

John,

I want to write you because I saw your post on Facebook regarding: <http://cesletter.com/>

You commented, "If you retain your testimony after reading this...then: 1) hats off to you..."

I want to write a response to that and make the case for belief. But first, I do want to point out how condescending that remark is. I know you don't appreciate it when TBM's say such crap as, "He's left the church because he wants to sin," or "He must not have had a testimony to begin with." You and I know that neither of those are true. It is also true that having a testimony is not equated to sticking your head in the ground and believing in fairy tales.

I'm probably on a fool's errand, but I would like to make the case for belief. I do not pretend to have the answers for anything. However, I believe there are enough legitimate reasons that support investigating the veracity of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith. And THAT is what I will attempt to communicate.

I recognize how difficult it is to believe. Developing faith is hard. I don't fault anyone for not believing. I'm not so certain that I'm right. Five years from now, I might be thinking the same as you. I'd like to just give this one shot and give it all I've got. I hope that at the end of this, I will have added to your view, or at least you can say, "Yeah, that paradigm (or another similar) is worth investigating." Because that is all we have really, paradigms and models through which we view the world. Some models are closer to truth than others. While not complete, and even possibly totally erroneous, I believe that my paradigm is closer to the truth now, than my paradigm was 5 years ago.

I will apologize up front for how long this is going to be. But I've listened to many four hour interviews you've given, so we're getting closer to even. =)

First, some background. I have a Masters degree in Molecular Biology. I also have a law degree and I am currently in-house IP counsel for a generic pharmaceutical company. My educational upbringing is critical to understanding my point of view. I did debate from 5th grade all the way up through high school, and I'm a lawyer now. So early on, I have been trained to see both sides of an issue. I believe this skill is essential to discovering truth. I'm also a scientist. I'm comfortable with hypothesis, proving them, and models and adjusting my model depending on what best fits all data. As data increases, the models adjust.

I've listened to a number of Mormon Stories podcasts. I think the ones I've found most interesting are Daymon Smith, Terryl Givens, Denver Snuffer, Tom Philips, and the McLays. For some time I got the impression that you were just being salacious and trying to get as much attention for yourself from bringing to light all the warts of the church. You have a fan club among the NOMs, but after your post, "Why I Stay" last summer, I was touched and I feel I misjudged you. So I will take you at your word that you are simply an earnest person trying to figure this all out.

But see, I do have a small problem with that. There are many ways of viewing the church/gospel. Some paradigms are closer to the truth than others. And a paradigm was presented to you and you didn't investigate it. Or at least I can't imagine that you've investigated it because if you had, I doubt you'd say, "If you retain your testimony after reading this...then: 1) hats off to you..."

Those who grow up in the church are fed this paradigm that God restored His ancient church through Joseph Smith. That church will retain keys, authority, and will spread throughout the world, will never go astray, and will usher in the Second Coming. All is well in Zion right? As the Presiding High Priest looks out over us and says, "Aren't we all a great looking bunch." (Hel. 13:27-28) We are wonderful aren't we? However, looking at the corporate church today, it's hard to accept that it's a divine institution. Its behavior doesn't resemble what's taught in scripture.

Didn't we all grow up thinking our church had angels, miracles, and teachers who spoke to God face to face? Weren't we told that OUR church had this relationship with all other true prophets since the dawn of time? Adam, Noah, Enoch, Peter, James, John, and the 3 Nephites are all on team Mormon, right? THAT is what we fell in love with. We were part of the true, ancient organization since the dawn of time. Now we find out that we are just a registered trademark? WTF? Do we see any divinity with the corporate church? Or do we see media studies, surveys, polls, and overall general lack of knowledge in which direction we should head? Are we Zion or are we General Motors?

So, what if that is not the right paradigm? Is there a way Joseph Smith could still be a prophet, the Book of Mormon true, and the church be in a total mess? What if the very things we THINK we know about the Book of Mormon aren't what the Book of Mormon is trying to communicate at all? How best do we reconcile the last 180 years?

Here's one way:

Denver Snuffer wrote a book about how to reconcile the last 180 years. You interviewed him last year. He wrote "Passing the Heavenly Gift" (PTHG) and it offers a paradigm in which one who is aware of the church's historical issues can happily stay a member and not let the idiocies of the corporate church or overbearing bishops/stake presidents get to them. I'd like to make it absolutely clear that I in no way speak for Denver, or am even attempting to summarize (PTGH). This letter is not about that. It's about how I see the church, how I understand the gospel, and why I still believe in the Book of Mormon. I'm just suggesting that you may have lost an opportunity to reconcile your faith with a workable paradigm. And perhaps it's because of PTGH that has allowed me to change my paradigm. Or better said, PTHG enables me to better articulate my own paradigm, because I have had these questions just hanging out there in an incoherent way for some time.

Since you are aware of the book, you have constructive notice that it could resolve your doubts, or at least provide you with a paradigm you could be comfortable with. Your negligence in investigating that paradigm may be why you are still left without answers.

What if we've gone about understanding the Book of Mormon the wrong way? What if we are wasting our time looking into DNA,¹ artifacts, and names of cities? What if the entire purpose of the Book of Mormon (as understood by the church) is inaccurate? I would submit that the most important function the Book of Mormon serves is bringing you to deity, helping you connect to heaven. You see it on the

¹ People really need to be patient, scientific models are always changing.

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/11/131120-science-native-american-people-migration-siberia-genetics/>

very first page. In 1 N. 1: 6, Lehi is brought to the throne of God. We INSTANTLY learn that man can dwell in the presence of God. Nephi takes us through his journey and is a witness to God, as well as Jacob and Isaiah. Enos connects with God and receives his calling and election. King Benjamin and Abinidi are ministered to by angels. Both Almas see Christ. Helaman sees Christ. Mormon, Mahonri, and Moroni see Christ. THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF MORMON IS HOW TO SEE CHRIST. NOW. IN THE FLESH.

It's not a story book. It's not a morning devotional book; it's not there to motivate you to feel like a champion. It's an instruction manual. Nephi gives us all the steps, then the rest of the book fleshes it out.

First it starts with the testimony of someone who knows (Lehi), then Nephi:

- asked to know whether the things his father were true,
- had a desire to believe,
- received the confirmation of the Holy Ghost,
- had his obedience tested,
- received a ministry of angels,
- pondered over the things he'd received, and
- received The Second Comforter.

Nephi's message to us is what he did to connect to heaven. And we ought to emulate that.

