



The Lost Book of Mormon: A Journey Through the Mythic Lands of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Kansas City, Missouri

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A witty and probing travelogue through the landscapes associated with the *Book of Mormon*, one the most enduring and influential works of American literature.

Is the *Book of Mormon* the Great American Novel? Decades before Ishmael's ship embarked on its search for Moby Dick, before Huck Finn set out on his adventures along the Mississippi, a farm hand and child seer named Joseph Smith unearthed a long-buried book from a haunted hill in western New York State, a discovery that radically transformed his life and that marked the ambitious start of the American literary project. Using his prophetic gift, Joseph translated the mysterious book—which told of an epic hidden history of ancient America, a story about a family that fled biblical Jerusalem and took a boat to the New World—and published it under the title *The Book of Mormon*. The book caused an immediate sensation, sparking anger and violence, boycotts and jealousy, curiosity and wonder, and launched Joseph on a wild, decades-long adventure across the American West.

Today, the *Book of Mormon*, one of the most widely circulating works of American literature, continues to cause controversy—which is why most of us know very little about the story it tells.

Avi Steinberg wants to change that. A fascinated nonbeliever, Steinberg spent a year and a half on a personal quest, traveling the path laid out by Joseph's epic. From Jerusalem, where the *Book of Mormon* opens with a bloody murder, to the ruined Maya cities of Central America—the setting for most of the Book of Mormon's ancient story—where Steinberg gallivanted with a boisterous bus tour of believers exploring Maya archaeological sites for evidence. From there, to upstate New York, where he participated in the true Book of Mormon musical, the annual Hill Cumorah Pageant, an elaborate dramatization of the saga staged directly on the hill where Joseph unearthed the book; and finally to the center of the American continent, Jackson County, Missouri, the spot Joseph identified as none other than the site of the Garden of Eden.

Threaded through this quirky travelogue is an argument for taking the *Book of Mormon* seriously as a work of American imagination, as a story about *us*. And also an answer to the question: Why are we so afraid of the *Book of Mormon*? Literate and funny, personal and provocative, the genre-bending *Lost Book of Mormon* boldly explores our deeply human impulse to write bibles and discovers the abiding power of story.

The Lost Book of Mormon: A Journey Through the Mythic Lands of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Kansas City, Missouri Details

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From Reader Review The Lost Book of Mormon: A Journey Through the Mythic Lands of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Kansas City, Missouri for online ebook

Jenn says

This definitely deserves a longer review later - I found the story interesting and very respectful from a non-Mormon; but the author's intense self-conscious writery-ness was off-putting.

Ang says

First - this book is barely classifiable. It is a travelogue, exploration of the BOM as a sequel, a memoir, a psychological exploration of writing in general, a religious book, an outline of the BOM, and anthropological study. So... if any of that appeals to you, read the book. If not, put it down.

Avi Steinberg is not a Mormon, as such you may expect him to make fun of Mormons and generally discredit the whole shebang. Which he does ..NOT! I felt that he genuinely suspended his disbelief and approached the subject as an author and as a missionary - albeit with a very different idea of a mission than a Mormon. His portraits of the Mormon's he encounters paint them as generous, understanding and generally likable. This has been my general experience with people of the Mormon faith as well. However, if you are a devout believer this, or any other book that is not produced from the position of a believer, will probably leave you cold. So - leave it then. Personally, I liked it.

The book for me was enjoyable, but I like all of the categories listed above. The memior category is a bit difficult for me as at times most memoriests, Avi included, sometimes get a bit off the track and into their thier own psyches.

I enjoyed the parts of the book that dealt with the actual content of the BOM and Avi's retracing of the "historical" (fictional?) places and anthropology behind the BOM. I have never read the BOM, however, after this book I have a fairly good sense of the story, characters and the locations. I've picked up the BOM a few times, only to put it down as a poorly written version of the Bible (Hebrew and New Testaments both). So - thanks to Avi I feel like I finally know what is in the darn thing.

Kim Berkey says

I really wanted to dislike this book, but the story ended up being simply too much fun.

The book was more thoughtful than the cover art had led me to believe (though it certainly contained ample humor, usually achieved through its caricatures of the many oddball Mormons whom Steinberg encounters). Steinberg's Jewish upbringing makes him a perfect guide to the Book of Mormon. He is able to litter his book with references to the anxieties of biblical authors that in so many ways parallel the anxieties of their Book of Mormon counterparts.

