

Preface

Sometime in 1966, a friend gave me a copy of a two-page typewritten document that upon first glance is merely a list, but I soon found it to be much more. Titled “The Challenge the Book of Mormon Makes to the World,” the document in reality is a powerful declaration of belief which outlines thirty conditions any writer would need to meet to produce a book comparable to the Book of Mormon. I was profoundly impressed with the apparent impossibility of duplicating the Prophet Joseph Smith’s accomplishment it describes.

As this declaration has circulated among Latter-day Saints and others, its authorship remained unknown for many decades. Since I was considering writing a book based on the thirty conditions, I began an informal search to find the author.

An obvious early candidate was the late BYU Professor Hugh W. Nibley, considered by many the world’s leading authority on the Book of Mormon. Nibley was known to have used a modified version of this challenge to “test” his students by inviting them to attempt to write a book like the Book of Mormon in one semester. Dr. Nibley described the outcome in every class he gave the assignment:

To date no student has carried out this assignment, which, of course, was not meant seriously. But why not? If anybody could write the Book of Mormon, as we have been so often assured, it is high time that somebody, some devoted and learned minister of the gospel, let us say, performed the invaluable public service of showing the world that it can be done.

When I called Professor Nibley and asked him if he had written the original version, he said that he had not, nor did he know who authored it.

I next called the FARMS (now the Maxwell Institute), the Missionary Department at Church headquarters, and anybody else I could think of but no one knew the answer. A secretary at the Missionary Department she said she hoped someone would “do something with [what she called] the list,” which gave me encouragement.

In time, I came upon a copy of Hugh B. Brown’s “Profile of a Prophet,” a long-remembered BYU devotional address given on October 4, 1955, about two and a half years before he was ordained an apostle. Two direct quotes from the thirty conditions appeared in that address. Then I discovered that one of my neighbors in Provo, Utah, is the daughter of one of Elder Brown’s former secretaries, Mary Lou Taylor. With this fortunate circumstance, I asked the neighbor to inquire of her mother about The Challenge. She agreed to call her and learned that even though her mother could not definitively settle the authorship question, she said Elder Brown was always exacting in attributing sources and would not have quoted material that was not his own without

citing it. Based on this circumstantial evidence, it appears that Elder Brown, later a member of the First Presidency, is the author.

Some years after my introduction to this declaration and after our children were grown, I began collecting material for this book. My motivation to undertake such a big project was so that my children, grandchildren and other descendants, would know of my strong testimony of the Book of Mormon, and of my conviction that it originated in the way the Prophet said it did—from a record written on golden plates given to him by an angel that he then translated “by the gift and power of God.”

Life being what it is, it has been many years since I began this work, but providentially much new evidence is now available that would have been absent from the book had it been finished earlier.

As I began writing, I realized there are others beyond our family circle whose knowledge and testimonies could benefit from this book’s many “infallible proofs” of the Book of Mormon, as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland calls them, from the extensive historical and doctrinal evidences, and from the many beautiful stories of conversion I have been fortunate to find. *The Challenge* is written to brighten the flame of testimony in everyday Latter-day Saints, in those in which it may have dimmed, and in sincere investigators of the restored gospel.

Grace Guymon Jones
Provo, Utah
November 2018