So the best way to test to see if the Book of Mormon is true or not, is to follow its teachings and see if you get the results. If the Book of Mormon connects you to heaven, then does it really matter if there were horses in America, or if there was a neighboring town near Palmyra called Zarahemla? (As an aside, why would it be all that terrible if he did name the cities after places he was familiar with? Suppose the way they were really said were: Hangzhou, Shijiazhuang, Makhachkala, Magnitogorsk, Dniprodzerzhynsk (all real cities). I would rather refer to them as Heber, Sandy, Murray, Midvale, and Draper. He may just be trying to communicate ideas, not literal translations. The literal translation of proper nouns will not save you, nor will it connect you to heaven, but he does have to call the places something.)

When I say, "connects you to heaven," I do mean talking to angels, Jesus, and the Father and Mother, not just some really intense experience with the Spirit that could be confused with a spike in dopamine or serotonin in the brain. (Yes, hallucinations are another possibility, but my understanding is that the knowledge one learns from the other side of the veil is the proof that it's not a hallucination. You learn things your brain just couldn't come up with on its own.)

The Book of Mormon is filled with so much more than we give it credit for. All the tokens we learn of in the temple are in the first 13 chapters of 1 Nephi. Most of the temple is also in 3 Nephi. The Book of Enos is all about him receiving his Endowment. Temple imagery is everywhere.

One of the biggest proofs to me, that the Book of Mormon is true, is the inclusion of all the Isaiah chapters. Now, you're thinking, you've got to be kidding me. That's just plagiarism. And how is it that he copied the exact structure in the KJV? That's not what Isaiah actually wrote. What if "translation" is more about communicating ideas than a literal word-to-word translation? What if, as Joseph is peering

into the hat, he sees the idea that Nephi is trying to convey through the words of Isaiah and so he copies it, so as to communicate the idea?

It's funny, as a lawyer, I hate it when lawyers play their games. Lawyers can pick apart the words to death so as to construe a phrase completely different than what the author intended to communicate. Let's not get bogged down in words. Words can be ambiguous. I think it best to focus on the idea being conveyed.

So Nephi receives this vision, sees Columbus, the Revolutionary war, and the restoration; he sees the latter-days and the end of the world. But then he says he is "forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard." 1 N 14:38 So he saw our time. But he's prohibited from writing about it.

But he figures out a way to communicate a warning to us. He uses the WORDS of Isaiah to communicate an idea to US. We do this all the time, but we use them for our own purposes. It's like when people quote Shakespeare and say, "To be or not to be." Now, usually the person is not contemplating suicide like Hamlet, rather, do I date this person? Or do I take this job? If I say, "We're not in Kansas anymore," that doesn't mean I just left the state of Kansas.

So when Nephi is quoting Isaiah, he's not giving Isaiah's message, HE KNOWS we already have that in the Bible. He's giving his own message, but he's using Isaiah's words. Now look at the context. 1 Nephi he describes his visions, which include the fact that he's seen our day. Then he gives a whole bunch of Isaiah chapters, and then he gives his own commentary about the latter-days in summary.

(One thing that ought to be clarified, I will discuss many things that we have changed as a church, one of them is the definition of "gentile." In Joseph's day, it was clear that when one referred to gentiles that INCLUDED the LDS church. Even Bruce R. McConkie stated that the LDS church is the gentile church.² In addressing the dedication of the Kirtland temple, it is clear that the LDS church is the Gentile church. D&C 109:60 "Now these words, O Lord, we have spoken before thee, concerning the revelations and commandments which thou hast given unto us, who are identified with the Gentiles." Go read the Book of Mormon again, and understand that references to gentiles are references that, at a minimum, include the LDS church. See how differently you understand the BOM. I mean it only makes sense right? Mormons are the ones reading the BOM, the authors ought to be addressing us and not an entire population who will never read the book.)

So Nephi uses Isaiah's words to talk to us. He has some interesting things to say:

1 Nephi 20:

1 Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, or out of the waters of baptism, who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, yet they swear not in truth nor in righteousness.

² Thus Joseph Smith, of the tribe of Ephraim, the chief and foremost tribe of Israel itself, was the Gentile by whose hand the Book of Mormon came forth, and the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who have the gospel and who are of Israel by blood descent, are the Gentiles who carry salvation to the Lamanites and to the Jews." (McConkie, Millennial Messiah, p 233).

"We are those Gentiles of whom Nephi speaks." (McConkie, Millennial Messiah, p 238)

This is really interesting because “out of the waters of baptism” is in 1 Nephi, but not in Isaiah 48. So this is different, and it’s clear that he’s talking to those who are baptized—us.

2. Nevertheless, they call themselves of the holy city, but they do not stay themselves upon the God of Israel, who is the Lord of Hosts; yea, the Lord of Hosts is his name.

Hmmm. We tend to call Salt Lake a holy city don’t we? And he’s saying we’re not?!?

4. And I did it because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;

Great, now he’s telling us that we’re stubborn. I don’t really like where he’s going.

We don’t have time now to go through all the Isaiah chapters, but let’s go to the juicy stuff.

2 Nephi 12:

5. O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord; yea, come, for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways.

Wait, who’s he talking to again?

7. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots.

8. Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.

9. And the mean man boweth not down, and the great man humbleth himself not, therefore, forgive him not.

I mean, we’ve all got 401ks, and nice cars, nice homes, and great careers, but he can’t be talking about us right? It’s those other guys that are worldly, proud, and idolatrous.

2 Nephi 12:

16 Moreover, the Lord saith: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet—

I mean, I know there are a lot of boob jobs in Utah, but that can’t be what this is about.

12 And my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, **they who lead thee CAUSE THEE TO ERR** and destroy the way of thy paths.

Personally, I think this is the most interesting. It’s our leaders who cause us to err. We sure hear a lot of “follow the prophet,” but I don’t actually recall that idea in the scriptures, rather “...the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name.” (2N 9:41)

(The only support for “follow the prophet, he won’t lead us astray” is in the Official Declaration 1. But if you recall from Daymon Smith’s interview, Pres. Woodruff was not saying that “the Lord wouldn’t allow

the President to lead them astray” because that is a true principle, but it was a wink-wink, nudge-nudge, we’re not really giving up polygamy.³)

The Lord can’t be deceived, unlike a bishop that can be deceived in a temple recommend interview. And I don’t exactly recall “follow the prophet” as part of the pattern taught in the endowment either. (Pre-1990, there was only one other mortal man in the endowment other than Adam and Eve, and I think the point was to **not** listen to him, right? But we’re to seek messengers from Father.)

Consider Lehi’s vision:

1 Nephi 8:5 And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me.

7 ... as I followed him I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste.

