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A New Look at the Miracles of the Resurrection and the Book of Mormon

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A NEW LOOK AT THE MIRACLES OF THE RESURRECTION AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

Spencer Kraus

Review of Joshua Gehly, *Witnessing Miracles: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection and the Book of Mormon* (Monongahela, PA: The Church of Jesus Christ, 2022). 172 pages. \$14.95 (paperback).

Abstract: *Joshua Gehly, an ordained Evangelist of the Church of Jesus Christ, offers a compelling case for the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Gehly uses the historical methods used by William Lane Craig, Gary Habermas, and Michael Licona to demonstrate the historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and applies them to the Book of Mormon, concluding there to be greater evidence for the Book of Mormon using these methods than the Resurrection. He likewise concludes that the Book of Mormon serves to strengthen the reality of the Resurrection, bearing testimony of a historical people's interactions with a historical and risen Jesus. While Gehly comes from a faith tradition outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, his is a tradition that believes the Book of Mormon to be the word of God, and he shows his deep appreciation and love for both Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon throughout this book. Ultimately, it is a book that I can recommend to those interested in the line of historical analysis presented by many Christian apologists and the Book of Mormon.*

As Joseph Smith taught, “The fundamental principles of our religion [are] the testimony of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ, ‘that he died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended up into heaven’; and all other things are only appendages to these, which pertain to our religion.”¹ The Atonement, Crucifixion, and

1. “Questions and Answers, 8 May 1838,” p. 44, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/questions-and-answers-8-may-1838/3>.

Resurrection of Jesus Christ have always been the foundation for the Church. “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14).

Latter-day Saints are blessed with an additional witness to the Atonement and Resurrection of Christ than that found in the Bible, showing that our faith is not in vain. The Book of Mormon is a foundational text for the Church and all others who believe that the Gospel has been restored after years of apostasy. The Book of Mormon is also foundational to Latter-day Saints, as Joseph Smith likewise taught, “Take away the book of Mormon, and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none.”² The Book of Mormon and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ thus offer the two foundational beliefs of the restored Church and any branch of the restoration that links itself to Joseph Smith’s prophetic career.

One such believer in the Book of Mormon, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ headquartered in Monongahela, Pennsylvania, has offered a new and useful approach to determine the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon.³ This approach is based on the historical analyses of prominent Christian apologists such as William Lane Craig, Gary Habermas, and Michael Licona regarding the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, applied in a new way (p. ii).

Joshua Gehly is an ordained Evangelist in the Church of Jesus Christ (PA). However, while Gehly is not a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, his book is written in such a way that anyone can benefit from it, regardless of church membership. This is also true regarding his citations from the Book of Mormon — the Church of Jesus Christ (PA) publishes its own edition of the Book of Mormon that follows the versification as introduced by Orson Pratt in 1879, and footnotes are provided to offer the correct verses for the RLDS editions of the Book of Mormon as well as the Restoration Edition (p. ii).⁴

2. “Minutes and Discourse, 21 April 1834,” p. 44, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourse-21-april-1834/2>.

3. To avoid confusion between this church and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I will designate the author’s church as the Church of Jesus Christ (PA) and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by its full name throughout my review.

4. While the edition of the Book of Mormon published by the Church of Jesus Christ (PA) differs slightly from the 2013 edition published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have not noticed any variances in the verses quoted throughout the book. Such variants, if any, are probably minimal.

Introducing the Book of Mormon and the historical methods he will be using in the beginning of his book, Gehly does a masterful job discussing the scholarship that has been done by Craig et al. regarding the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and is well versed in the relevant scholarship regarding this study.⁵ The following will be a brief discussion of Gehly's analysis specifically.

