INTERPRETER

A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship

The Interpreter Foundation

Mission Statement

Supporting The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through scholarship.

The Interpreter Foundation supports the Church in the following ways:

- **Promotion:** We provide tools to encourage and facilitate personal learning by study and faith, and disseminate accurate information to the public about the Church.

- **Explanation:** We make the results of relevant scholarship more accessible to non-specialists.

- **Defense:** We respond to misunderstandings and criticisms of Church beliefs, policies, and practices.

- **Faithfulness:** Our leadership, staff, and associates strive to follow Jesus Christ and be true to the teachings of His Church.

- **Scholarship:** Our leadership, staff, and associates incorporate standards of scholarship appropriate to their academic disciplines.

The Interpreter Foundation is an independent organization that supports but is not owned, controlled by, or affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The material published by the Interpreter Foundation is the sole responsibility of the respective authors and should not be interpreted as representing the views of The Interpreter Foundation or of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This journal compiles weekly publications. Visit us online at InterpreterFoundation.org
You may subscribe to this journal at https://interpreterfoundation.org/annual-print-subscription/

Table of Contents

Light Began Once More to Grow

————————

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: *Readers are surely aware that the birth of the Christ child is the reason we celebrate Christmas. Members of the Church may be less aware, though, of the notable birth of a child, millennia later, of distant secondary importance.*

> Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. … [J]ust at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. (Joseph Smith — History 1:15–16)

By the time anybody out there reads this, we'll be racing from January into February 2020. However, as I write these thoughts, it's 23 December 2019. In other words, it's the eve of Christmas Eve.

It's also the 214th anniversary of the birth of the prophet Joseph Smith. Already several weeks ago, some critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were rolling out their annual claim that members of the Church celebrate "Smithmas" — the name that these critics have given to Joseph's birthday and that only these same critics use — with more enthusiasm and vigor than Church members bestow upon the mainstream Christian holiday of Christmas. Allegedly, our worship services on the Sunday closest to Christmas typically focus on the Prophet, whom we really worship. Jesus, so the charge goes, is scarcely mentioned. For some, I think, "Smithmas" is just a rather bitter and not particularly funny joke. A few, though, seem to take the claim seriously — or, at least, to want *others* to take it seriously.

I doubt, though, that many Latter-day Saints actually know that today is Joseph Smith's birthday or, if they do know it, that they are giving the subject a moment's thought. Contrary to the claims of our more extreme critics, we don't put up "Smithmas" lights, sing "Smithmas"

carols, or recite the story of Joseph's advent. Our chapels and homes aren't adorned with "Smithmas" trees. They don't feature manger scenes in which Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith gaze lovingly at their son, the infant prophet.

I won't be attending a special Joseph Smith memorial mass today. Instead, I'll be grading final exams and student term papers and otherwise engaging in ordinary, normal activities. In fact, we generally don't mark Joseph's birthday at all, let alone celebrate it — and not only because it's swallowed up in the mega-holiday that follows 48 hours later. If anything out of the ordinary happens today, it's likely to be last-minute Christmas shopping.

I recall a conversation from decades ago with Father Georges Anawati, my beloved tutor in Islamic philosophy at the Institut dominicain d'études orientales in Cairo, Egypt. Curious about my personal religious beliefs and somewhat aware of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he asked me whether we venerated the saints. No, I said. But surely, he continued, we pray to Joseph Smith. I replied that we did not. He paused for a moment, smiled, and then said, as if to himself, "These heresies are all so *bizarre*!"

However, as I've sat down to write this brief volume introduction, it occurs to me that perhaps a word or two about Joseph wouldn't be out of place today. Or, for that matter, on any day.

But first, a word about his associate, Oliver Cowdery. In April 1838, charged with serious offenses, Oliver was excommunicated from the Church. By his own choice he was not present to defend himself, though he always vigorously denied wrongdoing and eventually sought rebaptism. Before returning, however, he demanded that the accusations be retracted. Why? Because they were false. But also in order to preserve his credibility as a witness to crucial founding events of the Restoration. In March 1846, Oliver wrote to Phineas Young that,

> from your last [letter], I am fully satisfied, that no unjust imputation will be suffered to remain upon my character. And that I may not be misunderstood, let me here say, that I have only sought, and only asked, that my character might stand exonerated from those charges which imputed to me the crimes of theft, forgery, &c. Those which all my former associates knew to be false. I do not, I have never asked, to be excused, or exempted from an acknowledgement, of my actual fault or wrong — for of these there are many; which it always was my pleasure to confess. I have cherished a hope, and that one of my fondest, that I might leave such a character, as those who might

believe in my testimony, after I should be called hence, might do so, not only for the sake of the truth, but might not *blush* for the private character of the man who bore that testimony.[1]

As with Oliver — who was indeed rebaptized in November 1848 — so with Joseph. Like the gospel writers and like Peter and Paul, he testified of the divine Savior of humankind with the authority of direct personal experience. But what about his character? Is his testimony reliable? He was not perfect, and his critics often portray him as a scoundrel. However, they do him a deep injustice. His goodness and his sincere dedication to the Lord are evident in reminiscences from hundreds who knew him (conveniently gathered in Mark McConkie's valuable book *Remembering Joseph*) and shine out from his personal letters and journal entries (now being gathered and published in the monumental Joseph Smith Papers project).[2] Like Oliver, Joseph Smith was and is a credible witness.

Why does this matter? First and foremost because Joseph pointed to Christ. And at the year-end holiday season, his testimony supplies powerful evidence that Christmas is about much more than mere commercialism laced with a dollop of Victorian sentimentality.

Through Joseph Smith came the Book of Mormon,

> which contains a record of a fallen people, and the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also; which was given by inspiration, and is confirmed to others by the ministering of angels, and is declared unto the world by them — proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old. (D&C 20:9–11)

It was written, as its title page explains, "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations."

"And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him," he and Sidney Rigdon wrote following their great vision of 16 February 1832,

---

1. See Ronald G. Watt, "'Had You Stood in the Presence of Peter': A Letter from Oliver Cowdery to Phineas Young, 1846," *Ensign* (February 1977), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1977/02/discovery/had-you-stood-in-the-presence-of-peter?lang=eng. See, also, http://www.boap.org//LDS/Early-Saints/Letters-cowdery.html.

2. Mark L. McConkie, ed., *Remembering Joseph: Personal Recollections of Those Who Knew the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003).

> this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he
> lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we
> heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of
> the Father. (D&C 76:22–23)

As we celebrate the ancient birth and mission of Jesus Christ each December, it's fitting to reflect for a moment on the modern mission of Joseph Smith, the prophet whom the Lord chose to open the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times.

Joseph isn't the Messiah. He isn't on a par with Jesus, let alone superior. He went into the grove for guidance from the Lord, not to counsel God. He received revelation from God, not the other way around. He was subordinate. Depictions of his First Vision correctly show him kneeling, awestruck, at the feet of the Father and the Son. His importance is secondary, derivative. He is a moon, reflecting the light of the Son. His significance derives from the Lord who called him, from the Savior of whom he testified and whose birth we remember at the Christmas season. But that is no small thing.

Saturday, 21 December 2019 — two days ago, as I write — was the winter solstice in Earth's northern hemisphere. The winter solstice occurs when one of Earth's poles has its maximum tilt away from the Sun. (Accordingly, it happens twice annually, once in the northern hemisphere and once in the southern.) For those in the northern hemisphere, it is the day when the Sun is at its lowest daily maximum elevation in the sky and the day with the year's shortest period of daylight and the year's longest night. After the winter solstice, the periods of nighttime darkness become shorter and shorter, the sun rises higher in the sky, and days grow longer. There is, in short, more light.

In the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice usually occurs on 21 December or 22 December. This year, in 2019, it fell on the former. In 1805, however, the year of Joseph Smith's birth, the winter solstice fell on 22 December. The Prophet was born the very next day.

I can't say there was divine intention in this. I don't want to read more into it than there was. But it certainly seems symbolically appropriate, at the least, that the Prophet of the Restoration was born on the day in the astronomical year when darkness began to disperse and light began once more to grow. Since that time, we have "a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19).

The morning breaks, the shadows flee;
Lo, Zion's standard is unfurled!
The dawning of a brighter day
Majestic rises on the world.

The clouds of error disappear
Before the rays of truth divine;
The glory bursting from afar
Wide o'er the nations soon will shine. …

Angels from heav'n and truth from earth
Have met, and both have record borne;
Thus Zion's light is bursting forth
To bring her ransomed children home.[3]

These words of Parley P. Pratt were not penned about Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery, but about the Restoration of which they were a part. We may also rightfully consider Parley to be a part of that Restoration. Indeed, every Saint since Joseph and Oliver — including you and me — is a part of the Restoration that continues to unfold through divine decree and providence. Zion is bursting forth, and we are all blessed to live in a time when darkness is dispersed.

Daniel C. Peterson *(Ph.D., University of California at Los Angeles) is a professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University and is the founder of the University's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative, for which he served as editor-in-chief until mid-August 2013. He has published and spoken extensively on both Islamic and Latter-day Saint subjects. Formerly chairman of the board of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) and an officer, editor, and author for its successor organization, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, his professional work as an Arabist focuses on the Qur'an and on Islamic philosophical theology. He is the author, among other things, of a biography entitled* Muhammad: Prophet of God *(Eerdmans, 2007).*

---

3. "The Morning Breaks," *Hymns*, no. 1.

An American Indian Language Family with Middle Eastern Loanwords: Responding to a Recent Critique

John Robertson

Abstract: *In 2015 Brian Stubbs published a landmark book, demonstrating that Uto-Aztecan, an American Indian language family, contains a vast number of Northwest Semitic and Egyptian loanwords spoken in the first millennium bc. Unlike other similar claims — absurd, eccentric, and without substance — Stubbs's book is a serious, linguistically based study that deserves serious consideration. In the scholarly world, any claim of Old World influence in the New World languages is met with critical, often hostile skepticism. This essay is written in response to one such criticism.*

The most recent issue of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* included a review of two books by Brian Stubbs.[1] It gives me no pleasure writing this response to Chris Rogers's review of Stubbs. I sat on Chris's dissertation committee (University of Utah) directed by Lyle Campbell, and I wrote a positive letter of recommendation for his candidacy for the Linguistics Department at BYU. When I heard about his strong objection to Brian Stubbs's books,[2] it piqued my curiosity because I had

---

1. Chris Rogers, "A Review of the Afro-Asiatic:Uto-Aztecan Proposal," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 28 (2019), 258–67. The books reviewed by Rogers were Brian D. Stubbs, *Exploring the Explanatory Power of Semitic and Egyptian in Uto-Aztecan* (Provo, UT: Grover Publications, 2015), hereafter referred to as "Stubbs 2015," and Brian D. Stubbs, *Changes in Languages from Nephi to Now* (Blanding, UT: Four Corners Digital Design, 2016), hereafter referred to as "Stubbs 2016."

2. This paper treats Rogers's critique of Stubbs 2015. I do not address Rogers's critique of Stubbs 2016 because that book treats his perception of his earlier works' relevance to the Book of Mormon.

written a favorable article regarding Stubbs's 2015 book.[3] I understood that Rogers's displeasure had to do with (a) Stubbs's shoddy scholarship and (b) the apparent impossibility of Middle Eastern languages effecting changes in Proto-Uto-Aztecan (PUA), a reconstructed American Indian ancestral language.

I immediately emailed Rogers, trying to get some clarification regarding his strong antipathetic attitude toward Stubbs's works. In his response, Rogers mentioned that it had something to do with "joiners and splitters."[4] I was acquainted with "lumpers and splitters" (explained below), but I could not imagine how the concept applied to Stubbs's work. Rogers was kind enough to send a preliminary copy of an article, which was since revised, now appearing in the 2019 issue of *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*.