So, a MAN who APPEARS holy, leads him to a waste land.

8. And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to **pray unto the Lord** that he would have mercy on me ...

9. And it came to pass **after I had prayed unto the Lord** I beheld a large and spacious field.

10. And it came to pass that I beheld a tree...

So it’s not until Lehi prays to the LORD that he is delivered from the desolation where the MAN had led him. Back to Nephi and Isaiah:

After Nephi likens Isaiah unto us, he talks about us a little.

2 N 26: 20 And the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches; nevertheless, they put down the power and miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor.

Have we not done this? Own wisdom (Farms, FAIR, BYU?)

Gain and grind upon the face of the poor:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Creek_Center

verus

<https://www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/welfare/2011-welfare-services-fact-sheet.pdf>

Chapter 28 is really the best part.

4. And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance.

5. And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Hearken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men;

³ And prophets do lead people astray. Aaron was a prophet, and he built the golden calf.

Wow! Aren't we taught we needn't seek the face of God and search "deep doctrine," and all we need to do is to sustain our leaders, because they have the KEYS? You see, God has given his power unto men through keys.

Doesn't correlation kind of "deny the power of God?" I mean, if we all just relied on the Holy Ghost, what need would we have for a correlated curriculum? Couldn't the Holy Ghost just direct?

11. Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted.

All, huh? Ouch! Sure he's talking about us?

12. Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up.

13. They rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up.

He's not talking about City Creek and the recent development in Phily, right? Or the land in Florida, and.....

14. They wear stiff necks and high heads; yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men.

Wow! We've ALL gone astray, even you and me. And even the humble err because they follow men. This was so much easier to take when I thought it was talking about Billy Graham and Joel Osteen.

15. O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, and all those who commit whoredoms, and pervert the right way of the Lord, wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!

The rich can't be all that bad, I mean, it's not like there are any poor general authorities, right?

I'm not going to go through the rest of this chapter, though it's a worthwhile read. Remember, Nephi tells US to liken Isaiah, which is about a rebellious Israel. What do you think Nephi is trying to say, other than, "Hey, you latter-day guys, you are just like these guys?"

So yeah, we suck. I guess now I'm going to jump right into it, what if Joseph Smith was a prophet, translated the Book of Mormon, but, as Moroni said, we have dwindled in unbelief. (Moroni 9:20) Unbelief meaning that we do not believe what we need to believe in order to have miracles and the power of God made manifest in our lives. I do not doubt that Saints believe. I'm sure they believe. They have unbelief because they believe the wrong things, or we lack belief in the right things we need to believe. Our unbelief is because of the traditions of our fathers. (Hel. 15:15)

Look at the Book of Mormon a little more closely and can you not tell that it is entirely written about us? Seriously, the Zoramites and the rameumptom, that is totally fast and testimony meeting. Most people

only concern themselves with God on Sunday, they think they are chosen and better than everyone else, we have to wear nice cloths to church, and we're hard on the poor.

Look at what Moroni has to say about us:

35. Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.

See, Moroni has to be addressing Mormons. He's specifically saying, I SPEAK UNTO YOU, YOU the guy reading this bloody thing. If Moroni were talking to the Catholics and actually saw them, he'd see they aren't reading the Book of Mormon, so it would be silly to address them.

36. And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.

37. For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

We sure have a nice conference center, some great temples, and all our churches are really nice. And we really do love our money: our cars, boats, vacations, granite counter tops, and 55' flat screen TVs. Come on, I know who we are.

38. O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies—because of the praise of the world?

I mean, who else even makes the claim that they are the "holy church of God"? Maybe the Catholics might, but, again, they aint reading this book.

"Praise of the world," did we not all want Mitt Romney to win? Don't we all love David Archuleta, Steve Young, the Marriotts and Osmonds, and Stephanie Meyer? And Jabari Parker, how could you not go to BYU? We want Mormons to get the praise of the world. We've been seeking it for 150 years. Damn those polygamists that gave us such a bad rap!

39. Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?

Didn't we build City Creek so that we could move the homeless farther from the temple and preserve all the beauty that is downtown Salt Lake? Well, that was just Moroni's opinion. His opinion doesn't matter too much, he's the last writer anyway. See Christ likes us: 3 Nephi 16:

6. And blessed are the Gentiles, because of their belief in me, in and of the Holy Ghost, which witnesses unto them of me and of the Father.

7. Behold, because of their belief in me, saith the Father, and because of the unbelief of you, O house of Israel, in the latter day shall the truth come unto the Gentiles, that the fulness of these things shall be made known unto them.

See, the Gentiles are brought the truth and the fullness is made known unto them. Anyone else but the Mormons fit this description?

10. And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.

Huh? What? The Gentiles/LDS church rejects the fullness? It doesn't say "if" it says, "At that day when..." So Christ tells us that the Gentiles/Mormons will reject the fullness. What an odd thing for Joseph to write. There is so much of this book that predicts a Latter-day dwindling in unbelief. And our own latter-day revelations reveal the same.

D&C 84

54 And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—

55 Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation.

57 And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon ...

To my knowledge, this condemnation has not been lifted. We always point to how the Israelites messed up:

23 Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

24 But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory.

25 Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also;

26 And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel;

We pretty much all know that the early Saints tried to establish Zion. We know they failed ... cause it's not here. Did they harden their hearts? Could they endure His presence? Was Joseph taken out of their presence? (And wasn't it the members, who were actually responsible for Joseph's fate?) So what if we are also only left with the "lessor priesthood?"

D&C 124

28 For there is not a place found on earth that he may come to and restore again that which was lost unto you, or which he hath taken away, even the fulness of the priesthood.

Wait, huh, what? The fullness was taken away? When? Was it restored? It seems like we may very well have less than we presume. Back to the Book of Mormon and the parallels to the LDS church, look at the parallels with Abinadi and King Noah.

King Noah had the keys. He rightfully received authority from his father. But he:

2. And he had many wives and concubines

Not like Brigham Young, right?

3. And he laid a tax of one fifth part of all they possessed,

Tithing the poor on their gross income, that's not an oppressive tax, it's faith.

4. And all this did he take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines; thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom.

It's not a salary and they're not being paid, it's a living stipend. How else are they going to serve the church and live? They don't have jobs.

8. And it came to pass that king Noah built many elegant and spacious buildings; and he ornamented them with fine work of wood, and of all manner of precious things, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of brass, and of ziff, and of copper;

That's not at all similar to City Creek.

9. And he also built him a spacious palace, and a throne in the midst thereof, all of which was of fine wood and was ornamented with gold and silver and with precious things.