In many ways, Steinberg channels Fawn Brodie's approach to the Book of Mormon, viewing it as an elaborate allegorical clue to Joseph Smith's psyche. It was in these sections (particularly in the last chapter) that most of my frustrations arose. But it also seems to me that Steinberg gets something unquestionably *right* about the Book of Mormon--he recognizes its own obsession with writing and how that creative task exposes authorial anxieties. The first half of his novel reflects his own journey as a writer, mapping his personal creative life onto the Book of Mormon's story arc, and in so doing makes a kind of *typological* move. Although done in an unquestionably secular way, Steinberg thus picks up on one of the most vital aspects of the Book of Mormon--it wants to be read typologically.

All told, I found the first half of the book to be much stronger than its second half, and although I have quibbles with certain elements of Steinberg's approach, I can't fault him for them--he is, after all, an outsider. That said, in some ways he manages to read the Book of Mormon exactly as it ought to be read. This book is a great look at how we might approach the Book of Mormon as literature in the age of a very particular sort of journalistic novel. Interesting and fun.

Ira says

The Lost Book of Mormon was an intensely thoughtful, introspective, well written travelogue/meditation on Joseph Smith's book as one or all of: the sequel to the Bible, the Great American Novel (TM), an American gothic, and/or the most audacious first novel written by an American author.

I am not a Mormon and only have limited information on the real Book and the history of Joseph Smith, but I was fascinated by the premise of Smith as first time author and the (self-deprecating) comparisons between Steinberg and his subject. Like The Book of Mormon (or Kevin Smith's Dogma for the Catholic crowd), Steinberg's book is witty, humorous and irreverent, but I felt that his book was a deeper literary analysis of and even more respectful of the religion itself than the foregoing media representatives.

While the history, the religious comparisons and the literary criticism was interesting, what ultimately kept me riveted was both how deeply heartfelt and personal Steinberg made this book as well as his incredibly entertaining phrasing, perspective and overall voice.

This is not normally a genre that I read, but when I read something this thought provoking and well written, I will read anything. However, I recognize that the genre or the subject matter may not make this book for everyone.

If you are looking for a comparison, I think the musical is an inapt one. Rather, I'd compare this book and Steinberg himself to Chuck Klosterman, if Klosterman was previously ultra religious, was now secular and chose to write about modern religion and literature.

Nathaniel Kidd says

I read this book in the summer of 2015, and it was probably my favorite book of the season. Notwithstanding a few critiques I have of the style and shape of the book, I can hardly recommend it highly enough.

I am grateful to Avi Steinberg for having written a book about Mormonism that -- for accomplishing what a

book I would have written about Mormonism would have aimed to do -- frees me from any sense of having to write such a book. Of course, he says it all out of his own voice and his own experience -- which is obviously different than my own, and significantly more sarcastic -- but content-wise, a very helpful contribution, by my evaluation.

Steinberg approaches the Book of Mormon as a cross between a sequel to the Bible -- in the vein of all the delightful extrabiblical literature (fanfiction) that has been produced over the centuries -- and the Great American Novel. Accordingly, as his memoirs recount an imaginative romp through the lands of the Book of Mormon, he explores the nature of fiction, faith, religion, and the spirit of America along the way. His tone may not appeal to all, but struck me as an attractive balance of delight in the text and textuality, and satirical incredulity. Such features not only make Steinberg's book worthy of consideration: they help clarify why and how the Book of Mormon is worthy of consideration as a cultural phenomenon and artifact in the complex, religiously plural milieu of American life.

Bob says

This is the FRESHEST book on the magical, mystical, mysterious origin and publication of The Book of Mormon since Fawn Brodie's 1945 psycho-biography, "No Man Knows My History: A Life of Joseph Smith." Just as Brodie focused attention not on the content of the book--but on its historical era and on the personality of its author--Steinberg recognizes Joseph Smith as a fellow aspiring author with a boundless imagination.

Born in Jerusalem and raised in Cleveland, Steinberg says The Book of Mormon should be respected as part of the American Canon of Great Books.

Supposedly "discovered" by Joseph Smith and engraved on golden plates, Steinberg says The Book of Mormon can be read as a story of American assimilation: "It sounded like the backstory to every Jewish American novel of the twentieth century."

Whether you're a Believer, a Backslider, or Couldn't Care Less, this book succeeds in showing what it's really like to live among Mormons. As a fellow aspiring Author and resident--for 30 freaking Years!--of the State of Deseret/aka Utah, I salute Steinberg's accomplishment. Without resorting to caricature, he has created an instant classic of Mormonism in practice.

For more info, here's a link to my work-in-progress, "Sidetracked: My 30-Year Ordeal Behind the Zion Curtain:

<https://bobsaw.wordpress.com/2014/11/...>

Yeshua says

An irreverent travelogue, searching for the lands of the "book of Mormon.

