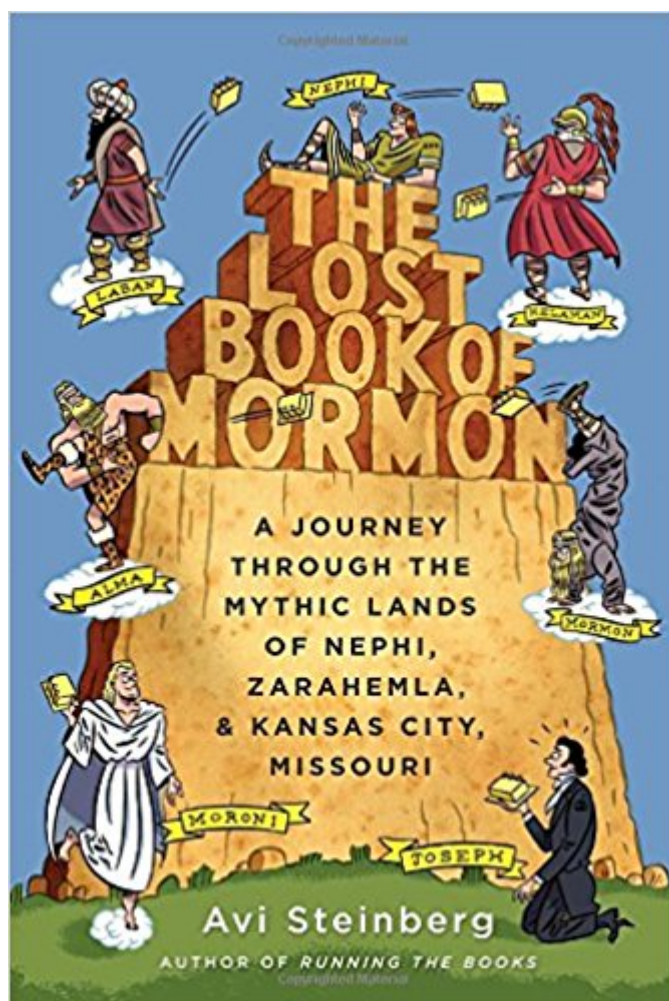


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# The Lost Book Of Mormon: A Journey Through The Mythic Lands Of Nephi, Zarahemla, And Kansas City, Missouri



## Synopsis

Is the Book of Mormon the Great American Novel? Decades before Melville and Twain composed their great works, a farmhand and child seer named Joseph Smith unearthed a long-buried book from a haunted hill in western New York State that told of an epic history of ancient America, a story about a family that fled biblical Jerusalem and took a boat to the New World. Using his prophetic gift, Joseph translated the mysterious book into English 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. Starting in Jerusalem, where The Book of Mormon opens with a bloody murder, Steinberg continued to the ruined Maya cities of Central America—the setting for most of the The Book of Mormon’s ancient story—where he gallivanted with a boisterous bus tour of believers exploring Maya archaeological sites for evidence. From there the journey took him to upstate New York, where he participated in the true Book of Mormon musical, the annual Hill Cumorah Pageant. And finally Steinberg arrived at the center of the American continent, Jackson County, Missouri, the spot Smith 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. Literate and funny, personal and provocative, the genre-bending The Lost Book of Mormon boldly explores our deeply human impulse to write bibles and discovers the abiding power of story.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[A] truly weird and beautiful memoir about an insane-sounding guy who retraces the geographical territory of the Book of Mormon in order to prove that it, the Book of Mormon, is the Great American Novel. If you need America to be reenchanted for you this year—and, let's face it, who doesn't?—pick this one up; you won't regret it." —Elif Batuman, *The New Yorker* "A multilayered narrative that grapples with some of the most fundamental questions of literature and of life ... [A] book about books, a story about stories, that sets out to explore why we tell them, how we craft them, and what makes some stand the test of time while others are forgotten." —Chicago Tribune "It is as if [Steinberg] has managed to find a way of telling a Faulkneresque family saga through the form of a perfect sitcom ... [W]ith its vivid, honest and often hilarious prose *The Lost Book of Mormon* does justice to an electric text." —The Believer "A wonderfully thoughtful exploration of how *The Book of Mormon* itself is obsessed with the idea of stories being preserved to be passed on, and what that might tell us about Joseph Smith not just as a prophet, but as a writer. There's something almost holy about the way Steinberg celebrates the humanity revealed by this book." —Salt Lake City Weekly "Steinberg's epic voyage is one born of admiration, and it never loses the thrill of discovery ... Steinberg gracefully navigates the tricky line between fan and voyeur." —The Boston Globe "[Written] with real humor and honest self-reflection." —Pacific Standard "[T]he story of a winsome, questing narrator's search for what it means to be a writer ... Steinberg is a funny and smart guide." —The Salt Lake Tribune "Avi Steinberg cuts no corners as he ranges from a Mexican military checkpoint to a pageant in upstate New York, to retrace the founding myths of Mormonism. *The Lost Book of Mormon* isn't just a good cheat sheet for curious non-Mormons (though it is that). It's a funny, humane, surprisingly moving account of a literary pilgrimage. All scripture should have it this good." —Kevin Roose, bestselling author of *Young Money* "Without a doubt, *The Lost Book of Mormon* will soon have you buying more books: anything written by Avi Steinberg and, yeah, most likely, the actual *Book of Mormon*. Steinberg could write about what he did yesterday and it would be glorious." —Jacob Tamsky, New York Times bestselling author of *Heads in Beds* "Steinberg's sardonic writing style is a delight ...

