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Reviewed by Daniel C. Peterson

Yet More Abuse of B. H. Roberts

James R. Spencer’s small brochure has been circulating since the early 1990s. In and of itself, the pamphlet is of little importance. The points it raises are not original; others have argued the same case for well over a decade. And, indeed, Mr. Spencer’s arguments have long since been answered (although his brochure betrays no awareness of that fact).

Replying to such anti-Mormon materials as "The Disappointment of B. H. Roberts" is somewhat frustrating. First, it obliges an advocate of the restored gospel to take time off from the pleasant duty of affirmatively teaching the truth. One is tempted to respond much the way Nehemiah did, when Sanballat and Geshem the Arabian tried to distract him from his rebuilding of the temple: “I am doing a great work,” Nehemiah replied, “so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:3). Answering such attacks as this requires, rather, that the discussion take place on ground chosen, often rather arbitrarily, by the critic. It distracts from the impressive quantity and quality of evidence now

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available in support of the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon.\(^2\) Second, and perhaps even more frustrating, it involves responding, yet once more, to objections that were successfully answered years ago and that, therefore, do not really merit renewed discussion—objections, moreover, that will almost certainly continue to be raised no matter how often and how convincingly they are settled.

Nevertheless, since Mr. Spencer’s arguments are superficially plausible, and since questions and sometimes even concerns continue to surface from those who have been exposed to them, it seems to me advisable (not to say efficient) to respond to Mr. Spencer in print.

His clear intent is to showcase “The Five Questions Roberts Couldn’t Answer” and to imply that the Latter-day Saints of today are equally unable to find satisfactory answers to these problems. He is evidently less interested in the particular case of B. H. Roberts himself, whose supposed slide into disbelief is assumed rather than proved. Because he was a prominent General Authority and writer of an earlier period, Elder Roberts serves merely as a striking (and, to Latter-day Saints, presumably a shocking) illustration. The implication of Mr. Spencer’s brochure is clear:

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\(^2\) Much of this is surveyed in the many important works of Professor Hugh W. Nibley. But it is not limited to his writing, and more such evidence accumulates with each passing year. The richest contemporary clearinghouse for it is, no doubt, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). Readily available books such as Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982; repr. 1996); Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., *The Allegory of the Olive Tree* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994); Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990); John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985); John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991); and John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), give some indication of the direction of current research and writing on the subject. (The latter two volumes are especially “user-friendly” and are available in paperback.)
Honest and intelligent believers in the Book of Mormon should abandon it, as the honest and intelligent B. H. Roberts did.\textsuperscript{3}

But this, in its turn, raises its own questions. Essentially, they are two: Did he? Should they?

The answer to both questions is a plain No.

First, let us briefly examine “The Five Questions Roberts Couldn’t Answer.” (We shall break them down slightly further, into seven categories, for ease of treatment.)

1a. Why is there such diversity in the Amerindian languages if the American Indians were all descendants of Lehi?

This question misses the mark entirely, for the Book of Mormon nowhere claims that “the American Indians were all descendants of Lehi.” Never. And, in fact, the best contemporary Latter-day Saint scholarship on the Book of Mormon argues that the Jaredites and the people of Lehi were not alone in the Americas.\textsuperscript{4}

Furthermore, it might be noted that the remarkable linguistic complexity of the pre-Columbian New World is rather difficult to explain on the basis of any unitary theory of Indian origins, including the one that has them all coming across a Siberian land bridge. As one recent discussion of the subject observes, “Of the world’s approximately 3000 languages, that is tongues that are mutually unintelligible, about 400 were spoken in the Western Hemisphere.” But it is not merely the number of languages that impresses; far more than that, it is their variety and distinctness:

Linguists, beginning with Major John Wesley Powell in the 19th century, have classified these languages into about 100 “families” of genetically related tongues,


similar in scope to the Indo-European family (which includes most of the languages of Europe, Persia and India). 5

In other words, there were approximately one hundred language families in pre-Columbian America that were as distinct from one another as the Indo-European family (which is made up of such varied languages as English, Sanskrit, Russian, Greek, Latin, Spanish, Norwegian, Persian, Irish Gaelic, and Hindi) is distinct from Chinese, Sumerian, and Arabic. Furthermore, even in the view of those most committed to an Asian origin for the American Indian, at best only a few languages of the New World can be even tentatively linked with Asian tongues:

With the exception of Eskimo, speakers of which are found on both sides of the Bering Straits, no native American language has been found to have positive connections with any in the Old World, although some arguments have been advanced for the affinity of Athapaskan (spoken in northwestern North America and by the Navajo and Apache of the American Southwest) and certain languages of eastern Asia.6