Three chapters deal with the eyewitness statements to the Book of Mormon, with an emphasis on the Three and Eight Witnesses (chs. 4–6; pp. 33–74). In these chapters, Gehly demonstrates how the witnesses were called to their roles, the persecution they experienced with the main body of the Church, and many of their excommunications from said Church. Throughout these chapters, Gehly shows that, much like the original witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the witnesses to the Book of Mormon were staunch defenders of what they knew to be true. Gehly does an excellent job of providing an objective overview, and any errors therein are minimal.

While Gehly accurately describes the history of the early Church, Latter-day Saints who read this book will note that, as a member of another church, Gehly describes some events through a different lens than we do. For example, he states that “Martin [Harris] fellowshipped with different churches for the rest of his life, but held firmly to his Book of Mormon testimony” (p. 70) rather than describing, as a Latter-day Saint would, Martin's return to the Church and travels to Utah.

Next, in Chapter 7, Gehly compares the empty tomb with the empty stone box that contained the Book of Mormon plates. Using the criteria established by New Testament scholars, Gehly observes that (1) the proximity of the stone box to Joseph's audience (pp. 76–81), (2) the enemies who testified of the stone box or the plates (pp. 81–90), and (3) the unlikely witnesses of the plates such as Josiah Stowell who accidentally saw a corner of the plates and testified to that effect in court⁶ (pp. 90–99) all affirm that, much like the Resurrection, some miracle had taken place. A helpful table is included that effectively summarizes his findings (p. 100).

5. For a brief overview of New Testament scholarship regarding the historicity of the Resurrection, see “Why Are the Gospel Accounts of the Resurrection Credible?” KnoWhy #665, Book of Mormon Central, April 4, 2023, <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-are-the-gospel-accounts-of-the-resurrection-credible>.

6. For Stowell's account, see “Trial Report, 28 August 1832 [State of New York v. JS–C],” p. 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/trial-report-28-august-1832-state-of-new-york-v-js-c/1>.

In the chapters that follow, Gehly makes more general observations. First, he observes how his findings can be understood through the historical methods used by New Testament scholars defending the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, demonstrating that there is just as much reason, if not more, to believe in the Book of Mormon for its added testimony of Jesus as the historical reality of the Resurrection of Jesus that may be found in the Gospels (pp. 103–22). He then discusses the doctrinal teachings of the Book of Mormon (pp. 1243–40) and internal Hebraisms in support of its authenticity (pp. 141–54).⁷

The final chapter of Gehly’s book deals with the experiential effects of the Book of Mormon. Gehly draws upon the experience of Mary Whitmer, who was shown the plates on which the Book of Mormon was inscribed by an angel (pp. 155–159). Gehly then moves on to describe modern witnesses for the truth of the Book of Mormon from his church. The witnesses and miracles cited by Gehly invite the reader to come to a deeper appreciation for the Book of Mormon and the effects of faith that it produces in honest disciples of Jesus Christ wherever they may be found (pp. 159–62).

Ultimately, *Witnessing Miracles* is a book that is well worth the time and a welcome addition to any Latter-day Saint’s bookshelf. The Book of Mormon provides some of the greatest evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it can be historically defended as a miracle that blesses millions of people today. Gehly’s book brings a new appreciation to both of these miracles of miracles.

To conclude with a quotation from the beginning of this book, Gehly aptly observed, “If the Book of Mormon is a modern miracle and inspired from heaven, then Jesus Christ is definitively alive and ascended into heaven. The truth of the Book of Mormon would overwhelmingly strengthen the veracity of New Testament proclamations. It would document a cross-continental, independent attestation of the risen Christ. The Book of Mormon ... holds the keys to the strongest evidence in support of Jesus Christ ever offered to mankind” (p. 15). Truly, the world has been blessed by this additional witness of Jesus Christ and will continue to be so blessed as faithful believers everywhere flood the earth with the Book of Mormon.

7. For another discussion on Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon, especially regarding how they are strong evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, see “Why Are There Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon?” KnoWhy #661, Book of Mormon Central, March 7, 2023, <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-are-there-hebraisms-in-the-book-of-mormon>.

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