One Mans' search for the "Book of Mormon" as "American Literature", ends up being, a humorous look@ the "Book of Mormon" pageant (and unfortunately) the arguments of Mormon detractors.

Becky Roper says

An entertaining but self indulgent somewhat arrogant writer looks at the Book of Mormon as American literature and travels the route taken in the actual text and in Joseph Smith's life. He spends about half the book in Jerusalem, possible because he is himself a Jew, and gives very short attention to much of the American cities involved. I mostly felt disrespected as a Mormon and Christian. The "comic book" style of the cover should have been a warning.

Biblio Files (takingadayoff) says

I'm not sure what just happened here. I read this book, The Lost Book of Mormon, because I read Avi Steinberg's previous book, Running the Books, and liked it. That was about Steinberg's experiences as a prison librarian, a job he fell into after college. The Lost Book of Mormon, is not a book I would otherwise have considered reading, as I'm not really interested in the subject, which is The Book of Mormon.

Steinberg, who spent part of his youth in an Orthodox Jewish seminary, does not appear to be considering converting to Mormonism. He is just fascinated by the storytelling of the book written by Joseph Smith in the mid 19th century. Smith, as Steinberg tells it, was quite the con man and hustler, trying a variety of money-making schemes throughout his life. And he was a heck of a yarn spinner as well, spending years writing the Book of Mormon and traveling to Jerusalem, Guatemala, and Missouri on the way.

Steinberg travels in Smith's footsteps in order to...I don't know. It's entertaining, hearing about the Australian and American extended families he accompanies on a bus tour of the Mayan towns that Smith tells of in his book. There are amusing episodes in Jerusalem and in Missouri as Steinberg participates in historic re-enactments. But the whole thing is heavy with Steinberg's underlying gloom. He mentions in passing that his new marriage seems doomed. Is this whole escapade a midlife crisis?

Even if it is, you could still enjoy the story for its entertainment and informational value, but every so often it takes a weird turn that left me uneasy. The final example of that weirdness is when Steinberg meets a teenage aspiring writer at a book signing of Steinberg's previous book. Steinberg befriends the young man and they hang out together for a few days, smoking dope, going to a rave, getting naked. It has nothing to do with Steinberg's The Book of Mormon quest, and seems an odd way to end the book. Really odd.

Steinberg has a way with words and can tell a good story but I can't imagine who I would recommend this book to.

Elif says

Anyone who is using my name to give one-star ratings to books I love: you are breaking the law, as well as acting completely against the spirit of Goodreads. You should be ashamed of yourself. I have notified Goodreads as well as an old college friend who happens to be a particularly aggressive criminal prosecutor. Good luck.

This book is hilarious and moving. In my opinion, it will be beloved by anyone who is a Melville fan or cares about the Great American Novel. I am a professional writer.

Bluerose's Heart says

I thought this book would be a great way to understand WHY Mormons believe what they do, because I'm genuinely curious, though I don't believe myself at all. There is some factual stuff in here, though I truly don't know how accurate it is. It's pretty much just making fun of Mormons, though(AND Christians). It makes me uncomfortable to read about someone making a joke out of my Savior, Jesus. It's a great deal of the author rambling about various things connected to The Book of Mormon(sometimes VERY mildly connected!)

I tried to keep an open mind. I really did. I'm setting this one aside, though.

Content: I stopped about a third of the way through. There were 2 F-bombs used within quotes. (I won't be reading anything by James Frey, by the way!) There was more mild profanity, too.

Avi Steinberg says

AMAZING book! Best book I've written since the last book I wrote.

Jesse says

An oddball of a book--not so much about the Book of Mormon as about the imaginative faculties required to create the Book of Mormon, in whatever sense you want to understand the verb "create." Plus a lot of exploration of just how strange the book's story is--I had somehow missed the part before this where the good guys flee Jerusalem and end up in Guatemala, allegedly right around the time all these Mesoamerican tribes we study are getting their civilizations started. Steinberg is unabashedly self-indulgent here as a writer (there's way more about him, his failed romantic life, his ex-Orthodox life, his impressions of others on the Mormon-memorial trail), but he's also wonderfully funny and turns quite a bit more than a few good sentences. And the section where he masquerades as someone else during the recreation pageant, though it seems a little worked-up so it can be in the book, is hilarious and yet poignant.

Ms. Reader says

I received this book from Goodreads First Reads in exchange for a honest review. An VERY honest review this book shall get!

I'm not Mormon, but I'm Christian and do believe in God. When I first read this book, I was slightly curious to see what it was all about. My first impression upon receiving it in the mail, I thought it was ABOUT and SUPPORTING the Mormon culture. Whether that was the author's intention or not, I felt like all the author did was mock, make fun of, and insult Mormons and even subtly(???) hinted the same behavior towards

Christianity.