Thus, despite the uncontested fact that mainstream anthropological opinion overwhelmingly agrees that the ancestors of the American Indians came from Asia, even very establishment discussions of pre-Columbian linguistics acknowledge that “one cannot point out Asiatic origins for New World languages.”7

All of which goes to say that the diversity of Amerindian languages presents no greater a puzzle to believers in the Book of Mormon than it would to Mr. Spencer, were he to consider the matter carefully. (Incidentally, it is rather amusing to see fundamentalist Protestants, in their efforts to discredit the Book of Mormon, making use of anthropological theories about Ice Age Asiatic immigrants crossing a land bridge at the Bering Straits

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6 Ibid., 13, 15.
7 Ibid., 15. On the same page, the authors express their strong belief in the solely Asiatic, Mongoloid origin of the Amerindians.
twenty thousand years ago. How do they reconcile such theories with their typically literal reading of the first chapters of Genesis? Contemporary anthropology, they should note, is a sword that can cut both ways.)

1b. Why is there no indication of Hebrew in any of the Indian languages?

On the unwarranted assumption that “the American Indians were all descendants of Lehi,” this is a difficult question. Without that assumption, it poses far less of a problem.

It is not at all uncommon for a language to disappear quite completely when it is covered up by foreign invasions or colonization, or when its speakers are assimilated into another, often larger, population. Very little Etruscan, for instance, survived into Latin, and even less exists in modern Italian, Spanish, or French. Indications of the ancient pharaonic language are quite rare in Egyptian Arabic. No Sumerian lives on in the Arabic dialects of Iraq. American English preserves only a few American Indian terms. English has virtually eliminated Irish Gaelic. The Greek of such great Hellenistic cities as Antioch and Alexandria is irretrievably gone. These examples could be multiplied indefinitely. Few things are better attested in human history than the death of languages.

But the question, as stated, appears to rest on a debatable presupposition in any case. It is not universally conceded that “there is no indication of Hebrew in any of the Indian languages.” One recent study presents 108 equivalences between Semitic languages (particularly Hebrew), and the languages of the Uto-Aztecan family (which include such tongues as Paiute and Shoshone, Hopi, and the language of the Aztecs, Nahuatl). The similarities do not demonstrate that the Uto-Aztecan languages descend from Hebrew alone, but they certainly hint, if they are genuine, that Hebrew may have been among the ancestors of those languages. Given that the Book of Mormon does not require all

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American Indians and their languages to descend only from Hebrew stock, such a conclusion, if accurate, is entirely consistent with Latter-day Saint belief.

2. The horse is mentioned in the Book of Mormon as existing among the Nephites of America, but the horse did not exist in the pre-Columbian New World.

Even if one assumes that the true horse (*Equus* *equus*) was absent from the Americas during Book of Mormon times, it remains possible that the term *horse* in the Book of Mormon—which, by the way, does not occur very often, and even then in rather puzzling contexts—refers simply to deer or tapirs or similar quadrupeds thought by the Nephites to be analogous to the horse. (It should be noted, incidentally, that no Book of Mormon text speaks of people *riding* their "horses.") Both Mayan and Aztec texts, for instance, appear to refer to Spanish horses as "deer" and to their riders as "deer-riders." But there is archaeological reason to believe that horses may, in fact, have existed in the Americas during Book of Mormon times. The question remains very much open.9

3a. Nephi is said to have had a "bow of steel." But the Jews did not know steel in Nephi's time.

We understand much less than might be guessed about references to "steel" in the ancient Old World, to say nothing of the far less well-known New World. The terminological difficulties are considerable. Nevertheless, recent evidence appears to "show that

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steel was indeed well known in the ancient Near East to such an extent that the 'Iron Age' may be considered a misnomer: it was really a Steel Age." So Mr. Spencer's confidence about the limits of ancient metallurgical knowledge seems highly exaggerated.

Military historian William J. Hamblin's discussion of Nephi's "steel bow" has been widely available since 1990 and was circulated in various forms even earlier. A specialist on the Near East, Hamblin suggests that the "steel bow" fits rather well into the ancient world of Nephi and his contemporaries. "I have found weapons and armor in the Book of Mormon to be consistent," he writes, "with patterns in the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica." 3b. There was no iron smelted in the Americas until after the Spanish conquest.