When I read the draft, I saw what Rogers's view of lumpers and splitters meant as applied to Stubbs's work, and given what he meant, I was deeply disappointed for the reasons outlined below. He sees Stubbs's work as "so replete with disorganization, numerous assumptions, mistaken definitions or incorrect characterizations of linguistic concepts, inexact methods, pedantry, and apologetic rhetoric that the idea seems dubious, *even without careful scrutiny*" (260, emphasis added). He went on to say, "the content of the book … suffer[s] from significant analytical and methodological issues" (261).

On reading the final publication, I now understand why Rogers used such derogation in describing Stubbs's work — he totally misunderstood the very foundation of Stubbs's work. What Rogers mistakenly concluded led him down a rabbit hole of confusion, misunderstanding, and mischaracterization, which he is now publicly sharing with others. Ironically, Rogers lumps together Stubbs 2015 and Stubbs 2016 in his review, which should have focused solely on Stubbs 2015.

In what follows, I will accomplish three things: I will first provide some background information, then show what Rogers understood Stubbs to have said, and finally give hard evidence of what Stubbs actually said.

---

3.   John S. Robertson, "Exploring Semitic and Egyptian in Uto-Aztecan Languages," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017), 103–16, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/exploring-semitic-and-egyptian-in-uto-aztecan-languages/.

4.   In his published critique, Rogers uses "lumpers" instead of "joiners." I will use "lumper" because this is the terminology he uses in his published version.

Lumpers, Splitters, and the Comparative Historical Method

Prior to examining Rogers's critique, it is important to understand two fundamental concepts: What the Comparative Historical Method is and what the terms "lumper" and "splitter" mean.

When establishing linguistic relationships — particularly relationships between a language and any derivatives or "daughter languages" — the researcher typically relies on a methodology known as the Comparative Historical Method. According to the renowned Calvert Watkins, the Comparative Historical Method "is one of the most powerful theories about human language that has ever been proposed — and the one most consistently validated and verified over the longest period of time."[5] In applying this method, here are the steps that a successful comparatist follows:

1. In two or more languages, the researcher scouts out as many words as he can find, which resemble each other both in sound and meaning. Such words are *cognates* — etymologically 'born together' from a given ancestral form.
2. Based on a series of such cognates, the linguist then reconstructs the unique ancestral forms from which each daughter language descends.
3. Starting with each reconstructed proto form, the comparatist develops a set of rules for each daughter language.

To be successful, the application of such rules to the unique, reconstructed forms must produce the same forms that are attested in each daughter language.[6] It is the rules alone, as applied to the ancestral forms, that validate the reconstructed forms. Without the effective application of the rules, the reconstructed forms remain purely hypothetical. This last step is the only way of telling if the reconstructed forms truly gave rise to the appropriate forms that exist in the daughter languages.

This brings us to the concept of "lumpers" and "splitters." These terms designate competing approaches to how languages and language families

---

5. Calvert Watkins, "New Parameters in Historical Linguistics, Philology and Culture History," *Language* 65/4 (1989), 783. Unknown to me until recently, Stubbs and I have a connection with the late Calvert Watkins, whose academic genealogy goes back to Ferdinand de Saussure, Antoine Meillet, and Émile Benveniste, all giants in the field of historical linguistics. Watkins was on my dissertation committee at Harvard, for which I am grateful. After retirement, Watkins went to UCLA where Brian Stubbs read one of his papers on comparative Uto-Aztecan. Watkins spoke highly of Stubbs's lecture to Uto-Aztecan scholar Pamela Munro.

6. If the rules do not properly derive the attested forms, the reconstructed ancestor form or the rules themselves must be revised.

should be viewed, particularly those in the Americas.[7] An example of a lumper is found in the work of Joseph Greenberg, who contended that before the Spanish Conquest there were three language groups that populated the Americas: Eskimo-Aleut, Na-Dené, and the remaining thousands of other American Indian languages spoken in North, Central, and South America. These thousands form a Greenbergian macro-group, called "Amerind."[8] His Amerind macro-grouping was not based on the traditional Comparative Historical Method. Greenberg's "lumper" grouping has since been rejected by the majority of scholars. In fact, Lyle Campbell, Rogers's dissertation chair, said that Greenberg "should be shouted down."[9] Conversely, "splitters" should presumably not be "shouted down." They generally seek to apply the Comparative Historical Method to determine how languages evolve and diverge (or *split*) over time.

Rogers's Mistaken View of the Core of Stubbs's Comparisons

Rogers claims that Stubbs's work catastrophically fails because, like Greenberg's work, "Stubbs's proposal falls into the 'lumper' camp'" (259). According to Rogers, by wrongly lumping Semitic, Egyptian, and Uto-Aztecan together, saying they came from some sort of proto-language, Stubbs is, like Greenberg, a misguided lumper.

Let me be more specific regarding what Rogers alleges Stubbs said:

> The purpose of this piece is to review the *long-distance genetic linguistic relationship* between languages of the Afro-Asiatic language family and the Uto-Aztecan language family suggested in Stubbs's *Exploring the Explanatory Power of Semitic and Egyptian in Uto-Aztecan* and *Changes in Languages from Nephi to Now.* (258, emphasis added)

Note the emphasized phrase: *long-distance genetic linguistic relationship*. This phrase has a special meaning when it comes to Rogers's assessment of Stubbs's work. Later in his critique, Rogers begins to clarify his use of the phrase:

---

7. There are, in fact, lumpers and splitters in a variety of disciplines, not just linguistics. For more information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lumpers_and_splitters.

8. Joseph H. Greenberg, *Language in the Americas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

9. Lyle Campbell, Comment on Greenberg, Turner, and Zegura, *Current Anthropology* 27/5 (December 1986), 488–89.

> A proposal for a genetic relationship between two or more languages must be supported by two types of evidence: (1) evidence that the languages discussed are in fact genetically related, and (2) evidence for the reconstruction of the common linguistic ancestor. (261)

Rogers left out an important step of the comparative historical method. Review, again, the three steps utilized under the Comparative Historical Method. Of those three steps, it is the third step — the crucial step — that Rogers left out. Only after this is done can the comparatist speak of a *genetic* relationship among the derived sister languages.[10]

The quintessential example of relations due to common ancestry would be Proto-Indo-European (PIE), the reconstructed ancestor of almost all European languages, certain languages typically found in Northern India, as well as the languages of Iran and Afghanistan. Here we consider two branches of PIE, the Italic and the Germanic branch. The Italic branch preserved the speech sounds *p, t,* and *k,* which were present probably around 6,000 years ago, in PIE times. On the other hand, the Germanic branch innovated by changing the original *p* to *f* (compare Latin **p**ater to English **f**ather, both from PIE *$pH_2tér$*), *t* to *th* (compare Latin **t**rēs to English **th**ree, both from PIE *tréyes),* and *k* to *h* (compare Latin **c**ornu to English **h**orn, both from PIE *$k\underset{\circ}{r}$-no*).[11] It is the application of many more rules like p > f, t > th, and k > h that help validate the reconstruction of ancient Indo-European spoken all those millennia ago.

However, any person who understands the Comparative Historical Method would never surreptitiously put in people's minds that Stubbs should have used the method (1) to compare Near Eastern and the New World languages, (2) to postulate an ersatz proto-language, and (3) to devise a set of rules that would predict the cognate forms in each daughter language.

Specifically, the theory that Rogers attributes to Stubbs is that somehow, perhaps 7,000 years ago, in an unknown continent, there existed an ancestor of PUA *and* Proto-Afro-Asiatic (PAA), namely Proto-PUA-PAA. This ancestral language would have been an even more remote ancestor of what today we know as Uto-Aztecan (New World) and Semitic, Egyptian, Berber and other languages (Old World). According to Rogers, Stubbs 2015 has the duty of giving evidence of *genetically related* languages, descendants of some remote, ur-language.

---

10. French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dalmatian, etc. come from the common ancestor, Latin (or, to be more precise, "that come from the emergent dialects of Vulgar Latin").

11. This is the celebrated Grimm's Law, named after one of the Brothers Grimm.

This, however, is an unfortunate strawman; it is no wonder that Rogers assesses the content of Stubbs's book as suffering from "disorganization, numerous assumptions, mistaken definitions or incorrect characterizations of linguistic concepts, inexact methods, pedantry, and apologetic rhetoric" (259). His mischaracterization of Stubbs's work and the strawman he constructs makes it easy to make Stubbs look like a fool — but as we shall see, Stubbs is no fool.

Rogers further asserts that "one of the main methodological issues of Stubbs's proposal is the omission of an explanation for why the Uto-Aztecan and Afro-Asiatic languages are being compared in the first place" (261). The only reason I can possibly imagine for Rogers's statement is owing to his determination that Stubbs is a lumper. According to Rogers, Stubbs omits the reason for comparing Uto-Aztecan and Afro-Asiatic because he should have, but could not, reconstruct a 7,000+ year old ancestral language existing on two separate continents. So, like Greenberg, Stubbs had to "lump" them, without reconstructing an ancestor language, and without providing the rules that would correctly predict the forms of each daughter language. This makes Stubbs, like Greenberg, a lumper.

The Core of Stubbs's Actual Comparisons

The truth, though, is that Stubbs *does* make a comparison — but on what grounds? Throughout Stubbs 2015 the comparisons come from *borrowing* and not from ancestral descent. To be clear, what Stubbs asserts is that at a given time in the past, in the environs of Uto-Aztecan, and in an intimate relationship, *borrowing* effectively brought Uto-Aztecan and the Near Eastern languages together. Therein lies the grounds of comparison; there was no way that he ever imagined that the relationship was genetic, despite Rogers's strawman allegations.

To bring Stubbs's notion of borrowing closer to home, let us consider a hypothetical scenario. Let us suppose that a Martian has accessed thousands of pages of English as well as voluminous pages of French, doing this for the purposes of careful research. His investigation reveals two classes of words. On the one hand he finds words like *hand, foot, tooth, child,* and *sun* that he cannot find in French. On the other hand, he finds words like *disorganization*, *numerous, assumption*, *definition*, *incorrect, inexact, method*, and *pedantry*[12] that he finds in both languages.

12. For the record, he also finds affixes that are attached to French words, like *dis-, mis-, de-, in-, -ous, -tion, -ment, -able, -ain, ism*, which are compelling evidence of French loans into English.

With no English words in French and nearly half of English words of French origin, our Martian friend rightly concludes that English borrowed from French, which makes our Martian researcher a splitter, not a lumper — a splitter because he separates French loanwords from what was originally Anglo-Saxon English!

And so it is with Stubbs, who has assiduously documented a vast reservoir — literally thousands — of Near Eastern words as well as fossilized grammatical affixes presently found in the sinews of Uto-Aztecan. This makes Stubbs a splitter by the very act of identifying borrowed words, separating Near Eastern loanwords from what was originally Uto-Aztecan. But there are no Uto-Aztecan words in the Near Eastern languages.

The Relationship between Genetic Relatedness and Borrowing

Here I must point out that borrowing does implicate the Comparative Historical Method. First, though, I must note that when one language borrows from another, there is a compulsory transformation of the loanword to accommodate the shared speech habits of the speakers of the receiving language. For example, contrast the donor language Spanish with the receiving language English in these three examples:

- Spanish: *galeón* [gale**on**] > English *galleon* [**gal**-ee-uhn, **gal**-yuhn][13]
- Spanish *tomato* [tom**a**to] > English *tomato* [tuh-**mey**-doh]
- Spanish *bonanza* [bo**nan**sa] > English *bonanza* [buh-**năn**-zuh]

The point is that phonological rules describe the transformation of words of the donor language wherein sounds and meanings are adapted into the ingrained sound patterns of the receiving language. From the examples above, the rule would be, "In English, any vowel of the syllable next to a syllable with a stressed vowel, is reduced to '*uh*' as in, for example, b*uh*-**năn**-z*uh*."