The Conference Center is for everyone. And surely Noah's fine wood was not made from the tree of his childhood youth.

10. And he also caused that his workmen should work all manner of fine work within the walls of the temple, of fine wood, and of copper, and of brass.

See, it's all work on the temple, so it's okay.

11. And the seats which were set apart for the high priests, which were above all the other seats, he did ornament with pure gold;

Gold seats are sin; nothing wrong with red cushy seats.

12 And it came to pass that he built a tower near the temple

The church office building needs to be that big...lots of employees.

13 And it came to pass that he caused many buildings to be built in the land Shilom;

The Book of Mormon can't be bashing City Creek again, so it's clearly not referring to it. I mean seriously, could there be more parallels than this? I'm going to ignore the very obvious Abinidi parallel.

When you interviewed Denver, I don't think you understood what he meant when he said the writers of the Book of Mormon nailed us. They saw our day and they nailed us. This is not a book about everyone else. It's about us.

How did we get here? One reason is we've ignored the Book of Mormon. (D&C 84:57)

The BOM teaches:

Alma 12: 9 And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God ...

10. And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

11. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.

Alma is saying we should open our heart to receiving the mysteries, but doesn't the Church teach not to delve into the mysteries? It seems we are even commanded to seek the mysteries.

D&C 11:7 Seek not for riches but for wisdom; and, behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you...

No, no, no, we need milk before meat right?

Hebrews 5:13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

14. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

While we start with milk for sure, it seems that those who stay on milk are "unskillful in righteousness" and only those with strong meat can discern good and evil. Are we as a church receiving meat, or are we stuck on milk?

Haven't we changed ordinances? Haven't we changed our scriptures?

We've changed the sacrament. It used to be wine, which is a much better symbol for Christ's blood than water (and not just because it's red).⁴ The priest used to pray with up-lifted hands like in the temple, and the congregation used to kneel.

The endowment has been changed. The penalties have been removed and the false preacher was eliminated. (Interesting that we no longer are instructed how to distinguish between a false preacher and a true messenger.) You may like that the penalties were removed. They were uncomfortable for most. But they were trying to teach an idea. Now that idea is lost to all those who go to the temple post 1990, unless you read the internet, like me. =)

We used to have prayer circles and alters at home and in stake centers. The scriptures have been changed. We've removed (~1921) the Lectures on Faith from the Doctrine and Covenants. The LOF used to be THE DOCTRINE, of the Doctrine and Covenants. Now we literally have no doctrine.

⁴ While D&C 27:3 does command us not to purchase wine from our enemies, and other liquids will suffice, there is no revelation that "ended wine" from being used in the sacrament. We just ought not buy it from our enemies.

Aren't we taught that changing the ordinances and scriptures are signs of apostasy?

So my paradigm is definitely unique in that I believe the Book of Mormon is true, but I also don't believe that we've had a Prophet, with a capital "P" since Joseph. You would look at our present state and say, see this Church can't be the only true and living church. I would say that BECAUSE the scriptures, including the Book of Mormon so perfectly predicted what would happen, that that is evidence for its veracity.

My deepest concern in publishing this is that it could be used to justify leaving the church. However, this entire letter is premised on the Book of Mormon being true. So, one would be a damned fool to use this letter in support of disbelief.

Most of the problems with "the Church" can be laid at the feet of the leaders of the church, their discrepancies/contradictions, their racism, sexism, pride, and self-righteousness. You eliminate all that, and the "Joseph Smith Restoration movement" isn't all that bad. When you accept that these people are not getting marching orders directly from God, then it's EASY to see why we are where we are.

See, I believe God's mission for Joseph was restoring lost knowledge about how to connect with heaven. It wasn't God's desire for us to have a New Testament church. But that's what the converted Campbellites and Sidney Rigdon's congregation wanted. God doesn't need a church; He needs families. The first many generations were simply ordered in families. The PATRIARCHS led their families. No church. Don't you see, even the structure of the church was made in the image of the family. You have Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3) the FATHERS (a First Presidency), then you have the 12 SONS of Jacob (12 apostles), then you have the 70 GRANDSONS (Exodus 1:5) for the Seventy.

So Joseph made a church for the Saints. It wasn't precisely what the Lord had in mind, but He often succumbs to what we want. See Ezekiel 14. (Though, next time they mention follow the prophet at church, have a look at Ez. 14:7-8).⁵

We talk about how the Lord was going to offer all the Israelites the opportunity to dwell with Him, but they didn't want to go up Mt. Sinai, they wanted Moses to go up instead. Then they would just follow the prophet. The Israelites rejected the higher law and were given a lesser law. **We are no different.**

The Lord gave the saints an opportunity through Joseph to establish Zion. But we failed. We rejected that opportunity. And we have a lesser version of what we could have had. And we have a prophet now, instead of walking with the Savoir ourselves. We talk down and ridicule the Israelites and Nephites for being foolish. Our own pride and vanity blinds us to the fact that we are doing the same thing, except we have their histories to warn us. We are even dumber.

I mean honestly, are we closer to establishing Zion than we were in 1844, or are we closer to Babylon? I don't think Babylon is about drinking alcohol and wearing immodest clothes ... no, not even once. It's an

⁵ 7 For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, **and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me**; I the Lord will answer him by myself:

⁸ And I will **set my face against that man**, and will make him a sign and a proverb, **and I will cut him off** from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

absolute shame that we've reduced the distinction between living the gospel and following the world to such crap.

A study of the succession crisis in 1844 and you'll see that while Brigham Young may have been appointed the Office of the President of the Church through common consent, that did not make him a "prophet," nor did he ever call himself a prophet. Our prophets, seers, and revelators, are such because they are OFFICES in the church, not because they are actually prophets, seers, and revelators. In fact, it wasn't until after Heber J. Grant that we actually started calling the President of the Church "Living Prophets."⁶ Before that, they were not called living prophets, but Presidents of the Church. We have exalted them beyond what they deserve. I would have no problem sustaining a man who leads the church through the common consent of the members, but can we please stop pretending he's got God on speed dial? (Or if he does, can he just say so? All the other prophets did.)

This brings me to the difference between signs and symbols versus the real thing. When we receive our endowments, as you know, we are not actually receiving those blessings. We are not being pronounced kings and priests, rather we are being anointed or INVITED to receive them if we are faithful and worthy. Nor do we actually receive the Holy Ghost at confirmation; rather we are invited to RECEIVE the Holy Ghost. What if when a man is called to be a prophet, seer, and revelator, he is only being invited to become such, but he can reject the invitation? So what is to be done?