The verb to smelt does not occur in the Book of Mormon, in any of its forms, so it is not entirely clear what we are to conclude from this "question." Only once, in early Jaredite history, do we seem to find a reference to the process (Ether 7:9). Iron was, evidently, relatively rare in the ancient New World, as the Book of Mormon itself attests. But iron of one origin or another was indisputably present and used in pre-Columbian America, and the question of whether or not iron was ever smelted in Mesoamerica is by no means closed. Several tons (tons!) of worked iron ores


13 See Welch, Reexploring the Book of Mormon, 133–4, and Welch, "Finding Answers," 10.

14 Consult Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 284–6. That iron ores were available in the Olmec region is explained in Michael D. Coe and
were very recently found at the Olmec site of San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán, in southern Mexico.\textsuperscript{15}

Amusingly, one piece of carefully fashioned iron ore recovered from ancient Mesoamerica appears to function as a compass needle, from what Professors Michael D. Coe and Richard A. Diehl identify as perhaps the “world’s first compass.”\textsuperscript{16} I call this discovery amusing because critics of the Book of Mormon have misguidedly mocked Lehi’s Liahona for many decades, on the unexamined assumption that compasses originated in China and only emerged from that ancient nation during the period of the European Middle Ages. (Latayne Colvett Scott’s \textit{The Mormon Mirage} will serve to illustrate the argument, with her complacent allusion to “the fact that compasses weren’t used in the western world until the twelfth century A.D. according to history.

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\textsuperscript{16} Professor Ann Cyphers Guillén, of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, shared information on the San Lorenzo find during an October 1996 visit to Brigham Young University. Her site report is forthcoming, but preliminary information on the discovery is available in her article on “San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán,” in \textit{Los olmecas en Mesoamérica}, ed. John E. Clark (Mexico City: El Equilibrista, 1994), 43–67 (see especially fig. 4.26, on p. 63). I am grateful to Dr. William J. Hamblin for initially bringing Professor Cyphers Guillén’s work to my attention.

Coe and Diehl, \textit{In the Land of the Olmec}, 245, 394.
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books.") But the apparent Olmec compass needle, like the Olmecs themselves, dates to a period several centuries before Christ.

Furthermore, recent evidence suggests, contrary to conventional theories that denied the use of metals in Mesoamerica before A.D. 900, that metals may have been known in Mexico and Guatemala at least as early as 1000 B.C. The notion that “New World archaeology reveals a complete absence of metals,” and that “no iron . . . [has] ever been recovered from pre-Columbian archaeological sites” appears to be nothing more than an element of anti-Mormon mythology.

4. The Book of Mormon mentions “cimeters” (scimitars). But scimitars are unknown until the rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D.

This is simply untrue. “There can be no question,” says Assyriologist Paul Y. Hoskisson, “that scimitars, or sickle swords, were known in the ancient Near East during the Late Bronze Period, that is, about six hundred years prior to Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem.”

17 Latayne C. Scott, The Mormon Mirage (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 65. Of course, it isn’t entirely clear that the Liahona was a compass at all, in the usual understanding of the term. For it worked according to the faith, diligence, and obedience of those to whom it was given (1 Nephi 16:28–9; Mosiah 1:16; Alma 37:40); it ceased to function when they were unrighteous (1 Nephi 18:12–3; Alma 37:41–2); and it resumed functioning when they repented (1 Nephi 18:21). I am grateful that my Boy Scout compass didn’t behave that way. (Otherwise, our troop would certainly have perished miserably in the wilderness.)


19 The quoted phrases are from Peter Bartley, Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult (Dublin, Ireland: Veritas, 1989), 49–50. Compare White, Letters to a Mormon Elder, 139. Former British prime minister Harold Macmillan is said to have remarked that, in a lifetime of politics, he had never found criticism to be inhibited by ignorance.

20 Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Scimitars, Cimeters! We Have Scimitars! Do We Need Another Cimeter?” in Warfare in the Book of Mormon, ed. Ricks and Hamblin, 352–9. See also William J. Hamblin and A. Brent Merrill, “Swords in the Book of Mormon” and “Notes on the Cimeter (Scimitar) in the Book of
5. The Book of Mormon says that the Nephites had silk. However, silk did not exist in pre-Columbian America.

