealing with imperfection and ambiguity. It means not being fully in a camp, and even being hated by people who ought to be your friends. (heck, just the day before I wrote this, a member accused me of being an "Anti-Mormon" because I suggested blind obedience to our prophet is not correct.) But recognizing the good and the bad is the only way to retain both faith and something approaching an accurate outlook.

In any case, take your time. The truth isn't going anywhere, and nothing you can do will change what the truth is. All you can do is decide who you want to be and where you want to go. There's no need to make quick decisions, especially while emotions are high. Look for the good in your life and figure out how you can build on it. It may involve the church, and that's ok. There's plenty of good reasons to hope the church might be what it claims to be based on all the good happening in the lives of believers (see part 1!)

Maybe, just maybe, the question isn't "how did Joseph translate the Book of Mormon," but rather, "Is the world a little better because I sacrifice a little time each day and read the Book of Mormon with my family?" Or, put another way, "Are my efforts leading me to the highest spiritual goals and values in life?" (Uchtdorf, 2015) As one recent convert put it, "it is not so much the doctrine that is important, but what effect that doctrine has upon that person's life." (brezo11, 2019)

I know that's not super satisfying when sometimes it feels SUPER IMPORTANT to have an answer to a question or challenge RIGHT NOW. And it can be frustrating to realize that some answers may not come in our lives. At a stake conference where every speaker had recently returned to the church, one speaker elegantly said, "one day I just realized that maybe 'enduring to the end' meant enduring not knowing." He set the questions aside and, with time, focused on what was most important – being changed by the gospel, not trying to prove or disprove it. He recognized that the "Truth" was far bigger and far more complex than he could hope to grasp in a lifetime and, in the meantime, there were important things he wanted to do. His journey to his new faith took time but resulted in an outlook and a faith that was far stronger than the one he had once left behind. It was a faith made of conscious decisions, not inherited teachings.

A friend of mine said it this way:

Doubt, for me, is to faith what exhaling is to breathing: it is necessary, cyclical, healthy, and natural. And if all one does is just try to only inhale or only exhale they will pass out. We need to do both continuously. And if all I try to do is have faith and never doubt or doubt and never have faith my spiritual life will not grow and be healthy.

Learning the truth will come as we progress down our path.

You can still navigate across the ocean while being completely, utterly wrong about what the stars are. Maybe the people in the pews next to you have no idea that the stars by which they navigate are actually huge balls of burning gas and not what they imagine them to be, and you just found out what stars really are. But really, you're both navigating the same ocean, trying to get to the same destination, with the same methods, just with different knowledge. It's not bad. In fact, it's kinda amazing.

Jeffrey Thayne, co-author of "Who is Truth? Reframing Our Questions for a Richer Faith" put it this way:

If we think of the Church as a system of beliefs and ask, "Are these true?", we may or may not get an answer. When we ask "What is true?", we can often get hung up on that question and never move past it.

But if we think of God as a Person, and start with that assumption, and ask, "How can I serve you better today? How can I keep my covenants with you? What lack I yet, that I can change right now, to be a better disciple? What neighbors can I minister to? How can I be a better parent or spouse?", we WILL get an answer. We will get answers upon answers.

And as we do, our testimonies will resolve past the epistemological hangups of the prior questions. Because as we feel God's hand and voice in our lives leading us to be better disciples, better fathers, better mothers, better ministers, there ceases to be any doubt of His existence, or of the divine power of this work.

I have learned "the church is true" for myself, but I learned it not from any study, blog post, online list, or even from anything I read in the Book of Mormon. I learned it through asking and acting. Asking not, "what's the deal with Kolob" but rather, "would you have me serve a mission?" I learned not by doing hours and hours of research, but by doing hours and hours of prayer and service.

Please choose to hold on to your faith and continue seeking God. Answers WILL come, though maybe not while you're looking for them. In the mean time, there are enough reasons to hope.

I hope this list of amazing truths can remind both of us occasionally that the truth is complex, there are reasons to believe, and there is much good being done and more yet to do. There is a lot of good being done in our individual lives and in the world by our participation in the act of grace, and that God is helping you and I move forward despite the flaws. Be patient. Be strong. He is still with you. You can do this. I know you can.

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A few little notes:

This document was created over the course of a few years' worth of evenings and represents a small selection of my favorite evidences and faith-positive tidbits. It is, however, woefully incomplete. For example, I still have unfinished chapters about Miracles, Joseph Smith, Modern Prophets, Prophecies, and, importantly, the remarkable Doctrines of the Church. I just needed to find a stopping point and this is it for now. Sorry if I didn't hit any particular point you wanted mentioned.

If there's interest, I'll see about revisiting those additional sections for later editions of this list.

Images were sourced from the LDS.org media library or from other royalty-free sources whenever possible. All imagery and quotations are used under the "Fair Use" doctrine of copyright laws which allow for educational use.

I do not accept donations or payment for this project. This is simply something I wanted to do for a long time. I do not speak for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I want to thank all those who built the mountain of evidence that I tried to distill here. Truly, the work of researchers, scholars, and laypersons has done what no individual could ever hope to do.

Finally, let me say this: I guarantee I got something wrong. It's a near-certainty. Sometimes it will be because I relied on outdated information, sometimes it will be because I simply didn't understand what I was reading. Please be patient with me. I'll try to correct things and improve. That's the thing about research. We're always learning. Isn't it great?

"If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things."



We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time....
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
-T.S. Eliot