Note that borrowing is comparable to the three rules of the Comparative Historical Method:

1. Finding Similarities

Genetic Relatedness: Words that are cognates in sister languages are equivalent to the ancestral words from which they descend, having similar sounds and meanings.

Borrowing: Words in the donor language are

---

13. The "phoneticism" representing English pronunciation was borrowed from https://www.dictionary.com.

equivalent to words in the receiving language, having similar sounds and meanings.

2. *Reconstructing*

Genetic Relatedness: Based on cognates, ancestral forms are postulated from which the words of the daughter languages can be derived.

Borrowing: The words of the donor language are the words from which the receiving language can be derived.

3. Derivational Rules

Genetic Relatedness: If results turn out to be valid, rules applied to the words of the ancestral form must correctly predict the sounds and the meanings of the words attested in the daughter languages.

Borrowing: If results turn out to be valid, rules applied to the words of the donor language must correctly predict the sounds and the meanings of the borrowed words of the receiving language.

A Word About Rules

Rules take the form "if x, then y." Rules are indispensable to scientific inquiry because their application predicts repeatedly true results. *If* I heat water to 212° Fahrenheit, at sea level, *then* the water will boil, every time. The reason Watkins says that the Comparative Historical Method "is one of the most powerful theories about human language" is because the method takes a form that is largely predictive and replicable. A Spanish word borrowed into English almost always follows the rule outlined in the previous section.

Sadly, Rogers chose to ignore whether Stubbs's rules are predictive, and this is a glaring omission of his review. Had he turned to page 2 of Stubbs 2015, he would have been able to comment on 31 instances of the rules b > p, d > t, and g > k, where there is an obvious similarity in both sound and meaning between Semitic and PUA words. Had he looked at the next page he would have been able to comment on 18 instances where ʔ > w/o/u, where the similarities between the donor and borrower words are again transparent. Each of the following pages (4 through 9) is full of rules that show a plethora of predicted relationships of similarity between Near Eastern donor and PUA borrower. These data are included in the 1,528 well-documented instances of the same relationships that can hardly be attributed to a chance happening, to onomatopoeic similarity, to universal traits, or to genetic descent. These are all examples

of borrowing — Uto-Aztecan borrowings from languages of the Near East, fully ensconced in the Uto-Aztecan language family.

Rogers pokes at Stubbs by paraphrasing his words: "Yet gullible may better describe those accepting the (assumptions) in the book than those digging in to find the facts" (261). Those same words ironically apply to Rogers's critique — he obviously does not accept the assumptions of the book he reviews and fails to dig in to find facts that Stubbs provided; he ignores making reference to the rules themselves. In other words, he never interacts with the data. Recall that it is the application of the rules to the donor words which, if successful, validates the proposed relationship between the Near Eastern words found in Uto-Aztecan. More than anything, this omission deprives Rogers's readers of a genuine understanding of the intellectual merit of Stubbs 2015.

E Pluribus Unum

One consequence of ignoring rules shows up in Table 6 (265). The table wrongly assumes that a multitude of correspondences between sound and meaning magically occur by chance without taking account of rules. Let us look more closely at the role rules play in Stubbs 2015.

A single, proper application of a rule belonging to any of the three languages would have only a 2% or 3% chance of showing a meaningful correspondence of sound and meaning. Another proper application would slightly diminish the possibility of chance. However, what happens if there is a multitude of proper applications of all the rules, each having the same consistent results? In the end, the cumulate effect of direct hits makes the appeal to happenstance so diminished as to rule out even the possibility of chance. Out of many proper applications of the rules, there can be only one, cumulative result for each rule.

Criticism of What Stubbs Did Not Do

Here, let us pick up with Rogers's discussion on "other explanations of the similarities" (264).

> Languages do not have to be genetically related to share similarities (as Stubbs correctly points out). Language similarities can be a consequence of accidents/change, borrowing, onomatopoeia and sound symbolism (or ideophones), universal traits, and genetic inheritance (or a combination of these). (264)

Let us consider each type that Rogers mentions:

- **Accident**: Lowland Mayan has *ay* and Spanish has (*h*) *ay* (the initial *h* was never pronounced). Both mean 'there is/are. *(H)ay* comes from Latin.[14] Obviously, Stubbs's work is not founded on forms that are purely accidental.

- **Sound Symbolism**: "moo" English; "moo" Hindi; "mø" Norwegian; "*mu, muh*" Uropi.[15] Again, Stubbs's work is not driven by sound symbolism. Rogers's attempts to use sound symbolism to diminish Stubbs's work is pointless, to say the least. Rogers says, "at least 100 of the 1,528 suggested similarities in the proposal are likely due to sound symbolism … This leaves conservatively 1,328 [sic] similarities as evidence for the proposal" (264). I do not know how Rogers came up with the round number 100, but I do know that 1,428 data points are left to be accounted for.

- **Universal Traits**: All languages have speech sounds that convey meanings. Obviously, this is not the basis of Stubbs's work.

- **Borrowing vs. Genetic Inheritance**: I find it conspicuously damning that Rogers ignores borrowing as one of the explanations for seeing similarities among languages. He goes on to say, "in a proposal of genetic relatedness, these other possibilities [including borrowing] should also be considered, but are not presented in either of Stubbs's publications" (264). Clearly, borrowing is Stubbs's *only* consideration, not the "genetic relatedness" that Rogers misattributes to Stubbs's thinking. Why should Rogers even think that Stubbs was obligated to consider any of the other reasons for similarities between Semitic and Uto-Aztecan?

Rogers clearly confuses the relationship between borrowing and genetic inheritance. I cannot begin to understand what he means by the following: "Lastly, when similarities due to borrowing are extensive, the result can be a mistaken conclusion of linguistic relatedness" (265). I am guessing that Rogers is using "linguistic relatedness" as equivalent to "genetic relatedness," as defined above. But who, if anyone, confuses

---

14. "From Old Spanish *ha i* ("it has there") (compare Catalan *hi ha* and French *il y a*), from *ha*, third-person singular present of *haber* ("to have"), + *i*, enclitic form of ahí, from Latin *ibī* ("there")," https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hay#Etymology.

15. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross-linguistic_onomatopoeias.

extensive borrowing with "linguistic relatedness?" Is Rogers saying that because similarities due to borrowing are so extensive that Stubbs confused genetic heritage with borrowing? Or was it that Rogers knew all along that Stubbs's work was based on extensive borrowing, but the "confusion" allowed him to allege Stubbs to be a lumper? Or is this somehow political theater, a kabuki dance?

Rogers goes even deeper into the weeds. His language in the following is so opaque, so difficult to follow, that I include here a bracketed translation from my attempt to get at what he means:

> The potential of borrowing resulting from a scenario of contact is not systematically considered as an explanation for the similarities presented in Stubbs's proposal. [Translation: There might be languages other than Near Eastern languages responsible for the loanwords found in Uto-Aztecan, which Stubbs did not take into account.] That is, the similarities are not put into the context of the other languages spoken all around the Uto-Aztecan languages. [Translation: The loanwords found in Uto-Aztecan might be due to languages "spoken all around Uto-Aztecan."] Without such a comparison, it is not possible to rule out the scenario that the Uto-Aztecan similarities to Near-Eastern languages are a result of borrowing these features from other languages or from Near-Eastern languages themselves. [Translation: Since there were other languages in the neighborhood of Uto-Aztecan, it is impossible to tell whether the loanwords in Uto-Aztecan came from Near Eastern languages or other languages contiguous with Uto-Aztecan]. (266)

First, it is perplexing that after all that Rogers said about genetic relatedness, out of nowhere he suddenly recognizes that there really are "similarities presented in Stubbs's proposal" *owing to borrowing*. However, I am puzzled by the fact that Rogers could even imagine that the loanwords cited by Stubbs as present in Uto-Aztecan could have been borrowed from "other languages spoken all around the Uto-Aztecan languages." It should go without saying that every sentient human knows that two mutually unintelligible languages are not the same, which is certainly the case regarding Near Eastern languages and languages neighboring Uto-Aztecan. It is unimaginable that Rogers would formally state that the characteristics unique to Near Eastern languages, which are clearly found in Uto-Aztecan, could possibly be the same as the characteristics inherent in the American Indian languages "spoken all around Uto-Aztecan

languages." This makes just as much sense as saying apples are identical to oranges in every possible way — taste, texture, smell, peelability — including all the other features that distinguish apples from oranges.

So, following Rogers, there are two possible explanations for the loanwords found in Uto-Aztecan. They either come from Near Eastern languages or from "the other languages spoken all around the Uto-Aztecan languages." For Rogers, both explanations are on equal footing. But it is clearly impossible to know what the other languages "spoken all around Uto-Aztecan" were. Rogers even calls Stubbs to task for failing to note that "the potential of borrowing resulting from a scenario of contact [was] not systematically considered as an explanation for the similarities presented in Stubbs's proposal" (266).

In light of Stubbs's "failure," let us do what Rogers omitted doing: choose between Near Eastern languages and his curiously odd alternative. Ockham's Razor makes the choice easy: "*Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*, that is, a hypothesis ought not to introduce complications not requisite to explain the facts."[16] Near Eastern languages are responsible for the loanwords found in Uto-Aztecan because no other language or combination of languages could have features identical to those belonging to Uto-Aztecan. Surely, Rogers's alternative suggestion that "the other languages spoken all around the Uto-Aztecan languages" is responsible for the similarities between the two languages is a complication "not requisite to explain the facts."

A Knotty Problem

Of course, Stubbs 2015 raises a knotty problem. It is academic dogma that any prehistoric migration from the Middle East to the Americas never happened, nor could it ever have happened. Any scholar's work would be anathema if it made such a claim. Some say Stubbs's work is anathema — but only at the expense of ignoring the breadth and depth of the actual data. There is actually existing evidence that favors such a migration — not an archeological artifact, nor a recorded manuscript — but evidence in the form of factual, predictive, lawful linguistic data found in Stubbs 2015. Such evidence of borrowing exists in abundance, available for proper review and criticism. And certainly, factual linguistic data should carry more weight for professional linguists than for anyone else.

---

16. C.P. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vol. IV (*The Simplest Mathematics*), edited by C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1933), 4.

Stubbs's *Bona Fides*

Does Stubbs's professionalism, his *modus operandi* as a comparatist, measure up to Comparative Historical Method standards? I believe so, and below I explain why Stubbs's 2015 data meet every expectation of a good comparatist.