If, by "silk," we are required to understand only the fiber spun into a cocoon by the Asian moth *Bombyx mori*, there may well have been none in the Nephite New World. However, many cloths are known to have existed in the Americas, deriving from both plant and animal sources, that are virtually indistinguishable from silk proper. (Furthermore, few Americans—emphatically including the uneducated frontier farm boy Joseph Smith—would have had even the slightest clue as to their precise actual names. "Silk" would be about as close as they could come.) As one account of the question summarizes the available data, "Mesoamerica ... exhibits almost an embarrassment of riches for the 'silk'... of Alma 1:29. All but the most trivializing critics should be satisfied with the parallels."21

B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon

Mr. Spencer informs his readers that B. H. Roberts "eventually concluded that Joseph Smith ... produced [the Book of Mormon] ... by drawing upon his own natural talent and materials like Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*." Really? We shall discuss Elder Roberts's opinion of the origins of the Book of Mormon in a moment, but it is important to say that the link between that book and *View of the Hebrews* is, at best, weak. There are many, many differences between the Book of Mormon and Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*—one widely available essay comments upon 84 striking and fundamental disagreements

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21 Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 164. Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* correctly notes that the original Arabic term *silk* properly signifies *any* thread, coming, as it does, from the verb *salaka* ("to enter," "to insert," "to pass [a thread through something]"). Reinhart Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1968), 1:676–7, gives as one of the meanings of *silk* the French word *tissu* ("tissue," "textile," "fabric").
between the two texts—and the similarities are vague and unimpressive.22

Clearly, B. H. Roberts should not have fallen into serious doubt over five questions such as these. They do not constitute serious objections to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Nor does Ethan Smith’s View of the Hebrews represent a plausible source from which Joseph Smith could have stolen the book. The question remains, however. Did B. H. Roberts, relying on the inadequate knowledge of the “experts” of his day, lose his faith?

Mr. Spencer writes, throughout his brochure, as if B. H. Roberts’s loss of trust in the Book of Mormon after the early 1920s were an unambiguous, established fact. He mentions, without qualification, Roberts’s supposedly “waning confidence in the Book of Mormon.” “Roberts eventually concluded,” says Mr. Spencer, “that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon himself . . . that the Book of Mormon was not of divine origin . . . [but] of obvious human origin.” He “had to admit the evidence proved Joseph Smith was a plagiarist.” Roberts, says Mr. Spencer, “now knew [the Book of Mormon] was a fraud.” It should be noted, though, that, in each and every case, these words are Mr. Spencer’s, and not Elder Roberts’s. This is very important. If Elder Roberts had explicitly declared his supposed loss of belief, Mr. Spencer would eagerly have included so damning a statement. He did not, because no such statement exists.

22 Welch, Reexploring the Book of Mormon, 83-7, and n.a., A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 69-71, offer good, brief surveys of the question. For more detailed treatments, see John W. Welch, “An Unparallel” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985), which is the essay listing the 84 differences, and Welch, “Finding Answers,” as well as Spencer J. Palmer and William L. Knecht, “View of the Hebrews: Substitute for Inspiration?” BYU Studies 5/2 (1964): 105-13. Latter-day Saint scholars are so unconcerned about its supposed parallels to the Book of Mormon that Brigham Young University has recently published Ethan Smith’s work, thus making it available to what is almost certainly (by far) the widest audience it has ever enjoyed. See Ethan Smith, View of the Hebrews, ed. Charles D. Tate Jr., 1825 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996). Professor Tate’s useful “Introduction” to the volume discusses the history of attempts to link the Book of Mormon with Ethan Smith. See also Andrew H. Hedges’s review of the book in this issue, pages 63-8.
Mr. Spencer offers no hint that anybody holds a contrary opinion. The implication is that all who know the facts agree that B. H. Roberts ended his life denying the historical existence of Lehi and Lehi’s descendants. But, in fact, a number of highly informed people do hold contrary opinions. Even the editor of Elder Roberts’s controversial studies of the Book of Mormon—which Elder Roberts himself never published, and never intended to publish—admits that the evidence for B. H. Roberts’s alleged loss of faith is, at most, “mixed.”

But even so weak a declaration may be mere wishful thinking on the part of those who would like B. H. Roberts to have denied Mormonism. In fact, the evidence seems overwhelming that he did not lose his faith. And this evidence is fortified by the fact that Elder Roberts was a man well-known for his willingness to speak his mind openly and frankly. “He was,” as Professor Davis Bitton has observed of him,

...a fighter. ... Shaped by a life of challenges that developed his toughness, Roberts moved through a series of controversies. His life can be fruitfully considered as a series of confrontations: in the mission field he faced not merely verbal denunciation but the murder of fellow missionaries; he opposed female suffrage at the Utah Constitutional Convention in 1895; he spoke out for his political convictions, often at variance with other Church leaders; he precipitated the “political manifesto” by which General Authorities were required to