"Adam, awake and arise." First, we have to wake the hell up. But instead of waking up and telling everyone every bad thing the church has ever done, we also need to arise. I don't think arising means criticizing, doubting, and throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Once we awake, we arise by gaining faith, repenting, being baptized, and RECEIVING the Holy Ghost. (2N 31-32) While this may seem too simple and overplayed, each of those principles should be reevaluated. I would submit to you that their actual meaning may be something different than what is taught at church.

- The Lectures on Faith discuss what faith really means and how to develop it.
- There are examples in the BOM of people who have repented within a very short amount of time. It kind of goes against the 5 Rs or whatever the church teaches repentance is about.
- Additionally, there are a few examples in the Book of Mormon of people who have been born again, or have been baptized of fire. It would be helpful to study those accounts to see if one is truly reborn.

Once you, "RECEIVE the Holy Ghost, [you] [can] speak with the tongue of angels." Then, "feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do."

5 For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.

⁶ See <http://denversnuffer.blogspot.com/2010/04/traditions-of-men-part-1.html>
<http://denversnuffer.blogspot.com/2010/04/traditions-of-men-part-2.html>
<http://denversnuffer.blogspot.com/2010/04/traditions-of-men-part-3.html>

6 Behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and there will be no more doctrine given until after he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh. And when he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh, the things which he shall say unto you shall ye observe to do.

This actually sounds a lot like the temple. First, angels come to you (telestial) to prepare you to receive Christ, and then Christ comes to you (terrestrial). And He tells you what to do to receive the Father (celestial).

In fact, let's talk about the tokens in the temple for a minute. I would submit to you that we are not going to meet an angel and be asked for a handshake. Rather the token is a physical symbol that represents something that must be received spiritually.

See, the Israelites were always focusing on the physical rite/ordinance and completely missed what it meant spiritually. There were symbols in their ordinances and in the Law of Moses that showed the higher law. The ordinances that were performed in the temple on the Day of Atonement are extremely symbolic of Christ's own sacrifice. But they completely missed that. They focused on the bloodshed by the animals and the scapegoat carrying away the sins of the people, etc. (Lev. 16) So when Pilate judged Christ, and the Sanhedrin elected to allow Barabbas to go, they didn't recognize that they were actually reenacting in real life the ordinance that the High Priest performed symbolically on the Day of Atonement. Man did they blow it!

Our ordinances are symbols too, so instead of sleeping through the movie, and standing and sitting while in a trance (oh, wait, now we get to sit much more) let's try and figure out what they mean, so that we can receive the real thing. (Let's also ignore how much more dramatic these awesome new movies are.) We are told to receive the tokens while in the temple, right? Our bodies are temples, so we are to receive the tokens while we are in our bodies.

First, before we come to the telestial kingdom (earth) we covenant to God to obey Him. All who are born may receive the light of Christ. We are to receive the light of Christ, in our temple, in our bodies. The light of Christ is like a gentle hand, hold us, guiding us along the way.

Then if we covenant with the Lord through sacrifice, we can receive the Holy Ghost. We are to receive the Holy Ghost, in our temple, in our bodies. The Holy Ghost is like a firmer hand, holding us, guiding us along the way.

The temple teaches us that true messengers will first come to us undisclosed to see if we are being true and faithful to the tokens.

Hebrews 13:2 tells us, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." And Abraham 3 teaches us that there are noble and elect that are here proving others.

So suppose an angel were to come to you, undisclosed, and wanted to see if you were being true and faithful and living the law of the gospel? How would he do it, perhaps as a beggar? A beggar could

petition you on the street to prove you, and see if you were compassionate. If you show compassion, then you have shown him that you are true and faithful and have received the token.

Once you have been proven, then the angel may return to you, this time identity known, and as Nephi says, angels through the Holy Ghost will “show unto you all things what ye should do.” Then you are ready to change the robe to the other shoulder and are born again. Then you can enter the Terrestrial Kingdom. If you are loyal to Christ and do not cheat on Him, you receive your calling and election. We are to receive our calling and election, in our temple, in our bodies, and Christ will spiritually take your hand and guide you.

Then once you have shown you will give everything to the Lord, you will receive the Second Comforter and you will see the marks on his wrists and hands, and the Lord will teach you. (See D&C 76). We are to receive the Second Comforter, in our temple, in our bodies.

The temple is all over the Book of Mormon. I don't really have time to go into more. 3 Nephi has a ton. Prayer circles, washings, anointing. I simply don't believe Joseph could have constructed all that to perfectly fit what we have today. The endowment was created at the end of Joseph's life, and all the elements of the temple were already laid out in the Book of Mormon.

While I have yet to see an angel, or the Lord, I know about 8 people who have. I have personally met and spoken with 5 of them. 2 of them I would say are friends. I have corresponded online with four others. The common denominator, they've all read The Second Comforter. Below are their testimonies.

<http://thesecondcomforter.com/> I actually work with Dan. He's a patent attorney in San Antonio. He's local counsel for us there.

<http://upwardthought.blogspot.com/2013/03/my-witness.html> I've met the author and we talk through Gchat regularly. I'd call both of these two friends.

<http://ldsperfectday.blogspot.com/p/this-blog-is-fulfillment-of-wish-that-i.html> I've personally met and spoken with the author here. His blog is pretty much dedicated to helping people connect with heaven.

<http://myjourneytothefullness.wordpress.com/2014/02/11/10/> The author of this blog has also seen Christ.

<http://www.ldsforum.com/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=27637> The author of this post has also seen Christ.

John Pontius actually wrote a book back in the early nineties about seeking the presence of Christ, “Following the Light of Christ into His Presence.” <http://www.amazon.com/Following-Light-Christ-into-Presence/dp/1555176437>

Then of course you have Denver. But there are also others that I have not included. I'll leave those for you to seek and find if you want to.

I understand if you don't believe them. I wouldn't blame someone for not taking a stranger-on-line's word for it. But I have gotten to know some of them. I find them credible. So I believe them.

This is in fact what testimony is intended to do. It is for those with an actual knowledge to give hope to others to receive the same. Our testimony meetings are rather vain and stupid. Not many people have an actual knowledge, so little is gained. This is what the role of an apostle is supposed to be. An ACTUAL witness who testifies to what they KNOW. Then those who listen may have enough hope to see the same.

Our GAs call themselves "special witnesses." I was told that when a Seventy is called they get an orientation. They are told that "special witness" is a noun. It is akin to an office. So they can go around telling people that they are "special witnesses," which is a position for people to bare testimony. But saying that you are a "special witness" is not an adjective describing the type of witness (one with actual knowledge). I find this position particularly troubling and quite intellectually dishonest. Especially when THEY KNOW that everyone listening to their witness understands it in a different manner.