Using Smith as a backdrop, this enjoyable read raises questions about what it means to be an author and what type of person becomes one. It will appeal to a variety of readers, particularly those that appreciate a biting wit." —Library Journal

Avi Steinberg is the author of *Running the Books: The Adventures of an Accidental Prison Librarian*, which was a San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year. He is a regular contributor to *The New Yorker*'s Culture Desk blog. His essays have appeared in the Boston Globe, the New York Times Magazine, Salon, and other publications.

Avi Steinberg undertakes a pilgrim's quest to the heart of "The Book of Mormon". In his droll, witty and understated style he lassos many interesting Joseph Smith tidbits, reveals fascinating connections between Hermann Melville and Smith, gamely bounces through a raucous, Chaucerian style, Mormon sponsored, quest to Mesoamerica in search of a Zarahemla siting, rehearses for, but does not act in, the Mormon Hill of Cumorah Pageant. On this journey Steinberg lays bare and deeply honors the author Smith's creative act, an activity with which Steinberg humbly identifies. As a riff on "The Book of Mormon", Steinberg acknowledges it as uniquely American literature and as a uniquely American religion. Steinberg shows us many echoes of the Hebrew Bible and its writer(s). He wisely hints that both the Book of Mormon and the Bible can sustain myriad interpretations. He suggests that both Mormon and Jewish text and practice can seem obscure and mysterious. Though Steinberg's book defies categorization, it is really a worthy read. We see before our eyes the thinking, the working and re working of quite complex religious and authorial ideas.. Steinberg would make a wonderful classroom teacher. He has the gift of gab with which he serves up a delicious dose of narrative and counter narrative. This is not a religious nor pious book. However, Steinberg's orthodox Jewish youth informs, shapes and structures his capacity to scrutinize, labor over and deliver an inside out view of another religious text. 'ter's is in a category by itself

A very weird book--part introspective memoir, part effusive cynicism, part interpretation of history, literature, religion, and the place where they all come together, the Hill Cumorah. Steinberg, during a depressing period in his life, decides to go on a pilgrimage to the supposed sites where the supposed history related in the Book of Mormon supposedly occurred. Most readers will be very surprised to learn that most of those sites are in Mesoamerica, not the eastern or central United States, and that Mormon history can be and has been thoroughly conflated with Mayan history. Some of the description of his almost-picaresque journey is a tad too cutesy--how could he have

chanced upon quite so many cartoonish weirdos on one trip? Why in the world, when he decided to infiltrate and actually act in a Mormon pageant (which seems very similar to the New Age one at Mount Shasta, sort of a passion play for angelophiles), would he use an alias that sounds just as Jewish as Avi Steinberg does? I recommend this book to people who like weird writing on weird topics. Like my Uncle Uzzy, who thinks Andrei Codrescu sits at the right hand of God.

A very satirical take on the Book of Mormon by a Jewish author, who decides to make the same journey Lehi and family took from Jerusalem to South America and then up to Palmyra, New York. Avi Steinberg was born in Jerusalem and returns to the city of his birth to discover the ancient Prophet Lehi. He goes to the old city where archeologists are uncovering the old city. Rather than look at old Christian and Jewish historical sites he tries to locate places mentioned in the Book of Mormon. He finds the place some Mormons believe Nephi may have cut off Laban's head. He then travels to South America and joins a Book of Mormon tour of places that may have been historical Nephite cities. He has some deep insights on how some of Book of Mormon people lived and into why Moroni waited about 35 years after the destruction of the Nephites to hide up the plates. I found the book very enjoyable and his description of the hill Cumorah pageant as he signs up to participate in it and get assigned the part of Wicked Priest #2. It is funny, irreverent and thought provoking. If you can't laugh at your own religion every once in a while, you need to lighten up. I really enjoyed it and would recommend it.

The first half was interesting and then it got bogged down describing the Jos. Smith Farm and pageant. Should have gone to Nauvoo and Independence MO.

Between my son and myself, we had two different opinions of Avi Steinberg's "The Lost Book of Mormon." Maybe because I grew up with a few Mormons in the household (and he grew up with none), I was more sympathetic to Steinberg's case. I do feel like he wandered a little too much in his journey in making the case for The Book of Mormon as a work of literature, but it was nonetheless an enjoyable, sympathetic take on the book that is the basis for a huge religious structure. I liked it. The son didn't. So I'd recommend with that caveat. But I still gave it a 4-star because my opinion counted more.

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