Among the many that have contributed to the study of PUA, there are three major players that stand out: Wick Miller, Kenneth Hill, and Brian Stubbs. Miller produced 700 correspondence sets (that is, reconstructions of PUA). Hill added 500 more, for a total of 1,200 correspondence sets. In 2011 Stubbs published a landmark book, *Uto-Aztecan: A Comparative Vocabulary*,[17] which added 1,500 more, more than doubling Miller/Hill's 1,200 to 2,700 correspondence sets, without addressing any Near-Eastern contributions. Written for other Uto-Aztecanists, *Uto-Aztecan: A Comparative Vocabulary* treats Uto-Aztecan reconstructions of vocabulary and grammar of PUA. Stubbs's careful use of the Comparative Historical Method resulted in Hill saying, "All in all, this is a monumental contribution, raising comparative Uto-Aztecan to a new level."[18] This work has become a standard, which every Uto-Aztecan comparatist must take into account.[19]

The methodology that all competent comparatists use is the Comparative Historical Method, which is, as already mentioned, "one of the most powerful theories about human language that has ever been proposed."[20] As a student of Watkins, as a comparatist who has studied the Mayan language family from 1967 to 2019, and as one who has 60+ refereed articles in prestigious journals, not to mention books, I feel that I might be somewhat competent to judge Stubbs's comparative work. My take is that Stubbs's work of both 2011 and 2015 is spot on, that Stubbs has always been an exacting practitioner of the Comparative Historical Method. In this regard, I would challenge anyone to demonstrate any significant drop off of methodology between Stubbs's 2011 and 2015 books. Both meet every standard required by the Comparative Historical Method.[21] Furthermore,

---

17. Brian D. Stubbs, *Uto-Aztecan: A Comparative Vocabulary* (Flower Mound, TX: Shumway, 2011).

18. Kenneth C. Hill, "Uto-Aztecan: A Comparative Vocabulary by Stubbs," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 78/4 (October 2012), 591–92.

19. Hill told Stubbs (personal communication), "I must tell you Brian, whenever I think I have found a new Uto-Aztecan cognate set, I go to your Uto-Aztecan book, and nearly every time it's already there " (personal communication from Stubbs).

20. Calvert Watkins, "New Parameters in Historical Linguistics, Philology and Culture History," *Language* 65/4 (1989), 783.

21. In some sense, Uto-Aztecan comparatists, all of whom received the 2015 book, are in a bind because, on the one hand, they accept Stubbs's methods and

his publications in refereed journals and his presentations at Uto-Aztecan conferences also attest to his professionalism.

In evaluating *Uto-Aztecan: A Comparative Vocabulary*, Hill goes on to say,

> Part III (pp. 47–420) is the core of the work, the comparative vocabulary. Stubbs numbers the sets 1–2703, but in reality there are many more than 2,703 sets because many subsets are given with numbers like 7a, 7b, 7c, for vocabulary that may or may not be groupable into a single more inclusive set. Each set is discussed in some detail and the serious comparativist *will delight in the discussions.*[22]

It must be agreed on all hands that Stubbs, or anyone who understands scholarly methods and practices, has the right (if not the responsibility) to object to Rogers's criticisms. Regarding "splitters" and "lumpers" we can happily say that Stubbs is a splitter because he carefully separates the native aspects of Uto-Aztecan from the borrowed Near Eastern features that are now ensconced, part and parcel, in the fabric of Uto-Aztecan.

Conclusion

As I said initially, I am sorry that this whole thing came up. I am sorry that Rogers abused my words, wrongly giving the impression to the quick or casual reader that I agree with his harsh disavowal of Stubbs 2015:

> The result is that when evidence and methods are considered carefully, there is ample reason to "*challenge the breadth and depth of the data*" … (259, emphasis added)

I was saddened when I saw that Rogers had manipulated the intent of my words. These were the closing words of my favorable review of Stubbs, not conveyed by Rogers:

> As a practitioner of the comparative historical method for 40+ years, I believe I can say what Stubbs's scholarship does and does not deserve: It does not deserve aprioristic dismissal given the extensive data he presents. It *does* deserve authoritative

---

practices in his 2011 book, dealing only with Uto-Aztecan, but on the other hand, they recognize the same professionalism found in the 2015 book, dealing with Middle Eastern languages and Uto-Aztecan.

22. Kenneth C. Hill, "Uto-Aztecan: A Comparative Vocabulary by Stubbs," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 78/4 (October 2012), 591–92, emphasis added.

consideration because, from my point of view, *I **cannot** find an easy way to challenge the breadth and depth of the data.*"[23]

I am sorry that Rogers similarly manipulated Dirk Elzinga's statement regarding Stubbs 2015. Rogers wrote:

> ... to remain unconvinced by the "*extensive accurate data, to back up his [Stubbs's] extraordinary claim.*" (259, emphasis added).

How can extensive, accurate data constitute a reason for remaining unconvinced? This is what Elzinga actually said:

> Stubbs has something the language eccentrics do not have: the training and experience, together with *extensive accurate data, to back up his extraordinary claim* of significant Old World linguistic influence in Uto-Aztecan, a New World language family.[24]

I am sorry that Rogers accused Stubbs of postulating a logically impossible theory of some contrived common ancestor of the Uto-Aztecan and the Afro-Asiatic languages, that he was so fixated on "lumpers and splitters" that it blinded him to Stubbs's obvious claim of borrowing, which functionally makes him a splitter.

I am sorry that Rogers became so overly zealous as to state that Stubbs was someone who made false assumptions, mistook definitions, mischaracterized linguistic concepts, used inexact methods, and was pedantic and apologetic.

I am sorry that Rogers accused Stubbs of wholly inept scholarship, below academic standards, in the face of Uto-Aztecanists' general acceptance of and acclaim for his past work.

I am sorry that Rogers was blind to Stubbs's genuine contributions to the field of comparative Uto-Aztecan — his 2011 book (crucial to the field), his publications in scholarly journals, as well as his lifetime of presentations at Uto-Aztecan conferences.

Most of all, I am sorry that his misleading representation of Stubbs's work may cause LDS, LDS dissenters, and non-LDS scholars not interested in the Book of Mormon to discount out-of-hand the 1,528 data points, the unyielding facts that alone give substance to the predicate of Stubbs's claim.

John S. Robertson *is a Professor of Linguistics Emeritus, Brigham Young University. He received a BA in political science, an MA in linguistics,*

---

23. Robertson, "Exploring Semitic and Egyptian," 114.
24. Dirk Elzinga, Review of "Brian D. Stubbs: Exploring the Explanatory Power of Semitic and Egyptian in Uto-Aztecan," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55/4 (2016): 176.

both from BYU, and a PhD in linguistics from Harvard University. He has more than 60 publications, which include several books and many articles that treat the reconstruction of proto-Mayan, language change, and the grammar and sound system of the Mayan Hieroglyphs. He is also an inveterate student of the polymath C.S. Peirce, founder of American Pragmatics and Semiotics. His missionary service includes France Paris (1962–1965), England London, Family History (2011–2012), Pathway (2015–2017), Cody Historic Mural and Museum (May–September 2017), the latter three with his wife Barbara. Other Church service includes bishop, bishop's counselor, branch president (Guatemala), high council, Young Men's, and Primary. He is happily married to Barbara Clyde Robertson, with 23 grandchildren.

Ministering across Fault Lines of Belief and Community

Daniel Ellsworth

Review of David B. Ostler, *Bridges: Ministering to Those Who Question* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 206 pp. $32.95 (hardback), $20.95 (paperback).

Abstract: David Ostler's book Bridges: Ministering to Those Who Question *addresses the daunting task of ministering to people who have grown disillusioned with the core doctrines and the community of believers they encounter in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is perhaps the most challenging ministering effort a leader or member of the Church can undertake, and* Bridges *provides valuable insight into the process of disaffection as well as specific things that Church leaders and members can do to create a healthy environment for members to work through challenges to their faith. This review discusses those strengths of* Bridges *as a resource and also explores areas where the well-intentioned approaches discussed in the book can backfire, causing more harm than healing in a community of believing Latter-day Saints.*

In C. S. Lewis's masterful book *The Great Divorce,* a bus full of spirits travels from the dreariness of hell to the foothills of heaven, where each spirit is ministered to by heavenly guides. In one of the most interesting exchanges in the book, a heavenly spirit ministers to the spirit of an apostate Anglican bishop, with whom he shared friendship in mortality. The spirit's encouragements to believe are answered by the bishop with deconstructive, theoretical rejoinders that illustrate the bishop's cravings for intellectual abstraction over personal commitment. At one point, the bishop says of the theological opinions he taught in mortality:

> They were not only honest but heroic. I asserted them fearlessly. When the doctrine of the Resurrection ceased to

commend itself to the critical faculties which God had given me, I openly rejected it. I preached my famous sermon. I defied the whole chapter. I took every risk.[1]

The ministering spirit refutes the bishop's assertion, countering that there had been powerful social incentives in terms of prestige and fear of commitment for the bishop to hold and promote those skeptical views. The spirit steers the conversation to a specific choice he hopes the bishop will embrace:

We are not playing now. I have been talking of the past (your past and mine) only in order that you may turn from it forever. One wrench and the tooth will be out. You can begin as if nothing had ever gone wrong. White as snow. It's all true, you know. He is in me, for you, with that power. And — I have come a long journey to meet you. *You have seen Hell: you are in sight of Heaven. Will you, even now, repent and believe?*[2]

The idea that belief in the gospel message can be *chosen* is controversial. Some people seem born with the ability to believe, but restoration scripture also speaks of the ability to believe witness testimony as a gift (Doctrine and Covenants 46:14). However, if we feel inclined to view that gift as something allocated arbitrarily to mortals by divine whim, we are also told this and other spiritual gifts can be sought (D&C 46:8), with the qualifier that the seeking should be done "earnestly." To my mind, one of the most underappreciated phrases in the Book of Mormon's narratives of the nature of belief is Nephi's recollection in 1 Nephi 2:16 that "I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father …." We are not told of the duration of this process that culminated in Nephi's transition to belief, whether it was days, weeks, months, or an even more prolonged and iterative commitment.

What may be even more controversial is the idea that, as the ministering spirit in *The Great Divorce* indicated, belief can be the outgrowth of repentance. This assertion is deeply problematic if we view repentance only in terms of being the remedy for chosen sinful behavior. But if we adopt the proper biblical definition of repentance as "turning," or a reorientation of the soul, repentance is a wonderful term for the set of decisions and behaviors that enable a contrite soul to return to belief. My own experience and that of others I know who have returned

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 40–41.
2. Ibid., 42–43, emphasis added.

to belief in the restored gospel after a period of doubt shows a common set of decisions that constitute our repentance, including the following:

- Reorienting to a faith that is based primarily in Christ.
- Abandoning cynicism and voices of accusation and deconstruction.
- Adopting better-informed assumptions about gospel concepts.
- Embracing mystery.
- Taking responsibility for our Church experience.
- Giving serious, sustained attention to witness testimony that spans from antiquity to the present day.

The nonbelieving bishop in *The Great Divorce* had powerful social incentives to embrace nonbelief, and there are similarly powerful emotional and ideological incentives, such as painful reflection on the problem of evil or a sense of unfairness about unequal distribution of spiritual gifts and privileges. Conversely, however, there are powerful emotional incentives for belief, such as the pain of guilt or the hope that life's injustices will someday be remedied by a loving God. One of the most powerful incentives for belief is the sense that, as the apostate bishop's ministering spirit said, "You are in sight of heaven." In mortality, this statement can perhaps most be felt to be true when one is part of a loving, caring, courageous community of believers. Creating that community is the subject of David Ostler's new book *Bridges: Ministering to Those Who Question.*

Bridges is the latest in what is now a growing body of writings devoted to addressing the problem of faith crisis in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The problem of loss of faith is not unique to our faith community; as Ostler explains in his first chapter, it is a problem among many religious communities in our day and age. Ostler's book is narrow in scope, however; it is addressed specifically to Latter-day Saints who are tasked and called to minister to those in crisis, and the book avoids many of the questions and issues of assumptions and expectations addressed in books such as Terryl and Fiona Givens' *The Crucible of Doubt,* Patrick Mason's *Planted,* and Michael Ash's *Shaken Faith Syndrome.* Each of those books and many more talks and presentations that could be cited have contributed immensely to our ability to rethink and reframe the issues that lead to faith crisis. In writing *Bridges*, however, Ostler undertook the extraordinary task of exploring the interpersonal aspects of faith crisis and how family and

other relationships are affected by the kinds of dialogue we engage in as part of our response. Without training or any real-world experience in this kind of dialogue, many of us stumble and fumble our way through interaction with loved ones in faith crisis and often aggravate personal situations already deeply painful. This problem is the core of David's effort in writing *Bridges* and the substance of his current life's work.