The book was wrong. Very wrong. Historically and factually speaking, making it irritating and annoying to read since the author was writing way off the radar. A lot of it felt like an endless, pointless rant of boredom and stupidity. I don't even know how I managed to get through reading it all, but I at least wanted to finish it so that I could honestly give it "one star". Needless the say, this book failed to impress miserably. The only "happy" part that came from this book was the relief to finally throw it away when I was done.

I don't recommend reading it!

Rod says

What a fun crazy journey - But i'm still sticking this book in my Religious-Crap-Section. Sorry Avi.

What a great idea for a book:

Retrace the accounts written about in the Book Of Mormon. From Jerusalem in 580 B.C.? To Meso-America "Gautamala"?? Then way up to Rochester New York??? Then wait a few thousands years... For Joseph Smith to dig up some FOOLS gold in the 1820's. Then wander with the Mormon's towards Salt Lake City. Not exactly a noble quest - more of a fools errand, and that's where Avi Steinberg comes in. (I was hoping he would vacation in the Salt Lake Temple: but no invitations were given by the current prophet.)

Although millions have done this journey for the Bible already - Their stories needed Avi's humor and fellow journeyers. I was just listening today to a ministry that promises a joyous romp through Jerusalem and Rome to follow in the steps of the New Testament. I hate walking and travelling - so that's a big NO for now.

The best thing in this whole book is the Mormon Map in the front: Naked mermaids, A penguin standing on the Hill Cumorah (in Meso-America), A much needed labelling stating "Here Be Dragons", and Darth Vader's Tie Fighter Chasing Luke Skywalker's X-Wing. That is really the heart of this book - and why I enjoyed it. (anybody seriously know how to spell TIE FIGHTER properly? Is that correct? Is it bad that I care?)

Avi manages to get every necessary jab at the ludicrousness of Mormonism. From endless polygamy to war horses and con artists. I was worried maybe he would befriend a Mormon or 2,000 and twist the truth to make them look like??? Ummmh... people who get their religion from heavy gold tablets with very poorly abused Egyptian hieroglyphics that rot in long lost hills for centuries and cause people to wear magic underwear and get their religion translated from a Magicians Hat. I couldn't make up a better story if I tried. And that is really the brilliance of Avi's book: That Joseph Smith wrote a very imaginative heroic American literary Harry Potter like tale (but then he swore it was fully endorsed by the Jesus of the Bible - that bit is just blasphemous.) Reminds me of Dan Brown's The Da Vinci Code, A novel that later got promoted as truth - every NON-scholar for a generation gobbled it up as divine. Apparently they've all moved on to Fifty Shades of Mommy Porn - so Christianity is once again safe. Relatively speaking of course.

A wise "funny" old saying: Questionably wise anyway.
"Never let the truth get in the way of a good story."

To get all the serious theological issues out of the way: Is the Book of Mormon a con-job by J. Smith? Or a Demon inspired blasphemous distraction of truth? (That gets my Vegas bet.)

Or just a poorly written American Tale, like an early steam punk hack at the Bible? (Avi might have \$2 on this one.)

Personally, I've read the Bible many times (love it, talking donkeys and floating Zoo's), and i've attempted to finish trudging through the sewer of literature that is the Book of Mormon...no, IT HASN'T COME TO PASS YET! Apparently the Mormon's have been desperately attempting to turn the B.o.M. into a motion picture success - It worked for Harry Potter and a bunch of Vampire/Werewolf love triangles. I would be much obliged if somebody could sum up the B.o.M. in a feisty 3 hour movie. (maybe for those endless credits at the end they could just post ALL of the "And it came to pass" moments, for the dedicated few to sit through.)

I loved Avi's very dynamic descriptions of the Mormons he came across in his journey's, especially his mates in the Mormon production in New York... Greg who may have been the Greatest King Noah in the history of Mormon Theater. And Uncle Hugh in Meso-America - who may have taken up eternal residence in the original Hill Cumorah.

I must say:

This is the best way to truly learn about any religion. A belief system with no comedy is bound to end up more Nazi than Nazareth. If God can't laugh once and awhile - He would be a very depressing deity who I wouldn't want to spend an eternity with.

Thankfully this book has not caused Avi or I to become Mormons. I still appreciate the Bible more than ever. And I recommend Avi now do an Islamic Journey about the mythical/historical bits of the Quran and Muhammad - but it's a known fact: Muslims don't appreciate humor around their religion, and you would be put to death for that map bit in the front of your book.

Thankfully us Fundamental Bible loving Christians generally have a great sense of humor. (we have flaming flying chariots but no naked mermaids that we know of.)