What about, "it's too sacred to share?" Surely all the testimonies above are lies because if they really had them, they wouldn't have shared them. I think this idea is a false tradition. It's the excuse you give when you don't want to tell people you haven't had that experience. The scriptures are replete with people baring testimony of their sacred experiences. The one thing I've found among those who I know, who have connected with heaven, they only testify that they've had the experience, unless permitted, they do not share the subject matter of what the experience was about, which makes sense. They are being instructed for what THEY need to know to progress. And we are all different. What an angel may tell you would likely be different than what an angel would tell me.

As the Lecture on Faith put it:

56. We have now clearly set forth how it is, and how it was, that God became an object of faith for rational beings, and also, upon what foundation the testimony was based which excited the inquiry and diligent search of the ancient Saints to seek after and obtain a knowledge of the glory of God. We have also seen that it was human testimony, and human testimony only, that **excited this inquiry in their minds in the first instance**. It was the credence they gave to the testimony of their fathers, it having **aroused their minds to inquire after the knowledge of God**. That inquiry frequently terminated, indeed always terminated when rightly pursued, in the most glorious discoveries and eternal certainty.

See, it is the testimony of others who have an actual knowledge that excites the inquiry for everyone else. Most people do not know people who have an actual knowledge of the existence of God. I don't blame them for not believing. But I've seen too many witnesses to not give it a shot myself.

This is why I believe. Right now, I don't know. But I hope to know someday. Perhaps if I do everything I know how and it doesn't happen in a decade or two, I wouldn't doubt it if I become agnostic.

Yes, there are many other issues.

- What is the point of having an innocent man/God suffer and die to redeem everyone else? Why is that necessary and how does it work?
- Why is the killing of Isaac good? Seems awful to me.
- What about all the killing in the Old Testament?
- If every dispensation goes bad, nearly from the beginning, what is it all for? Why is it so hard?

I've found paradigms and answers that suite me for now. I personally think that it provides me a rationale explanation, or at least enough of one to continue my investigation further. And it is likely that as I go along, I will further refine my view, hopefully getting closer and closer to the truth.

So while I am familiar with the issues, I can still find belief, though it's through a paradigm that is rather unorthodox. I cannot believe in the corporate church. Didn't we all grow up thinking our church had angels, miracles, and teachers who spoke to God face to face? THAT is what we fell in love with, right? But do we see any of that with the corporate church? Or do we see media studies, surveys, and polls.⁷

Jacob, King Benjamin, and Samuel didn't need a survey or poll to tell them what the members were thinking, they got their stats from heaven.

Jacob 2:5 But behold, hearken ye unto me, and know that by the help of the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth I can tell you concerning your thoughts, how that ye are beginning to labor in sin, which sin appeareth very abominable unto me, yea, and abominable unto God.

Jacob didn't need any polling or surveys.

Mosiah 2:3 And the things which I shall tell you are made known unto me by an angel from God. And he said unto me: Awake; and I awoke, and behold he stood before me.

King Mosiah didn't have speech writers, wait, well, yes he did, but it was an angel.

Helaman 13:7 And behold, an angel of the Lord hath declared it unto me, and he did bring glad tidings to my soul. And behold, I was sent unto you to declare it unto you also, that ye might have glad tidings; but behold ye would not receive me.

Honestly, I would seriously doubt so many people would be having a crisis of faith if they ever ONCE heard at General Conference, "And the things which I shall tell you are made known unto me by an angel from God." No, we get:

"The origins of priesthood availability are not entirely clear. Some explanations with respect to this matter were made in the absence of direct revelation and references to these explanations are sometimes cited in publications. These previous personal statements do not represent Church doctrine." <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/race-church>

⁷ https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B0cHQPe2_G8fUnU1d2tWTFRURGs/edit

This is an example of the church's "continuing revelation," and it is definitely revealing. And why is it coming from the church's Newsroom? Why are all these new statements not coming from the 15? This really looks more like a corporate structure with a strong public relations arm than a church led by a living prophet.

Do the GAs claim to be True Messengers from the Father?

Do we believe in a true messenger who is without prophecy, seeing, and revelations, who sits upon the top of a topless throne, whose keys are everywhere and whose authority ends nowhere but fills the world, who is surrounded by myriads of beings who have sworn allegiance and confidentiality to receiving second, secret ordinances, for acts of their own? Do we believe in this great True Messenger?

I do not. I cannot comprehend such a messenger.

That is the beauty of it.

Perhaps we believe a great hell for those without authoritative ordinances which the wicked are cast, and where they are continually burning, but are never consumed?

I do not believe in such a place.

I don't think what we have was what God's would have liked to have given us. But this is what we chose. And don't you see, that is the most logical explanation. The traditions that have been handed down to us, simply don't work. Our traditions are being exposed one after another as being totally false. But I BELIEVE this because the **scriptures said this would happen**.

I really felt bad for Tom Philips. He seemed like such a true believer. I mean that man was ready and expecting to see Christ when he went in for his second anointing. I imagine all of the apostles are like that. I have tremendous sympathy. It could have been really easy for me to continue along in my traditions, be called to higher callings, and then what if I were called to be an apostle? And I find out, that *being* an apostle is not much different than *not* being an apostle. It's just an OFFICE in the church. You get called in, you're sustained, and set apart. However, being an ACTUAL apostle is different. It requires sacrifice, faith, a real endowment, and witness from God.

I like the guys who lead the church, generally. I have loved Elder Holland's talks for years. Still do. Elder Bednar, and Elder Maxwell, and wasn't Pres. Hinckley great? This was a really hard realization to come to. Though I do find Elder Uchtdorf's talk utterly hypocritical as he welcomes all into the big tent of Mormonism, then the church excommunicates Denver Snuffer, Brent Larsen, and others simply for their beliefs, and other discipline is threatened against Rock Waterman. Of course Elder Uchtdorf probably never read any of the Excommunication Appeals that were sent to him, so I probably can't blame him personally. The church seems to be run by minions running around in the COB. It seems out of control. Though we were warned about secret combinations being everywhere, weren't we?

And on that note, I realize that you must think that I'm utterly crazy. You're probably right.

But I can't let this thing called Mormonism go. I'm sure you've met with tons who say, I know the corporate church isn't true, but I can't leave. The Spirit kind of wants me to stay. Sometimes it's simply peer pressure/family pressure in staying. But other times, the Spirit is really telling people, "Yes, there are faults, even lies, but you should stay. I would submit that the reason we should stay, is because the important parts are true. The non-important parts aren't true.