I will state a few things at the outset of this review: first, I speak as one who experienced a deep and traumatic faith crisis years ago. I am fortunate to be able to say I have recovered my faith and am happier in my faith and more committed to the mission and doctrines of the Church than I ever was before. Second, my mission in life closely dovetails with that of David Ostler. Having experienced a faith crisis, I serve with a team of people with similar experiences to manage an online community where we try to minister to those in crisis by sharing our love and our personal lessons learned. David Ostler and I have become frequent lunch and conversation partners, and I respect him and feel honored to call him a friend. Finally, I highly recommend this book for any member of the Church looking to understand people in faith crisis and how to engage with them in meaningful ways. I will personally be looking for this book on the bookshelves of Church leaders whose homes I visit in the future, and if I do not find it, I will encourage them to acquire and study it.

I would love to see the day when a member of the Church in faith crisis anywhere in the world feels comfortable saying aloud in Church meetings, "I have come across some information, and I don't know how to process it. I used to feel secure in my faith, but now I don't. I'm hurting so deeply. Please help me." And the ward responds by embracing that member and lovingly ministering in effective ways over a period of years if necessary, until that member is healed and returns to belief with new resources to effectively minister to others.

This ideal scenario is not happening nearly as often as it should, and *Bridges* hopes to explain why and how to make it a reality in our congregations. In this review, I hope to highlight some of the valuable insights from *Bridges* and also to explain things I wish David had said. I hope to give fair and charitable voice to my primary concern about the book, which is its avoidance of issues that could cause well-intentioned ministering to backfire, having the effect of spreading faith crisis among members of the Church rather than healing them. I hope my criticisms will be seen as a productive springboard for the development

of additional resources that fill in the gaps many people will sense in their reading of *Bridges.*

The Research that Led to Bridges

Ostler explains his impetus for the writing of *Bridges* in the book's introduction, as he relates his experience of being assigned along with his wife to minister to single members in his stake. He explains that around 80% of the singles in his stake were not attending Church, and in a decision I personally found gratifying to read, the Ostlers sent out a survey to each nonattending single, simply asking why they were not attending (viii). Despite the relatively few responses received, the information resulting from the survey and another conducted in partnership with leadingsaints.org brought to light painful disconnects between the nonattending singles and their families and former community as well as perceptions of inadequate training and resources for Church leaders assigned to minister and care for these members (12).

Personal Stories

Bridges includes compelling examples of personal stories, beginning with Mike (6–9), a formerly believing member of the Church who lost his faith after gaining exposure to aspects of Church history he had been unaware of during his youth and his formative adolescent and mission years. Next, we read of Amanda (9–10), also a formerly believing returned missionary who lost her faith as her "doctrinal shelf" — the euphemism many of us use to describe the place in our hearts and minds where we place issues we have trouble understanding — came crashing down in adulthood.

Both of these stories carry a special, important extra element: the appreciation that they feel for a listening ear, someone they are comfortable talking with about their struggles.

Another commonality in these stories speaks to what I view to be a glaring weakness in many surveys of deconversion: both Mike and Amanda express their commitment in terms of things they zealously did and believed, like serving missions and in other callings and marrying in the temple. They also describe the strength of their former testimonies of the restored gospel, which begs the question: what does this person mean by *testimony*? Would *testimony* in cases like this be characterized as *assent to beliefs held by their community*? One of the things I often ask people in these kinds of conversations is some form of the question "Did you ever personally experience anything that showed you that God is involved in the work of the Church?" I ask this question in an effort to

clarify the person's conceptualization of the word *testimony*, in contrast to terms like *commitment* or *zeal* or *dedication*. If someone went through adolescence and mission years mistaking dedication (enthusiasm in meeting community expectations) for testimony (personal verification of the truthfulness of something, which occurs independently of other people), then he or she is approaching faith crisis with a vastly diminished set of resources compared to someone who has independent experiential verification of God's involvement in the work of the Church. This problem of definition means that some lifelong members think they are approaching their questioning from the pinnacle of awareness and perspective, when in fact what they bring to the challenge in terms of inner resources is less than that of many of our new converts.

Ostler offers some conclusions based on his conversations with these formerly believing members, explaining that difficult issues in Church history, lack of Church venues for discussion of these issues, and interpersonal challenges often combine to create formidable challenges to struggling members who are looking to rebuild their faith (11).

Societal Changes and the Role of Technology

Ostler proceeds to discuss generational changes in perspective and the role that technology has in giving the younger generation vastly more exposure to information. He reiterates the statement made by President M. Russell Ballard in February 2016:

> Gone are the days when a student asked an honest question and a teacher responded, "Don't worry about it!" Gone are the days when a student raised a sincere concern and a teacher bore his or her testimony as a response intended to avoid the issue. Gone are the days when students were protected from people who attacked the Church. Fortunately, the Lord provided this timely and timeless counsel to you teachers: "And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith." (24)

Ostler follows with his own summary of the challenge, that it can no longer be assumed that members of the Church looking for information will turn only to Church-approved materials or trust Church authorities as sources of information.

On a personal note, my view growing up in the 1980s and 1990s was that I did not need to delve too deeply into questions around Church

history or the nature of scripture. I trusted that if I ever had questions in those areas, I could turn to something written by either Hugh Nibley or Elder Bruce R. McConkie and have a quick answer at my disposal. In terms of epistemology (the ways we arrive at belief and knowledge), I had a very rudimentary authority-based epistemic framework based on complete trust in a few people I considered to be spiritual and scholarly experts in gospel issues.

What Ostler (and President Ballard) are trying to convey is the fragility and insufficiency of this approach in the Internet age, and they are doubtless correct. What I see as a missed opportunity in *Bridges* at this point is the fact that here Ostler could have explored what might constitute a mature and robust epistemic framework for Latter-day Saints. Elder D. Todd Christofferson made inroads in this effort in his April 2012 General Conference talk "The Doctrine of Christ," wherein he described the council-like convergence of scripture, revelation, and authority in the process of establishing Church doctrine.[3]

Specific Issues

The avoidance of questions of epistemology is a lamentable recurring issue in *Bridges*, as the book proceeds in Chapter 3 into a discussion of "Why People Leave." From Church history to LGBTQ policies and practices to gender roles to questions about leader revelation and more, the book explores a litany of reasons why people become frustrated with Church doctrines, teachings, and policies. Unstated is the fact that we as members of the Church determine for ourselves which sources of information (personal revelation, experience, scripture, witness testimony, intuition, and more) sit in council at our "epistemic table." We determine which sources are given priority in any given line of questioning and how we respond when our epistemic sources are operating in tension. Perhaps it is too much to expect for this issue to be explored in *Bridges,* but epistemology is critical for understanding why certain issues trouble some people but not others. In my own ministering, I strongly encourage questioners to go through the exercise of defining their epistemic framework before approaching an issue, including explaining to themselves the strengths and weaknesses of each mode of inquiry in relationship to the question at hand. This is vastly more likely to result in the desired outcome of the questioner approaching the issue

---

3. D. Todd Christofferson, "The Doctrine of Christ," *Ensign*, April 1, 2012, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2012/05/sunday-morning-session/the-doctrine-of-christ.html?lang=eng#title1.

with the epistemic humility that a difficult and complex issue requires. In fairness to Ostler, I know of no book-length treatment of Latter-day Saint epistemology in existence, and this is a woeful gap in our resources as a community of believers.

In Chapter 4, Ostler discusses strategies for confronting challenges to faith, and this is an area of the book that shines. He recommends that members study Church history head on, including the difficult issues. In this area, Ostler and I probably share a wish to see basic concepts of historiography introduced to members of the Church of all ages. The ability to recognize that historians make choices in development of their historical narratives and inevitably bring their own world view and presuppositions to their craft would be an immeasurable help as members browse the Internet and encounter voices arriving at wildly divergent narratives using the same data.

Where Ostler encourages frank discussions of even less-inspiring aspects of Church history (47–50), I would go further and say we should teach why it is important to discuss our history in this way. We should see the sins, failures, and stumbles in our history as valuable teaching tools and also as correctives against our tendencies toward idolatry. Richard Rohr's discussion of the Old Testament is useful for illustrating this principle:

> The Jewish people, in a sense against all odds and expectations, kept their complaining and avoiding, kept their arrogant and evil kings and their very critical prophets inside of their Bible. They read about them publicly and still do, and we read them also. These are passages that didn't tell the Jewish people how wonderful they were, but told them how terrible they were!

> What you have built into the Hebrew Bible and strongly expressed by Jesus and the prophets is *the capacity for self-critical thinking. It is the first step beyond the dualistic mind and teaches us patience with ambiguity and mystery…*

> The Jewish and Christian religions always have the power to correct themselves from inside because of these kinds of sacred texts.

> This is quite rare in the history of religion. This is the self-criticism necessary to keep religion from its natural tendency toward arrogant self-assurance. It undercuts the possibility of any long-lasting group idolatry, even though it also deteriorates into cynicism, skepticism and post-modernism.

> The Jewish people possessed an uncommon power to stand their ground, with God alone, before negative realities. That's

quite the opposite of what we often have today, which can feel like "making a religion out of your better moments." *They made a religion out of their worst moments, which is probably why they have lasted so strongly to this day, even after the Holocaust.*[4]

One of the prominent subjects in Chapter 4 is an encouragement to "Focus on the Savior Jesus Christ" (50–52), and I wholeheartedly agree with this advice. I wish this had been an integral part of Ostler's analysis from the beginning, as a question for his interview subjects. Latter-day Saint historian Richard Bushman has spent remarkable amounts of time ministering to people in faith crisis, and in several recent interviews, he has stated that the question of a person's perception of Jesus Christ is now the only question he will explore with people who come to him in crisis:

> People will often come to me when there's a son-in-law on the verge of leaving the Church and they are hoping that I can say something that will turn him around. I've decided after a decade of doing this that I can't. There's no argument that I can give. If I try to argue with them it goes nowhere. It's like Bible bashing in the mission field. It never gets anywhere.

> So I don't do much of that. I agree with the facts of what people say, all those things did happen, so I don't confute those things. What I wanted them to see at first was there might be another possible way of looking at them, that you don't have to see them as damning. But now I think more about these people's person's lives, and what those lives are going to be like if they leave the Church. How are they going to fill that hole, mend the relationships with their spouse or their mother, or someone or other? And how do they sort of complete their personal lives?

> So my most common question nowadays is "How do you feel about Jesus Christ?" If they say, "He means everything to me," I say, "You're gonna be alright. Don't worry about all this other stuff. Fiddle with it if you'd like, and worry about it, but if you can hold onto Jesus Christ you'll be okay."[5]

---

4. Rohr, Richard. *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*. (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007), 18–19, emphasis added.

5. Blair Hodges and Richard Bushman, "To Be Learned is Good," January 23, 2018, in *MIPodcast*, https://mi.byu.edu/mip-75-bushman/.

