

THE LITTLE BOOK OF
Book of Mormon
Evidences

John Hilton III



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To Opa John
a true scholar of the Book of Mormon

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A special thank-you to Noel Reynolds and Anthony Sweat, who showed me the value of teaching these evidences and provided ideas on how to do it.

Introduction

*Rational argument does not
create belief, but it maintains a climate
in which belief may flourish.*

Farrer, "The Christian Apologist," in Gibb, *Light on C. S. Lewis*

When Elder Russell M. Nelson was working as a doctor, he once gave a copy of the Book of Mormon to a couple he worked with:

About a week later, they returned the book to him, saying, "Thanks a lot."

Rather assertively, Russell asked, "What do you mean, 'thanks a lot'? That is a totally inappropriate response for one who has read this book. You didn't read the book. Please take it

back and read it; and then when you have read it, please return it to me.”

Somewhat red-faced and embarrassed by this challenge and confrontation, the [couple] retrieved the book, acknowledging that they had only thumbed through the pages. Three weeks later, they returned with tears in their eyes and said, “We have read the book. We know it’s true. We want to learn more.” Dr. Nelson said, “Now I know you’ve read the book.”

In due course, Dr. Nelson baptized the grateful couple.¹

The Book of Mormon is an amazing book! Once I took my son Levi (then five years old) to a missionary fireside. At the end of the fireside, when they offered copies of the Book of Mormon, Levi took one and said he was excited to share it with a friend.

A couple of weeks later, Levi’s friend Michael came to our house. Levi ran and got the Book of Mormon and gave it to him. “Here you go,” Levi said. “It’s a Book of Mormon.”

“Thanks,” Michael replied.

Levi looked at Michael, and Michael looked at him.

“Well,” Levi said somewhat impatiently, “you can read it right now.” Obediently, Michael opened the book and began reading.

I too love the Book of Mormon and know that it is the word of God. It was written by ancient prophets on the American continent and teaches of Jesus Christ and his gospel. President Ezra Taft Benson explained that the Book of Mormon is the “keystone of testimony.”²



A keystone is the center stone in an arch

Because the Book of Mormon is the “keystone of testimony,” gaining a testimony of the Book of Mormon can be essential to obtaining a testimony of the Restoration. That’s because (1) if the Book of Mormon is true, then you know Heavenly Father lives and Jesus Christ is our Savior. You also know Joseph Smith was a prophet. So (2) if Joseph Smith was a prophet, then you know that the Church he restored is true. Therefore, (3) if the Church is true, then you know it is led by a living prophet whose teachings come from God. Having a testimony of the Book of Mormon helps hold everything else in place.

As you know, the way to get a testimony of the Book of Mormon is to read it sincerely and pray about it. The last prophet in the Book of Mormon promised:

And when ye shall *receive* these things, I would exhort you that ye would *ask* God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall *ask* with a

sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moroni 10:4–5; emphasis added)

One of the most important things you and I can do is to take Moroni up on his promise and learn through the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is true. *Ultimately, the only Book of Mormon evidence that matters is the evidence provided by the Holy Ghost.* At the same time, there is a lot of scholarly evidence on the Book of Mormon that can be helpful to know. Let me explain why.

In the accompanying illustration you see a large structure made out of pipes that is connected to the building under construction. This is called scaffolding, a temporary framework that allows workers to more easily finish the building. Once the construction is complete, the scaffolding is taken down.



In some ways scholarly evidence of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is like scaffolding. It's not the real testimony, but it can support us while we are in the process of building and deepening our testimony by providing an atmosphere in which testimony can grow. Sometimes we might be confronted with the claims of those who argue that the Book of Mormon is not true. Knowing a little bit about Book of Mormon evidences can be helpful at such times.

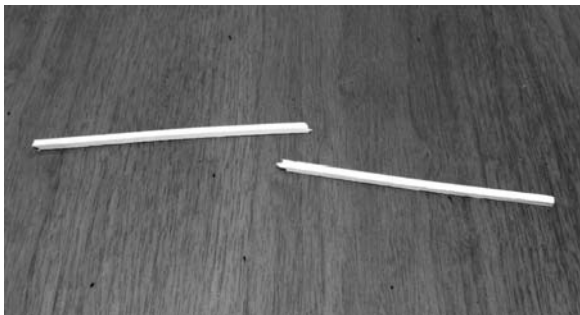
Once when I was a missionary, my companion and I were teaching a family. During the lesson,

a family member said many negative things about the Church. When we left the home that day, I still had a testimony, but I was a little bit shaken by what the person had said.