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24 This is the word used by Brigham D. Madsen in his “Introduction” to B. H. Roberts, Studies of the Book of Mormon, ed. Brigham D. Madsen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 29. (Professor Madsen’s volume is the chief source used by Mr. Spencer in his brochure.) Even D. Michael Quinn, who can scarcely be dismissed as an apologist for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its leaders, appears to doubt that the evidence indicates a loss of faith on the part of Elder Roberts. See D. Michael Quinn, The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, in association with Smith Research Associates, 1997), 688. See, too, the discussion of this issue by Matthew Roper on pages 98–110 of the present Review.
receive permission from the First Presidency before running for political office; he won an election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1898 and then fought unsuccessfully to retain his seat; he defended the role and authority of the Seventy within the councils of Church governance. In addition, he frequently jumped into the theological fray, defending "the faith and the saints" against outside critics.25

He can hardly be described as shy in expressing his opinions, however much those opinions might jar or irritate those around him. It was, for instance, largely Elder Roberts's stubborn refusal to alter certain assertions in what he himself thought to be his magnum opus, The Truth, the Way, the Life, despite requests from leaders of the church to do so, that blocked its publication during his lifetime.26 The book was not published, in fact, until more than six decades after his death.

It is decisively significant, therefore, that this frank and plain-spoken man continued to testify to the truth of the Book of Mormon right up to his death in 1933. Roberts was called to be a mission president in April 1922, for instance, after he had done substantially all the work he would ever do on the essays that were eventually published in 1985 as Studies of the Book of Mormon—the very essays used by James Spencer to cast doubt on his testimony. Of the period of Elder Roberts's mission presidency, Professor James B. Allen notes that, "Despite the still-not-answered intellectual questions relating to its origins, he had complete faith in the Book of Mormon and used it as his most important missionary tool."27

A few of the statements that Elder Roberts made subsequent to April 1922 can profitably be cited here.28 In May 1922, he wrote...
of its “tremendous truth.” In 1924, he remarked that the Latter-day Saints build upon the Book of Mormon, “wherein is no darkness or doubt.” He spoke in April 1928 of the “glorious things that have come to the world in that book to enlighten the children of men.” On Easter Sunday of that year, he praised God for the account of the visitation of Jesus to the Nephites, which he clearly took to have been a literal, historical event:

And now, O Lord Jesus, if thou couldst but come into the consciousness of our souls this day, as thou didst come into the vision of the ancient Nephites in the Land of Bountiful, we would join their great song of praise and worship, saying—“Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!” And we, like them, would fall down at the feet of Jesus and worship him this Easter day! Amen.”

On 16 June 1928, when asked whether “common knowledge and general discussion in the time and the vicinity of Joseph Smith when the Book of Mormon was undergoing production” would have been enough to account for it, Roberts responded, “Emphatically no.”29 As James Allen points out, Elder Roberts concluded his final testimony to the world, given in his last discourse in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, by reminding his listeners that God gave to Joseph Smith “power from on high to translate the Book of Mormon, and thence followed all which brought forth the New and Last Dispensation.” He listed the translation of the Book of Mormon among the many events “and nu-

numerous revelations to the Prophet which brought forth a development of the truth, that surpasses all revealed truth of former dispensations.”

Finally, on or about 1 September 1933, just a few weeks before his death, B. H. Roberts told Jack Christensen, “Ethan Smith played no part in the formation of the Book of Mormon. You accept Joseph Smith and all the scriptures.”

Such statements have been available to both friends and enemies of the Book of Mormon for decades and should have ensured that questions about the survival of B. H. Roberts’s testimony never even arose. Oddly, these questions have been asked, and continue to be asked—especially by opponents of the church like James Spencer. Fortunately, though, the long-delayed publication in 1994 of Elder Roberts’s *The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology* has supplied a definitive answer to them. “Surely this final treatise from the prolific career of B. H. Roberts should also be the final word on his belief in the truth of this ancient volume of scripture known as the Book of Mormon.”

When Roberts’s term as a mission president came to a close in 1927, he took a period of study leave, during which he first intended to gather evidences relating to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. But eventually he came to work on *The Truth, the Way, the Life (TWL)*, instead. “TWL,” observes Professor Allen, “was Roberts’s ultimate statement of his own beliefs.” Accordingly, because this final work dates to the period following B. H. Roberts’s intensive study of the Book of Mormon, which was supposedly lethal to his faith, “readers can now determine that Roberts did not waver in his belief because of that study.”