As a reminder of the centrality of Jesus Christ in the restoration, and the consequences of relegating Jesus Christ to a peripheral role in our focus, consider this warning from then-Elder Dallin H. Oaks at Brigham Young University in 1993:

> A few years ago I received a letter from a man who said he had attended an LDS testimony meeting and listened to seventeen testimonies without hearing the Savior mentioned or referred to in any way. He also wrote that the following Sunday he listened to a priesthood lesson, a Gospel Doctrine lesson, and seven sacrament meeting speakers without hearing any reference to Jesus Christ (see "Witnesses of Christ," *Ensign*, November 1990, p. 30). Some may have considered that report an exaggeration or an extreme case. The similar accounts I have received in subsequent letters persuade me that this was not an isolated experience. In too many of our classes, in too many of our worship services, we are not teaching of Christ and testifying of Christ in the way we should.[6]

It may be that many of our contemporary challenges with faith crises have roots in our past failures as a people to make Jesus Christ the center of our faith. I regret to say that I can speak from personal experience that for many years of my life, my Church activity has been oriented around things other than Christ. Programs, ideas, personalities, questions, and even the community we call "The Body of Christ" can sometimes serve as mental and spiritual distractions from serious engagement with the reality of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Key to my emergence from the faith crisis experience has been my personal reorientation to Christ-centered faith, and Ostler articulates this well:

> Church programs and leaders are not an end unto themselves. They are meant to help us come unto Christ by teaching and enabling us to love and serve others as he did. Our regard of and confidence in our leaders, past and present, and the institution of the Church are not the destination. They are the means whereby discipleship and our journey to be healed and become more Christlike begins. (53)

In discussing the centrality of Christ, I would add that our teaching of the reality of Christ should include very thorough and compelling

---

6. "Another Testament of Jesus Christ" Dallin H. Oaks, BYU Speeches, June 6, 1993, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/dallin-h-oaks-another-testament-jesus-christ/.

explorations of grace. The ability to personally internalize the power of God's grace enables us to extend it to the community of believers around us as well as Church leaders past and present. This is a tremendous asset in our effort to transcend critics' relentless focus on the sins and failings of members of the Church. Similarly, the ability to extend grace to critics of the Church by looking at their behavior in the most generous terms possible enables believers to avoid being consumed with anger and a spirit of contention.

Ostler follows his admonition to re-center our teachings in Christ with discussions of the importance of keeping realistic expectations for leaders, being cautious about what we claim to be religious truth, holding to things we know, and embracing ambiguity. All these areas of discussion constitute wise counsel, and as evidenced by the quotes used to support this section, these are common elements of advice offered by those of us involved in ministry to people in faith crisis.

Evolution of Faith

Chapter 5 of *Bridges* discusses evolution of faith and relates the author's personal evolution over time toward a more universal and inclusive faith, using Fowler's stages of faith as a model for reference. While Fowler's stages are an important and useful tool in depicting transition to deeper and more mature faith, they also stand as a problematic map to a model of idealized faith that does not actually believe in any distinguishing doctrines. Many progressive-minded members of the Church gravitate toward this model, as its culminating stage 6 dispenses with hierarchies, exclusive claims to any kind of authority, and any notions of non-egalitarian theology. If a progressive-leaning member of the Church in faith crisis is offended by the Church's claims to exclusive authority to perform certain ordinances, for example, this person will see in Fowler stage 6 an ideal of transcendence over these and any other beliefs that might cause anyone to feel excluded.

This becomes especially problematic when people portray Jesus Christ as an exemplar of Fowler level 6, as if he had not lived as a devout adherent to the very exclusive and demanding religion of second temple Judaism. In a perverse misunderstanding of the life and mission of Christ, many members in faith crisis mentally flee to a liberal caricature of a Christ whose beliefs conformed to modern liberal sensibilities and who did not see his own religion as having any particular salvific value relative to the religions of Israel's neighbors. When Latter-day Saints in faith crisis express a continued belief in Christ, we would do well to help them understand that the same kinds of questions around historical narrative

and the provenance of scripture used to deconstruct faith in the restored gospel could be used to deconstruct the religion Jesus adhered to and loved. In fact, critical biblical scholarship has been engaged in this process of deconstruction of biblical religious narratives for centuries. Yet Jesus and other enlightened individuals we read of in the New Testament thrived in second temple Judaism, and Jesus on multiple occasions expressed his view that his religious system was authoritative and binding. Turning to Jesus in order to flee what one might view as conservative religious ideas and praxis is a fundamentally ill-informed undertaking.

Even though Fowler's stages are flawed and often misused, the basic reality underlying the Fowler model — the idea that faith can progress and evolve through stages over a lifetime — is immensely useful. Ostler is to be commended for putting forth a model that enables struggling members to remove the element of shame from their transition back to faith. Ostler is also to be commended for recognizing that major changes to one's paradigm are not necessary for everyone to enjoy a fulfilling life of faith:

> Many Latter-day Saint adults stay in stage 3 their entire adult lives, having firm confidence in the Church and its leaders. Their faith is meaningful, rich, and vibrant — it defines their lives. For these individuals, their sure faith remains constant, and they can incorporate life experiences and challenges into their existing framework that was formed when they were young. (67)

Trust, Belonging, and Meaning

In chapter 6 of *Bridges*, Ostler discusses three concepts that he views as important for drawing people into continuous fulfilling activity in the Church:

- *Trust* is framed in terms of members' sense of confidence that their concerns will be handled appropriately by leaders.

- *Belonging* is our ability as a community to enable people to feel accepted as they are.

- *Meaning* is presented as the core purposes expressed in our teachings and praxis, and their relevance to members of our community.

Discussing each of these concepts often leads regrettably to tired questions of orthodoxy versus heterodoxy, and boundary maintenance versus inclusion. In my personal conversations with David Ostler,

I have expressed a desire to see these issues reframed in terms of mutual obligations and opportunities. *Bridges* does a wonderful service in helping leaders understand the importance of mature responses to people whose experiences, faith, or confidence in Church doctrines may not be at a level that enables them to relate to members around them in Church environments. In this chapter and the subsequent section on ministering, Ostler discusses the importance of non-judgmental responses to questions, sincere listening in difficult conversations, and avoiding temptations to label and to issue solutions that do not meet the person where they are.

These are all incredibly important concepts for ministering, and I would suggest that the reason they are not happening as widely as we might hope is they are extremely difficult in practice. And as both David Ostler and I are well aware, one of the tragic consequences of people's attempts to minister to members in faith crisis is loss of faith among those sent to minister. Faith crisis is inherently contagious, and until the underlying reasons for that are addressed, Ostler's lofty and important vision for ministering will never be adopted as widely as it could and should be. Without a sense of mutual obligations — as opposed to placing the burden of understanding and accommodating entirely on either the questioner or the community of believers — the efforts of leaders and others called to minister will backfire in ways that will likely lead to *less* of the loving inclusivity and vulnerability envisioned in *Bridges*. This problem and some proposed solutions are what I hope to convey in the remainder of this review.

Understanding the Member in Crisis

Bridges is a wonderful resource for teaching concepts of listening and empathy for people (unfortunately, like myself) for whom those skills do not come naturally. One of the great challenges I wish *Bridges* had addressed is the fact that many people with exceptional skills at listening and empathy have already been sent to minister to loved ones in faith crisis, and the outcome of their ministering has been their own loss of faith. This was documented well in the aforementioned example of Mike, whose ministry to his own brother set him on the course of nonbelief. Why? To answer that question, we need to have a very honest and sometimes uncomfortable conversation about the mental, emotional, and spiritual resources that members bring with them to their questioning.

Epistemology

Epistemology is, to my mind, the most undervalued concept in our discussions about gospel questioning. The ability to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of various sources of truth such as scripture, authorities, scholarship, personal revelation, witness testimony, and intuition, and how those sources can effectively interact to produce confidence — or lack of confidence — in a given proposition is an essential foundational skill in developing a robust faith that can withstand the debate orientation and deconstructive accusatory tactics employed in most criticism of the core doctrines of the Church. A person ministering to a member in crisis is very likely to encounter questions beginning with the phrase "How do you reconcile …" followed by some combination of commonly-employed criticisms and accusations:

- … the discrepancy between restoration scripture and the views of critical biblical scholars.

- … errors or anachronisms in scripture.

- … revisions to, or reversals of, prophetic teachings and directives.

- … discrepancies between Church historical narratives presented in various venues in the past, and narratives officially offered now in the Gospel Topics Essays.

If the ministering member personally operates with an overly simplistic, authority-based epistemic framework, these questions might be devastating, as they were in the case of Mike and as they have been for numerous other people. Lack of understanding of epistemology is what I would regard as one of the two greatest factors that contribute to the contagiousness of faith crisis. Terryl Givens addressed a key aspect of scholarly epistemology in the 2017 Bushman Colloquium at BYU:

> Prejudice, predisposition, or a ground of judgment is the provocation that invites challenge and rebuttal in any discursive community. We are no blank slate, and any attempt to emulate one is both self-deceptive and dangerous. The illusion of a neutral ground from which intellectual inquiry proceeds is a relic of Enlightenment optimism. We don't need to be postmoderns to recognize that, as Nietzsche observed wryly, only "the animal lives unhistorically." Not only are we

situated in history and in culture, but our history and our culture are always ineradicably situated in us.[7]

Truly, as Givens asserts, "We are no blank slate." The struggling member, the minister, and all their sources of information are operating with definable epistemic frameworks. Understanding this enables the minister and struggling member to be very judicious in topics of conversation because conversation undertaken from different epistemic frameworks is fruitless, allowing people only to talk past each other. In practical application, it is impossible to understand members' devotion to the work of the Church of Jesus Christ without embracing the witness testimony that is the core of Latter-day Saint epistemology and the beating heart of our religious community, from the First Vision to the Kirtland Temple dedication to the present-day manifestations confirming and validating the work of the Church. If a conversation partner is not willing to, at a minimum, be open to the validity of witness testimony in the work of the Church, then the number of gospel-related conversations I can have with that individual narrows almost to nil. For that reason, *declining to talk about the gospel* is sometimes the wisest approach in our ministering. We can be friends and have genuinely loving, caring relationships, but our productive conversations can happen only where we either share a common epistemic framework or are willing to suspend our non-shared epistemic commitments. This is likely possible in areas like sports, music, cuisine, or any number of other subjects, but not gospel teachings and praxis.

Forthright acknowledgement of our different epistemic commitments in matters of faith enables loving relationships to flourish around other areas of life where we can operate from a common perspective, and this emphasis on the importance of relationships is one of the salient themes in *Bridges*.

Vertical and Horizontal Faith

Students of religion often speak of religious systems as having vertical (God-oriented) and horizontal (people- or community-oriented) elements. Every Latter-day Saint and every person whom we minister to has some combination of vertical and horizontal dimensions to his or her faith. A person with a strong vertical orientation to faith may have that orientation due to transcendent spiritual experiences or perhaps

---

7. Terryl Givens, "The Poetics of Prejudice," in J. Spencer Fluhman, Kathleen Flake, and Jed Woodworth, eds., *To Be Learned Is Good: Essays on Faith and Scholarship in Honor of Richard Lyman Bushman* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2017), 23.

just a deep and life-orienting hope in a conceptualization of God's final justice and mercy. A person with this strong vertical orientation is likely to be prone to faith crisis that stems from experience with the problem of evil or from questions around the provenance of scripture that informs that person's hope and trust in a loving and fair God.

By contrast, a person with a strong horizontal orientation is likely to experience faith crisis in response to interpersonal problems in the community that person loves, such as instances of abuse or other disturbing behavior by the people around him or her. A person whose orientation is entirely horizontal, lacking any authentic vertical dimension, is prone to deep disillusionment if the community of believers fails to measure up to that person's ideals or is incapable of conferring those senses of trust, belonging, and meaning that Ostler describes in *Bridges*.