At such a time, I was grateful for a grandfather who had taught me about a variety of scholarly evidences that supported the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Don't get me wrong—I still had my spiritual testimony, but at that difficult time the intellectual knowledge I had was a help—a scaffolding if you will—that allowed me to examine my understanding of the Church and make my testimony even stronger.

In addition, you may have had acquaintances who attacked your beliefs and demanded “proof” that the Book of Mormon is true. When that happens, knowing about wordprints, chiasmus, Hebraisms, and other evidences can be useful.

You've probably seen an object lesson in which somebody takes a stick and then snaps it in half.



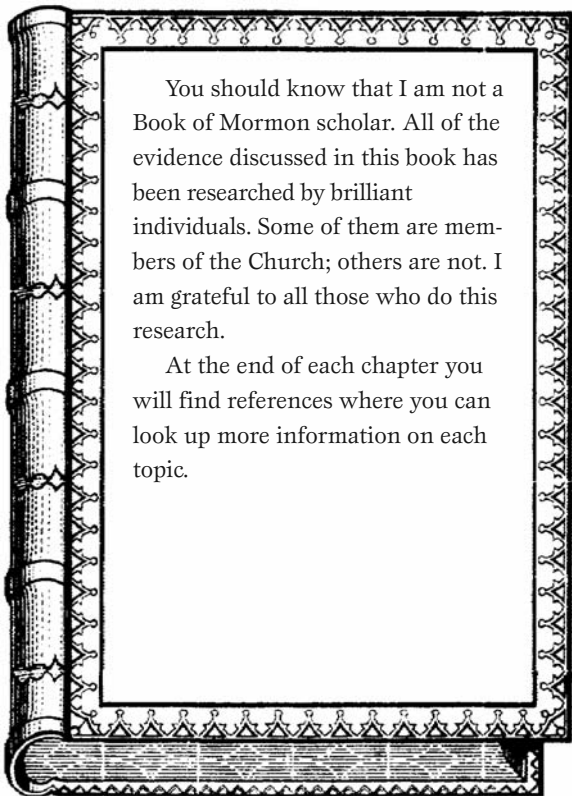
But when several sticks are put together in a bundle, they cannot be broken.



This object lesson can be likened to evidence that the Book of Mormon is true, with each piece of evidence being like a stick. In this little book you will read of statistical experiments, eleven

witnesses, Hebraisms, and more than a dozen other pieces of evidence (sticks) that demonstrate that the Book of Mormon is exactly what it claims to be—ancient scripture. Individually, these scholarly pieces of evidence could be dismissed as “just a coincidence.” None of them “proves” that the Book of Mormon is true, but taken together they provide a strong witness for its authenticity. And the more we know about them, the harder it will be for people to break our testimonies.

The truth is, the Book of Mormon *is* scripture. God *in reality* spoke to ancient prophets who lived on the American continent. And even though we do not need to “prove” it, I hope the evidences presented in this book reinforce your belief and help you share your testimony with others.



What's Up with Wordprints?

Have you ever heard of Theodore Kaczynski? Don't feel bad if you haven't, but his story is a fascinating one. More commonly known as the Unabomber, he planted sixteen bombs that injured twenty-nine individuals and killed three. Some of his bombs were planted in packages mailed to the victims. On one occasion he planted a bomb on an airplane. Fortunately, that bomb malfunctioned. Instead of exploding, it began emitting smoke, and all the passengers were able to get off the plane safely.

For sixteen years (from 1978 to 1995) the Unabomber was one of the most wanted criminals in the United States but managed to evade

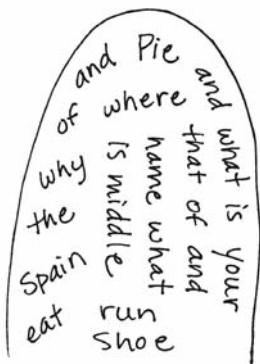
local and state police—even the FBI. So how did he finally get caught?