“Despite whatever questions he may have considered,” James

31 Madsen and Welch, “Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith,” 27, from an interview between Truman G. Madsen and Jack Christensen.
32 John W. Welch, “Introduction,” to *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, xxvii.
33 Allen, “The Story of *The Truth, the Way, the Life*,” clxix (691).
34 Ibid., clxv (687).
35 Welch, “Introduction,” to *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, xxvi.
Allen points out, "he retained his faith in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and he let it guide much of what he said in TWL, which he completed after those three manuscripts." 36 "TWL pointedly asserts the antiquity of the Book of Mormon." 37

For example, Elder Roberts used the appearance of the resurrected Christ to the Nephites as one of his key evidences for the Savior’s resurrection, which would scarcely make any sense if he regarded that appearance as a piece of American frontier fiction. 38 Likewise, Roberts’s final work identifies the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi as having lived a number of centuries before Christ. 39 Summarizing the situation, Professor John W. Welch, the editor of The Truth, the Way, the Life, observes that "TWL contains several statements that necessarily assume the antiquity and literal truthfulness of this ancient American scripture. For example, Roberts speaks literally of the words that the resurrected Jesus spoke ‘to the assembled Nephites to whom he appeared on the Western Continent.’" 40 Roberts repeatedly and unmistakably refers to the Book of Mormon as an “ancient” volume of American scripture 41 or as a volume that “contains the revelations of God to the ancient inhabitants of America.” 42 He describes one of the prophecies recounted in the book of Mosiah as “one written near the close of the second century B.C.” 43 Having listed the four standard works of the church, expressly including the Book of Mormon, Elder Roberts declares that “these scriptures are all of equal authority, all of them dependable sources of knowledge.” 44

Surely Professor Welch is correct when he declares that “these unequivocal statements will disappoint anyone who has imagined Roberts as a closet doubter or late-in-life skeptic.” 45 "In TWL,

36 Allen, “The Story of The Truth, the Way, the Life,” clxv (687).
37 Welch, “Introduction,” to The Truth, the Way, the Life, xxvi.
38 Roberts, The Truth, the Way, the Life, 395.
39 Ibid., 401.
40 Welch, “Introduction” to The Truth, the Way, the Life, xxvii.
41 Roberts, The Truth, the Way, the Life, 152, 259, 263, 427, 445; cf. 21.
42 Ibid., 275; cf. 21, 259, 263, 427, 445, 470.
43 Ibid., 401.
44 Ibid., 276.
45 Welch, “Introduction,” to The Truth, the Way, the Life, xxvi; cf. xxvii.
Roberts goes out of his way to identify the Book of Mormon as an ancient record written by prophets who lived long ago. He repeatedly reaffirms its divine origin and antiquity."\(^{46}\) Consider too, for example, Elder Roberts's description of an angelic revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith: "Three years after this first revelation an angel of God named Moroni was sent to the prophet to reveal the existence of an ancient volume of scripture known as the Book of Mormon, a book which gives an account of the hand-dealings of God with the people whom he brought to the continents of America from what we now call the 'Old World.'"\(^{47}\) Can there really be any doubt that B. H. Roberts regarded Moroni and the Nephites as literally historical personalities?

Such sentiments do not seem, even remotely, to imply any loss of faith in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, B. H. Roberts may have foreseen that some, willfully or otherwise, might misunderstand his studies of the Book of Mormon. "Let me say once and for all," he wrote in a letter relating to those studies, "so as to avoid what might otherwise call for repeated explanation, that what is herein set forth does not represent any conclusions of mine."\(^{48}\) He took the position, he said, that "our faith is not only unshaken but unshakable in the Book of Mormon."\(^{49}\) Speaking in October of 1929, he apparently sought to correct such mistaken notions as those now advanced by Mr. Spencer. He asserted his belief in Mormonism, and then concluded, "I hope that if anywhere along the line I have caused any of you to doubt my faith in this work, then let this testimony and my indicated life's work be a correction of it."\(^{50}\)

The conclusions to be drawn from our brief survey of the questions raised by Mr. Spencer's brochure are plain: B. H. Roberts should not have lost his faith in the Book of Mormon over the issues Mr. Spencer cites. What is more, he did not. Nor

\(^{46}\) Ibid., xxvi.

\(^{47}\) Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, 469.


\(^{50}\) Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 90.
has Mr. Spencer given contemporary Latter-day Saints any reason to abandon theirs. This tired issue, so often raised and so often settled, should now finally be put to rest.