The ideal Church experience cultivates a balance of vertical and horizontal orientation. With a healthy balance between the two orientations, a believer experiencing a period of disillusionment in his or her relationship with God can draw strength from a relationship with the community, and the reverse is also true. Samuel Brown beautifully explained the practical application of this principle in a discussion of the impact of mental health on one's relationship with God:

> One of the many reasons that mental illness can be so devastating is that it interferes with the connection we have with God. Mental illness can destroy our emotional and spiritual senses. These are the times when the Church can be overwhelmingly important in our lives. People who love us — who are willing to reassure us, to pray with us, to walk the road with us — can bring the Holy Ghost to us. They can hold the Spirit for us, in trust, while we struggle, watchfully and patiently waiting for the time when we are ready to receive it again.

> We often remind our adolescents and young adults that they will need to stand on their own, that they will need a testimony that can withstand separation from their parents. And it's true that our attachment to Church and gospel must be stronger than the vagaries of young adulthood. There must be within us something more than just conformity to whatever people around us say. But we must not believe that our walk of faith is solitary. We must be able to experience commitment to true principles and to the people of Zion that can resist mocking voices or temptations of the flesh. But we should not thereby forget that God and the Holy Ghost generally speak to us in

the context of our relationships with the saints. Our lives are deeply blessed by the people who carry the Spirit to us at times of great sadness or anxiety.[8]

Bridges contains stories of disaffection that are rooted in both vertical and horizontal factors in people's Church experiences. One of the things I wish the book had addressed is the importance of understanding this aspect of the spiritual perspective of both the minister and the struggling member. For example, if the individual assigned to minister has a very strong horizontal orientation and the struggling member has a strong vertical orientation, it is very unlikely, as in the case of conflicting epistemology, that they will be able to do anything other than talk past each other in discussions of faith. A leader should have a sense of this aspect of people's faith when planning for ministering.

Barriers to Ministry: Cynicism, Deconstruction, and Committed Nonbelief

Cynicism is an attitude of suspicion and negativity toward the motives of other people. When someone has grown cynical toward the Church, they attribute the worst of intentions to the Church, its leaders, and its members from the beginning of the restoration to the present.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said of cynicism:

> It is only the cynic who claims "to speak the truth" at all times and in all places to all men in the same way, but who, in fact, displays nothing but a lifeless image of the truth. He dons the halo of the fanatical devotee of truth who can make no allowance for human weaknesses; but, in fact, he is destroying the living truth between men. He wounds shame, desecrates mystery, breaks confidence, betrays the community in which he lives, and laughs arrogantly at the devastation he has wrought and at the human weakness which "cannot bear the truth." He says truth is destructive and demands its victims, and he feels like a god above these feeble creatures and does not know that he is serving Satan.[9]

8. Samuel M. Brown, *First Principles and Ordinances* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2014) 123–24.

9. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "What Does it Mean to Tell the Truth?" in *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Michael Dejonge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 754.

Having gone through a period of years of cynicism myself, I can say from experience that it is extremely difficult to minister to people who are cynical, as they are likely to attribute ulterior motives to people sincerely trying to help them. Every misstep by a minister or other member is taken to be evidence of the general corruption and irredeemable flaws of the institutional Church. Ministers to cynical people should understand that the cynical person is engaging in a form of self-protection from events viewed as negative, such as changes in Church policy or corrections to our understanding of Church history or doctrines. The late Rachel Held Evans offered this profound insight on cynicism in the process of rebuilding her faith:

> [W]hat I'm learning this time around, as I process my frustration and disappointment and as I catch those first ribbons of dawn's light on the horizon, is that I can't begin to heal until I've acknowledged my pain, and I can't acknowledge my pain until I've kicked my dependence on cynicism.
>
> Cynicism is a powerful anesthetic we use to numb ourselves to pain, but which also, by nature, numbs us to truth and joy. Grief is healthy. Even anger can be healthy. But numbing ourselves with cynicism in an effort to avoid feeling those things is not.
>
> When I write off all evangelicals as hateful and ignorant, I am numbing myself with cynicism…. When I roll my eyes and fold my arms and say, "Well, I know God can't be present over there, " I am numbing myself with cynicism.
>
> And I am missing out. I am missing out on a God who surprises us by showing up where we don't think God belongs…. Cynicism may help us create simpler storylines with good guys and bad guys, but it doesn't make us any better at telling the truth, which is that most of us are a frightening mix of good and evil, sinner and saint.[10]

Deconstruction is the process of "taking apart" a belief. Many of the Church's detractors hold up deconstruction as a tool for arriving at the truth, and to facilitate deconstruction, they put forward alternative naturalistic narratives to sacred history and voluminous accusations that they know the hearer cannot answer.

---

10. Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 222.

Latter-day Saints should be aware that, contrary to detractors' assertions, deconstruction applies to true propositions as well as false ones. A stark example is the frequent loss of faith in a round Earth among people who stumble onto flat-Earth evangelism in their perusing of videos on YouTube. A BBC investigation summarizes the phenomenon:

> All around the world, there are conspiracy theorists who believe the Earth is flat. And their community seems to be growing, judging by attendance at flat Earth conferences and events.
>
> Flat Earthers say YouTube was key in helping them spread their message. One researcher found that of attendees at a flat-Earth conference, nearly all said they first came to the idea through the video-sharing platform.[11]

In the case of both flat-Earth teachings and faith crisis, a very effective mode of deconstruction of true beliefs is immersion in sources that voice assertions and accusations at a greater volume than the hearer is able to answer. If a member has embraced detractors' false characterization of deconstruction as the most reliable tool for arriving at the truth, a minister unaware of the nature of deconstruction might be in danger of being overwhelmed by assertions and accusations communicated by the disaffected member during a ministering visit.

Committed Nonbelief is a term I use to describe the decision of some members to maintain nonbelief in core restoration doctrines as a viable permanent intellectual posture in the Church while also desiring to enjoy full participation with the community of believers. Committed nonbelievers often reject the angry and outrage-fueled antics of the Church's vocal detractors and do the Church an immense service in helping to steer people in faith crisis out of anger and into a frame of mind that allows for appreciation of the real benefits that come from participation in the community of believers.

Where this mindset perhaps affects the community of believers most adversely is in its reinterpretation or outright rejection of witness testimony — testimony that is one of the primary forces that binds together the community of believers. Since much of Latter-day Saint witness testimony supports claims to exclusive priesthood authority (particularly in the experiences and manifestations that accompany our temple ordinances), the widespread adoption and promotion of nonbelief

---

11. Marco Silva, "Flat Earth: How did YouTube help spread a conspiracy theory?" July 18, 2019, video, https://www.bbc.com/news/av/stories-49021903/flat-earth-how-did-youtube-help-spread-a-conspiracy-theory.

among Church members would serve to undermine core aspects of Latter-day Saint community identity. To illustrate this problem, I offer the following witness testimony related by a woman named Sheera in Laura Rutter Strickling's wonderful *On Fire in Baltimore*:

> After my mom died I would dream about her all the time, but I could never see her face. And every time I would dream, she was in a wheelchair or sick in bed. I would see her three times a week, and this was sad for me. I dreamed like that for two years, and I was grieving, oh, I was grieving! So Laura, when I finally got to go to the temple to do the baptisms for her — now I guess people think I'm making this stuff up, but I tell you, this is the honest truth — after I did the temple work for my mother, I dreamed about her and she wasn't sick anymore. I could see her face, and she wasn't in a wheelchair. And me and her was being together, you know, just doing things together.[12]

This story is an excellent example of why Latter-day Saints believe our temple work is of significant ontological value, as it shows a member of the Church receiving knowledge by revelation that temple ordinances have the ability to bring the healing power of the atonement of Christ to spirits in the next life. Imagine, for example, if one of Sheera's ward members were to voice nonbelief in the value of temple worship, or to express a belief that temple worship has no value other than a bonding exercise for the community. If ward members no longer have the confidence that their testimonies will be believed by the people around them, or if they expect that the ontological value of their testimonies will be diluted in the service of other ideological commitments, then that ward has ceased to be a community of believers. Moreover, this scenario raises the larger issue of creating spaces at Church to voice nonbelief and rejection of the Church's core doctrines: people who express a longing for this kind of dialogue in official Church spaces (87) also bear the responsibility for articulating what that would look like in practice, and where lines of propriety should be drawn.

Some nonbelieving members demonstrate an admirable sensitivity toward the cohesiveness of the community of believers they interact with at Church, and in that spirit they sometimes engage in private semantic redefinition of concepts in order to maintain comfortable participation

---

12. Laura Rutter Strickling, *On Fire in Baltimore: Black Mormon Women and Conversion in a Raging City*. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2018), 79.

with the community[13] and avoid disrupting the normal group dynamics of the believers around them. Temple worship is an area of Latter-day Saint faith where belief in the core doctrines of the Church is paramount. President Gordon B. Hinckley said of temple worship:

> I fear that some people are granted temple recommends before they are really prepared for them. I feel that sometimes we unduly rush people to the temple. Converts and those who have recently come into activity need a substantial measure of maturity in the Church.…

> As you know, it is expected that everyone who applies for a temple recommend will be asked certain specific questions to determine his or her worthiness. It goes without saying that there must be total honesty on the part of those who are interrogated.…

> Most important, and above all other qualifications, is the certain knowledge on the part of a recommend holder that God our Eternal Father lives, that Jesus Christ is the living Son of the living God, and that this is their sacred and divine work.…

> I know it is difficult for a bishop to deny a recommend to someone who is in his ward and who may be on the borderline with reference to personal behavior. Such denial may be offensive to the applicant. But he or she should know that unless there is true worthiness, there will be no blessing gained, and condemnation will fall upon the head of him or her who unworthily crosses the threshold of the House of God.[14]

Temple recommend interviews are an example of the importance of members interacting with each other and with Church leaders in an authentic way. If ward members are always suspicious of each other's ability to operate with common definitions of terms, for example, how much authentic gospel conversation can take place at the ward level, and therefore, in what sense is that ward a community?

My own view, based upon personal observation, is that the Church is capable of accommodating a wide range of interpretations of many concepts as well as a wide range of levels of belief. But for members to accept and normalize nonbelief in the Church's core doctrines is not desirable,

---

13. "Temple Recommend Questions," *LDS Church is True* (blog), November 6, 2017, https://www.Churchistrue.com/temple-recommend-questions/.

14. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Keeping the Temple Holy," *Ensign*, April 7, 1990, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1990/05/keeping-the-temple-holy?lang=eng.

nor is it possible in light of the witness testimony in our community. I and others who through experience can bear personal witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ, for example, cannot with integrity embrace a naturalistic, mythical, or pantheistic conceptualization of Christ in lieu of the Church's standard articulated in *The Living Christ*.[15] The missionary experiences of Church members and the temple experiences that validate our bringing people of other faiths into post-mortal institutional membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, similarly cannot be reconciled with naturalistic and pantheistic ideological commitments. As with the spirit ministering to the unbelieving bishop in *The Great Divorce*, a leader with stewardship over a nonbelieving member should not lower his or her hopes to the level of mere spiritual détente. Leaders should hope and strive for nothing less than that the member will "repent, and believe." As discussed in *Bridges*, the leader should actively work to create a ward environment where members feel they are "in sight of Heaven," where a nonbelieving member's doubt is met with kindness, compassion, fasting, service, and other loving interactions that can sustain the nonbeliever through what may be years and possibly even decades of personal reorientation of the soul.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I reiterate my recommendation of *Bridges* as a resource for leaders who are wondering how to minister to people who are questioning the core doctrines of the Church. The book's vision of inclusiveness, its practical tips for mature engagement with people outside the norm in our faith community, and its encouragement to get outside our comfort zones and listen to people's pain are welcome counsel that, if followed, would likely result in healed relationships and miracles.