Well, the Unabomber had an agenda. He hated technology, and in 1995 the Unabomber demanded that a paper he had written about the dangers of technology be published in major newspapers. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* agreed to publish it, hoping that somebody would recognize his writing style. That's exactly what happened. On April 3, 1996, the Unabomber was arrested.

The Unabomber's brother tipped off the FBI, but before the brother contacted them, the FBI was working with a statistics professor at Brigham Young University. Now why would the FBI want a statistics professor's help in determining who wrote a manuscript? Because of wordprints.

Wordprints?

Yes, wordprints. They are like fingerprints. Let me explain.



Just as people have unique fingerprints that identify them, writers have wordprints—writing patterns that are different and distinct from those of other writers. The way a writer uses simple words such as *the*, *a*, *of*, and others creates a pattern unique to that writer. Even when writers try to change the way they write, their wordprints follow them. And so the FBI wanted this BYU professor to compare the wordprints of several possible suspects to the wordprint of the Unabomber.

The professor the FBI contacted happened to

be John Hilton the first—my grandfather! I remember the excitement I felt when I learned that my grandfather’s work was contributing to crime fighting. But that feeling was nothing compared to what I felt when I learned what his work with wordprints had to do with the Book of Mormon.

My grandfather first got into wordprints when he joined a group of scientists, several of whom were not Latter-day Saints, to do a test on the Book of Mormon. Because some people argued that Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery wrote it, the researchers wanted to compare their wordprints with those of the Book of Mormon. If their wordprints were different from the wordprints in the Book of Mormon, that difference would show that they did not write it.

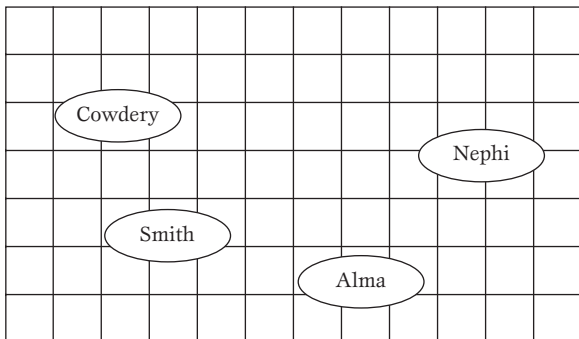
Furthermore, as those who have read the Book of Mormon know, there are different authors throughout the book. The researchers decided to measure whether the wordprints of Alma and

Nephi were the same. If Alma and Nephi turned out to have different wordprints, that would establish that the Book of Mormon was written by more than one person.

I'll spare you the complicated details, but as you probably guessed, the researchers discovered that the Book of Mormon was *not* written by Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery. In fact, they discovered that it is “statistically indefensible to propose Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery” as the author of the Book of Mormon.¹

My grandfather explained the researchers' results to me like this: Imagine everybody's wordprint measurements on a graph. Each person's wordprint occupies a specific location. If you have a document written by Oliver Cowdery, it would be clear that it was *his* writing and not somebody else's.

As the researchers studied the wordprints, it became obvious that each author was on a separate and distinct place on the graph.



Simply stated, wordprints are legitimate measurements recognized not only by scholars but by the FBI. And wordprints statistically prove that Joseph Smith did not write the Book of Mormon—a great piece of evidence!



Additional Resources

G. Bruce Schaalje, John L. Hilton, and John B. Archer, "Comparative Power of Three Author-Attribution Techniques for Differentiating Authors," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 1 (1997): 47–65. Available at maxwellinstitute.byu.edu

John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (1990): 89–108. Available at byustudies.byu.edu

What Would You Do If You Felt a Friend Betrayed You?

Lessons from Book of Mormon Witnesses

Consider the following hypothetical situation:

Lisa, Jennifer, and Susy had been friends for about a year. One day Lisa asked Jennifer if she would help her out. Lisa had a crush on Susy's boyfriend, Paul, and she wanted Jennifer to tell Susy a lie about Paul to get them to break up. Lisa promised Jennifer a hundred dollars if she would help her. Jennifer wasn't a bad person and didn't want to lie, but she needed money. So she told Susy a lie about Paul, and Susy broke up with him. Are you following all this?

But Lisa never paid Jennifer the hundred