

The Trial of Our Faith

by Shirley R. Heater

One thing I know for sure, our faith will be tried. I know this from numerous scripture references, such as 1 Peter 1:7, or DC 102:5c, or Ether 5:7, or 3 Nephi 12:3. I also know this from observing others. And I know this personally!

I was asked several years ago why I believed The Book of Mormon to be true. I reflected for a moment on all the various evidences, both internal and external:

Did I believe The Book of Mormon were true because of the testimony of Christ and his visit to the Nephites? Nephi's Psalm? Lehi's vision? Or was it because of its many teachings, such as little children are alive in Christ? the clarity of the plan of salvation? the role of baptisms? and God's covenant with his people? its Hebrew nature? Hebrew fingerprints on every page? poetic devices? Hebraisms? Old Testament connections? promises of records yet to come? [and much more!]

Did I believe The Book of Mormon were true because of the archaeology? evidences of parallel culture that places it in Mesoamerica? a mirror image timeline? deciphering the glyphs? the discovery of barley in the New World? [and much more!]

After these reflections, I had to honestly answer to myself, No—it was much more personal than all these things, although I did believe them all to be true and there was no doubt they intensified my testimony. Even with all these “evidences”—both external and internal, including the marvelous teachings, it became clear to me that our testimony in the Book of Mormon must be much deeper.

So how did I answer the question, why did I believe The Book of Mormon to be true? For me, it boiled down to this: because of this record in my life, my walk with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has been deepened and enriched. In answering that question, something seemed to “toughen” in my spirit, a realization that my feet were steadied on solid ground. This awareness has come back to me in recent months.

In the late '80s or early '90s, Patriarch Henry Schaefer lifted his voice in warning that “everything that can be shaken will be shaken.” In retrospect, I know that we can all think of individuals whom we thought were stalwarts turn away. I have seen this in grown children of friends, and even my youngest brother, among many who have faltered, turned away, and thrown their books in the trash! I have seen this happen to others who had been pastors, Sunday School teachers, several-generation saints.

And I've learned of archaeologists (LDS) and Book of Mormon scholars who have also turned away, many times because they didn't find the “evidences” they were looking for as proof. Most recently the ruckus is caused by “DNA evidence” that is being interpreted and used to attack the authenticity of The Book of Mormon. We have seen the faith and testimony of many being shaken, and they have turned away, some in anger, some in despair and disappointment. Many hearts have been broken as loved ones that they thought were strong have divided families.

What I would share with everyone is that we must examine ourselves and our own testimony. Can it be shaken? I'm reminded of Lehi's vision and the rod iron. Of the four groups of people, those who were holding fast to the rod of iron (the word of God) did not fall away (1 Nephi 2:78). “Holding fast” means just that, grasping it

tightly. This meaning was brought sharply into focus a few years ago.

I went on a walking tour of an underground cave where there was a concrete sidewalk with a 2” diameter iron pipe handrail that descended gradually into the depths. Off to the right the ground plunged down into a 500 foot abyss. I wasn't wearing proper shoes and the concrete was wet and slick. As I carefully made my way following the line of people in front of me, I walked gingerly, tightly holding on to this pipe and moving my hands along from place to place in order to not break my hold. Then I slipped! My feet went out from under me, and I swung under the handrail! I hung on for dear life! With the help of the person behind me, I was pulled back up on the path, and shakily continued on, thankful I had been holding on tightly!

Later, when rereading Lehi's vision, I realized in retrospect that our grasp of God's word must be just as tight! When we are shaken, when our faith is tried, we must be holding on tight enough to not be shaken loose!

Last year I attended a class presented by Neil Steede who has had many experiences with The Book of Mormon and the hill in Mexico believed to be Cumorah. When asked if the hill Rabon should turn out to not be Cumorah, would his faith be destroyed? He answered, “No”, his faith was in the book. I was profoundly struck by his answer which only reinforced my understanding of my belief in The Book of Mormon not being founded on external evidences.

Let us examine our testimony and hold fast to The Book of Mormon so that when our faith is tried, it will not be shaken but tempered as steel in the refiner's fire!