We have made the church and its leaders an idol. We rise when they enter. When we have questions, we ask, "Well, what have the brethren said about the matter?" We have become Brethrenites.

We are taught to "submit to priesthood authority," but what exactly is that?

D&C 121: 41 No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

42 By kindness, and pure knowledge...

THERE IS NO PRIESTHOOD "AUTHORITY" OTHER THAN PERSUASION. And if you don't persuade someone, you better be ready to be long-suffering, because you're going to have to be patient with them for awhile.

We have replaced our worship of the Lord, with the worship of the Church. I'm no longer an idolater.⁸

Look, the Israelites apostatized, they had their idols too. But they were still the Lord's people. He did come to them. While the Lord held no keys or authority in the Jewish religion in His day, He honored those who did have keys. The Nephites rebelled, but the Lord still came to their temple in Bountiful. Look at all the people who've had commissions to teach repentance without any ecclesiastical authority/office: Lehi, Abinidi, Alma, Samuel, John the Baptist, Paul, and Christ. This actually seems to be the way God works A LOT. He doesn't seem to use ecclesiastical hierarchy. Yes, they received a commission from God, they had authority from HIM, but did not have OFFICE in the church. Few of the Old Testament Prophets were the High Priest. But we have been raised with these traditions that there's always a church and the Presiding High Priest is the Prophet.⁹ I don't believe that tradition any more. I think the Mormon church is still the vehicle in which the gospel is best disseminated throughout the world, though it's capacity to do so is becoming weaker as we become closer to Babylon. In my opinion, we ought to stick with it. The Lord will straighten it out in time. Though, I think it may be unpleasant at first.

D&C 112: 24 Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord.

25 And **upon my house shall it begin**, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord;

26 First among those among you, saith the Lord, **who have professed to know my name and have not known me**, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house, saith the Lord.

⁸ Well, yes, I probably still am, just not in this regards anymore. Go Niners!!!

⁹ 3 Nephi 5:12 seems to indicate that there was no church at all in the Book of Mormon from Lehi until Alma.

Who claim to be His House and profess to know him? Anyone else making this claim? I have to say I'm rather content that I don't live in Utah right now.

Everyone is on a different level of progression. That is why the Spirit says different things to one person than to another. The Spirit could very well tell a Methodist to stay in the Methodist church. That is right for that person then. I don't believe the Spirit is so much black and white, rather different shades of grey. We are all somewhere in between and the Spirit adapts to what each of us need.

When I was a sophomore at BYU, I was taking a microbiology class and learning about evolution. I seriously looked into it, the science, what the Brethren had said about the matter. And it was really undeniable that evolution was a fact. I made the comment to my roommate, who was also a microbiology major and in the same classes as me, that I thought it was interesting that all the theologians say the earth is 6000 years old and there's no evolution, and all the atheists say there is no God. How ironic that they are both wrong, and they are both right! God does exist AND evolution was the means in which he created man.

I enjoyed watching "The Practice" on TV, which was a lawyer show. On one episode, a judge made a decision that upset both sides, and then the judge remarked that he then knew his decision was right, precisely because it upset both sides.

We tend to be a mix of right and wrong. No one has a monopoly on right, and rarely is someone totally wrong. One of the biggest problem our society faces is the right v left with no compromise. In my opinion, conservatives are right to want freedom/capitalism and shouldn't be compelled by the government, but the left is also correct, we ought to be more compassionate and more charitable, we have a societal duty to take care of one another and we need not be so self-interested and greedy.

The democrats wouldn't get a ton of support if they were all error and no truth. Likewise, no one would be republican if there was no truth there. The problem is there is truth in both. Even Satan has to deal out some truth to lure people in. He corrupts the truth. But he has to use some. There are few who are solely attracted to error and evil.

That is really the hardest part in finding truth. It's everywhere and no one has a monopoly on it. And it's mixed in with error. Finding truth is perhaps the hardest thing about life. But at the same time, when you see truths standing right before you, you can't deny it.

I don't have time explain my view on all the known problems, but let me address some of the translational issues with Joseph (Abraham, seer stone, kinderhook plates¹⁰, etc.)

¹⁰ Joseph never translated anything from them that would be considered scripture. In fact, all he did with the KH plates was ask someone to fetch his Egyptian Alphabet. He had made the Alphabet while translating the Book of Abraham. When it was fetched, he looked for symbols on the KH plates that matched anything in his Alphabet. One figure matched and it was a figure that indicated being a descendant of Ham, which is exactly what is recorded by Joseph's scribe in his journal. No seer stone, no urim and thummim, no revelation from heaven. All he did was match up a drawing to his attempted Alphabet. It's crazy that people get so worked up over the KH plates.

It's one thing to be upset that the church isn't transparent about the issue. But remember, I don't think they have all the answers anyway. What exactly is the concern? Do you worry about how Mormon compiled the record, or Matthew, or John or Moses? If you're concerned about the means of Joseph's translation, why aren't you concerned about the others?

Suppose Mormon stuck his head in a hat as he "abridged the record," but never actually read the records. Or suppose Moses stuck his head in a hat when he received the 10 commandments. I would suggest that the seer stone and papyrus were simply means in which Joseph could be inspired to write scripture. It didn't have to be those tangible things, the Lord could have used something else. And those weren't translations in the original sense, but he was translating ideas that a previous prophet had already written.

You can get mad at Joseph for not being frank about the fact that he wasn't translating the way we understand, but what if he didn't know at the time? What if the Lord was just using him to disseminate info to us through all sorts of means? He didn't even use anything to correct the Bible? No one makes a big deal about that.

Getting worked up about all these little issues just baffles me. You were fine with angels and golden plates left in holes in up-state New York, but he sticks his head in a hat and everyone loses their minds. If you're a cynic, shouldn't you have been lost at golden plates buried in up-state New York?

See, as a lawyer, all I have to prove is that it's possible something could have happened. Then the inquiry can still continue. Only when something is impossible is it justified to stop the investigation. (Or if it's simply not worth it.)

But that's the problem here. Mormonism offers the most extravagant claims. There is so much that is at stake and could be gained. It really justifies as thorough an investigation as is possible.

I read "The Second Comforter" four years ago. I've given that book out more than any other book. I've recommended his other books too. I read PTHG, and because it addresses such controversial issues that most members don't know about, I would NEVER recommend that book to someone ignorant of church history. But, if they are aware of church history, it's the FIRST book I recommend. "Passing the Heavenly Gift" is the BEST book that will help you reconcile your faith. It's ironic. Now that Denver's been excommunicated, I have to recommend PTHG first, so they can understand why the church did what they did. Then they can read The Second Comforter.

I'd also recommend that you get Daymon Smith back on Mormon Stories. He's written a 5 volume set about the cultural background of the Book of Mormon. Nephi blames our state on the traditions of our fathers. Well, what if we don't understand the Book of Mormon at all? We ASSUME the Jaredites left the tower of Babel. The text doesn't say that. There's A LOT the text doesn't say, but we simply assume. The Book of Mormon could have a tremendously different meaning than what we understand. You should get him on again.

I hope that I have not communicated to you a dislike for the church. I love the church—the people in it. The church is a great organization to be a part of. There are so many opportunities to serve and help others. There are great friends to be made. The corporate church and correlation, well, they kind of suck and I strongly dislike most everything about them. I don't like the pride we all have thinking we are better than others. I don't love the bureaucracy. But you see, I don't really care about "the church." My focus is changed. I'm far more interested in the gospel, and seeking out Christ. Living the gospel and seeking Christ are more than enough reasons to stay active. There's just a distinction between the church and the gospel. (See Elder Poleman's talk back in 1983.¹¹) When you focus on living the gospel and being Christ-like, there is no need for continual guilt trips about home teaching, it just takes care of itself.

Women and priesthood, gays and sealings, etc., it's all just a waste of time. Salvation and heavenly power comes from God alone, not from an earthy institution. Who cares if women lack an office which is only a symbol of the real thing when they could go out and get the real thing? If they get the real thing they can bless and heal their children regardless whether or not their "ordinance" is accepted by the church.

Consider the levite priests. Only the levites could officiate in the ordinances of the temple. Only they could kill the animals, sprinkle the blood, light the incense, and enter the Holy of Holies, ALL OF WHICH symbolized connecting to heaven. But they were not ACTUALLY connecting to heaven. The symbols and ordinances only point and teach us how to do the real thing.

The modern parallel is that women really want to get in there and kill the animals and sprinkle the blood and light the incense as symbols. In reality, they can have heavenly blessings, but in meekness and humility as it wouldn't be "recognized" by anyone. (Real power from heaven administered through men also tends not to be "recognized" by anyone.) But women CAN still receive The Second Comforter and other REAL spiritual gifts. They can commune with God. They can be brought before the throne of the Father and the Mother. Why covet the symbol? Seek the real thing.

Doctrinally, I have no problem with woman holding church office. I just think we are focusing on the wrong thing. Women were the first to receive The Second Comforter after the Lord's resurrection, right? He came to women before he came to his apostles. In fact, he came to 2 disciples on the Road to Emmaus before he came to his apostles. Clearly, church office/hierarchy is nothing to be concerned about.

I believe the Book of Mormon because it causes me to be a better person. It is true if it connects me to heaven. Studying out its message is far more valuable than any historical or textual criticism. ALL of the authors were visited by Christ. The authors are trying to get you to make that connection too. They are not merely telling stories. There is so much there.

¹¹ But make sure you watch the original version, not the edited version the Church.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcM7koDc-jg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuUv4nca4Gc>

The Book of Mormon is a sealed book because people can read it and not understand the true message that is there. It takes receiving the Holy Ghost before one can truly have the sealed book opened to them.

“Okay, fine,” you might say, “the Book of Mormon doesn’t suck as much I thought it did, but what about Joseph? What about the different accounts of the first vision and the polygamy?”

I don’t have time to go into all the polygamy, other than to say, for having 30+ wives, it’s awfully odd that he never fathered another child with any of them. I’d submit that the relationships he had with them are not the husband-wife relationship one normally has. (Yes, I know there are documents saying he had sex with them, there are arguments that contest that. Again, I don’t have time to go deeper here.)

What about the visions? Well, I’ve had it explained by one who’s had a vision, that when you are taken out of time, and you enter into eternity, it’s initially quite confusing. Multiple things seem to happen simultaneously. It’s not linear. It’s actually hard to know what’s going on while you’re experiencing it. However, you retain a perfect memory of what happened, and then you are able to weed out ideas as they become relevant and important over time. Consider Nephi. He pondered the things he saw for 30 years before he made enough sense of them to right them down. (2 N 5:30) With that background, it is entirely possible (assuming that’s how visions work, I don’t know, I haven’t had any) that Joseph articulated certain aspects as they become relevant in that moment. All accounts are true. They all happened. He only saw an angel. And he saw the Father and the Son. It all happened simultaneously and it was all distinct. And each account was an attempt to communicate the idea that was important to communicate at that time—or something like that.

I wouldn’t blame you at all if you say, that’s just crazy. Yeah, it might be. But I’ve never had a vision. What if it is like that?

I think it’s dangerous when we assume that our construct, our paradigm, the cultural traditions we’ve been raised in, are used as the lens through which we see everything, especially if we use them to peer into the heavens. Because I think it’s fair to say that the heavens operate differently than our paradigm. Since they’ve been around longer, and are more resilient than our changing culture, it might be a good idea to try and understand a heavenly-based paradigm, rather than forcing it to conform to ours.

It’s also possible that heaven does exist and the idea of visions as I explained above is not what a vision is like. All I’m saying is that there is a paradigm that explains the different accounts. Since it’s not impossible, we can continue the investigation.

Remember that the context for this letter is simply to respond to “If you retain your testimony after reading this...then: 1) hats off to you...”

I think there is an argument that supports belief. I think it’s reasonable to keep investigating scripture and seeking God. There is nothing in <http://cesletter.com/> that proves the BOM is false. It simply shows that the traditional Church narrative is untrue. And to make clear, this letter was not intended at all as a

comprehensive response to this letter, though I personally have ideas that overcome the letter's objections.

I want to end on why I think it's important to seek the face of Christ. I don't think that it would just be cool to see Christ. I'm not looking for a sign. Many members believe or say, "While it would be nice to meet Christ, I don't think I really need that. I don't have to see Him to believe. And I'll be fine if I don't see him until after this life." I disagree; I believe it essential to exaltation to see Christ in mortality. That's because Nephi described the Doctrine of Christ as faith, repentance, baptism, receive the Holy Ghost, be instructed by angels, then be instructed by Christ **while in the flesh, while in our temples**. Christ has things to teach us while we are in our temples so that we may fulfill them while in our temples. And if we don't, then we will receive less than we could have.

Again, my purpose in writing this is not to resolve anyone's issues. It's to persuade people to start over and look again for answers. I personally believe that if you connect to heaven, you will find them.

/B Bartel/

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