Believing and nonbelieving members often engage in volatile and unproductive arguments over "boundary maintenance," when it would be much more helpful to transition to a discussion of shared obligations and opportunities. If *Bridges* is a good articulation of the obligations and opportunities of the leader and minister, then it is critically important to also articulate the obligations and opportunities of the person receiving the minister's heartfelt best effort. In situations where a questioning member is willing or eager to engage in gospel conversation, I would strongly

---

15. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Living Christ," January 1, 2000, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2000/04/the-living-christ-the-testimony-of-the-apostles-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints?lang=eng.

encourage leaders to ensure common awareness and understanding in the areas of epistemology and vertical/horizontal faith orientation. For the sake of the minister, it is essential to secure shared commitment not to engage in cynical or deconstructive messaging. In the ward environment, committed nonbelievers should resolve to utilize commonly-understood definitions of core gospel concepts, rather than obfuscating with semantics in order to maintain a facade of commonality of belief.

My misgivings about *Bridges* have to do with things the book did not include, and I further wish the book had expressed some hope that for some people in faith crisis, a return to full belief in the core doctrines of the Church is possible. I and many others stand as witnesses that this is possible without compromising intellectual and spiritual integrity. Sometimes "less is more," as envisioned with Ostler's emphasis on pure listening; sometimes, however, "more is more" and we can create environments and provide resources that help people return to faith. Much work remains to be done in getting tools and resources to where ministers need them and in helping members of the Church to develop and mature in our approaches to faith. I applaud my friend David Ostler's fine contribution to this effort.

I close with a poem written by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn as he reflected upon his return to faith. His return came about not by accounting for every possible counterargument and criticism in a way that would satisfy his prodigious intellect; it came through the contemplation and the reorientation of soul that he experienced in one of Stalin's gulags:

> When was it that I completely
> Scattered the good seeds, one and all?
> For after all I spent my boyhood
> In the bright singing of Thy temples.
> Bookish subtleties sparkled brightly,
>
> Piercing my arrogant brain,
> The secrets of the world were ... in my grasp,
> Life's destiny ... as pliable as wax.
>
> Blood seethed — and every swirl
> Gleamed iridescently before me,
> Without a rumble the building of my faith
> Quietly crumbled within my heart.
>
> But passing here between being and nothingness,
> Stumbling and clutching at the edge,

> I look behind me with a grateful tremor
> Upon the life that I have lived.
>
> Not with good judgment nor with desire
> Are its twists and turns illumined.
> But with the even glow of the Higher Meaning
> Which became apparent to me only later on.
>
> And now with measuring cup returned to me,
> Scooping up the living water,
> ***God of the Universe! I believe again!***
> ***Though I renounced You, You were with me!***[16]

Daniel Ellsworth *is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Born near Los Angeles in Southern California, Dan served a mission to Brazil, then graduated with a BA in international studies from BYU. He currently works as a technology consultant in the Charlottesville, Virginia, area and has a strong interest in biblical studies and gospel teaching. Married with two children, Dan serves in the bishopric in his ward. Along with his wife Julee, Dan serves on the Donor Council for the Richard Lyman Bushman Chair of Mormon Studies at the University of Virginia.*

---

16. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: an experiment in literary investigation*, vol. 2 (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 614–15, emphasis added.

The Role and Purpose of Synagogues in the Days of Jesus and Paul

Taylor Halverson

Abstract: *This article explores why Jesus so often healed in synagogues. By comparing the uses and purposes of Diaspora and Palestinian synagogues, this article argues that synagogues functioned as a hostel or community center of sorts in ancient Jewish society. That is, those needing healing would seek out such services and resources at the synagogue.*

What were synagogues like in Palestine[1] during the time of Jesus? What were synagogues like in the Roman world during the time of Paul? Why is the synagogue a place where people can be healed? Why does Jesus do so much healing at the synagogue? Why not do the healings elsewhere? This article explores why Jesus so often healed in synagogues.

A careful reading of the New Testament suggests that synagogues played an important role in the ministries of Jesus and Paul. Synagogues provided the contextual backdrop for Jesus's stunning Messianic announcement and his acts of healing and teaching. For Paul, synagogues constituted a staging ground for preaching the gospel message and may have been a place of lodging when first arriving to town. Hence, understanding more fully the physical configuration and social purpose of ancient Palestinian and Diaspora synagogues will provide contextual meaning of synagogical references in the New Testament, specifically why Jesus healed at synagogues.

---

1. My use of the words "Palestine" or "Palestinian" are not technically accurate since the area we call Palestine was only so named by the Romans after the time of Jesus. However, for ease of communication, I use that phrase because most readers recognize that Palestine refers, roughly, to the geographical area of ancient Israel, such as it was used in the document "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Jesus and Palestinian Synagogues

When we think of Judaism, synagogues are a natural component. Though we may have a general familiarity with these Jewish houses of worship as they exist in our own day, the picture in Jesus's day was quite different.[2]

Throughout the Gospels we hear stories of Jesus entering into synagogues to read scriptures, to teach, and to heal. Indeed, the Gospel of Mark records that Jesus's first act after making the announcement of his missionary purpose[3] was to go to the synagogue to teach and to heal (see Mark 1:21-27). Similarly, the Gospel of Luke teaches that Jesus first revealed his divine mission while at a synagogue after reading a passage from Isaiah. Because the synagogues were central to Jewish community life during the time of Jesus and during the time of the synoptic writers, we see the gospel writers share a variety of crucial stories about Jesus that are situated at the synagogue. Given the prominence of synagogues in the world of Jesus, we would do well to learn more about them.

Studying synagogues in first century Palestine (or in the first century Diaspora, for that matter) is not a simple and straightforward undertaking. Though the institution today is synonymous with Judaism and has been for more than 1800 years, the available evidence on first century Palestinian synagogues is not abundant. Nevertheless, we do have sufficient evidence about ancient synagogues to paint an intriguing and valuable contextual picture through which we can enhance our understanding of Jesus's activities associated with them. Even though the temple was the focal point of Jewish religious life during the time of Jesus, synagogues played an essential role in Jewish communities and an important role in the lives of Jews who lived in gentile communities.

Before we turn our eyes to the first century evidence on synagogues, it may be helpful to consider what we know about the origins of synagogues prior to the time of Jesus.[4] This question entails a definition of the word

---

2. The best and most recent work on ancient synagogues is Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

3. According to Mark 1:14-15, Jesus's message consisted of a proclamation that the Kingdom of God is near, therefore repent and believe.

4. Joseph Gutman, ed., *Ancient Synagogues: The State of Research* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981); Lee I. Levine, ed., *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1981); Anders Runesson, *The Origin of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study* (Stockholm, SWE: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001); Birger Olsson and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins until 200 C.E.: Papers Presented at an International Conference at Lund University, October 14-17, 2001* (Stockholm, SWE: Almqvist & Wiksell

synagogue. "Synagogue" is formed from the Greek word *ago* (to lead, bring along) and the preposition *sun-* (together). When these two words are combined, they create the word "synagogue," which in its technical sense means "to gather in, collect, assemble." In Greek literature, "synagogue" refers to a gathering of things (e.g., boats, produce, ideas, etc.) or people (e.g., an assembly or meeting). What is important to recognize here is that "synagogue" in its earliest usages did *not* refer to a physical location, especially not to a building. In fact, it was as a result of the gathering of Jews into assemblies, for which purposes they only later built structures, that the word "synagogue" eventually evolved from indicating the act of gathering together to referencing the physical location or building where the gathering took place.[5] Though the Jerusalem temple, before the Romans destroyed it, was the major focal point of Jewish religious life, synagogues functioned as community centers that could support the spiritual and physical needs of those in the community.

The earliest evidence we have of synagogues is from inscriptional references in Egypt from the second and third century BCE.[6] Now, these assemblies were not always necessarily for religious purposes. In fact, at this early period, the term *synagogue* referred to a gathering for the purpose of conducting community or public affairs. Centuries later the primary purpose of synagogues centered on religious activities. Originally, synagogues were multi-purpose public community gatherings.[7]

International, 2003); Howard Clark Kee and Lynn H. Cohick, eds., *Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

5. E. Jan Wilson, "The Masada Synagogue and Its Relationship to Jewish Worship during the Second Temple Period," in *Masada and the World of the New Testament*, eds. John W. Welch and John F. Hall (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1997), 269-76.

6. J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Egypt and the Rise of the Synagogue," in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical and Archaeological Discovery*, eds. Dan Urman and Paul V. M. Flesher (Leiden, NLD: Brill, 1995), 3-16.

7. Mordechai Aviam and William Scott Green, "The Ancient Synagogue: Public Space in Judaism," *Judaism from Moses to Muhammad: An Interpretation*, eds. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Alan J. Avery-Peck (Leiden, NLD: Brill, 2005), 183-200; Zeev Safrai, "The Communal Functions of the Synagogues in The Land of Israel in the Rabbinic Period," in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical and Archaeological Discovery*, eds. Dan Urman and Paul V. M. Flesher (Leiden, NLD: Brill, 1995), 181-204. Intriguingly, Philip A. Harland argues that ancient synagogues in the Roman Empire served an analogous social role for Jews as did "guilds, or 'associations' (*koina, synodoi, thiasoi, mystai, phratores, synergasiai, collegia*)" (p. 2) for non-Jews. Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and*

Fortuitously, physical evidence of Palestinian synagogues near the time of Jesus exists.[8] Four locations in Palestine present unmistakable archaeological evidence that they once contained a first century Jewish synagogue: Jerusalem, Gamla (in the Galilee), Masada (the Herodian fortress near the Dead Sea), and Herodium (another Herodian fortress about 7.5 miles south of Jerusalem).[9] Though other archaeological sites suggest the existence of first century Palestinian synagogues, the evidence is not as certain.[10]

What do the archaeological reports tell us about each of these sites? Architecturally, they have shared features. First, these sites are built in rectangular fashion with seats lining the walls so everyone is essentially facing the center of the synagogue. This configuration enables the congregants to clearly see anyone who stands to read or speak and have immediate visual access to all other congregants. Second, the door of the synagogue is oriented toward Jerusalem, so as worshippers leave the synagogue, they do so as if embarking upon a pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Third, these sites have Mikvaot (ritual washing areas) associated with the synagogue building. And fourth, rudimentary genizahs, which are repositories for old and worn-out scriptures, have been found at these sites.[11]

Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society, 2nd Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013); Birger Olsson, "'All my teaching was done in synagogues…' (John 18, 20)," in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Essays by the Members of the SNTS Johannine Writings Seminar*, eds. G. van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz (Leuven, BEL: Leuven University Press, 2005), 203-24.

8. Lester L. Grabbe, "Synagogues in Pre-70 Palestine: A Re-assessment," in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical and Archaeological Discovery*, 17-26; Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher, "Palestinian Synagogues Before 70 C.E.: A Review of the Evidence," in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical and Archaeological Discovery*, 27-39.

9. Incidentally, the synagogues at Masada and Herodium had originally been built as Roman atriums during the time of Herod but were repurposed as synagogues during the first Jewish revolt against Rome, ca. 70 CE. Doran Chen, "The Design of the Ancient Synagogues in Judea: Masada and Herodium," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 239 (Summer 1980): 37-40.

10. Other possible first century Palestinian synagogue sites include the following: In the Galilee region Capernaum, Migdal, and Chorazim, northern Jerusalem, Jericho (just north of the Dead Sea), and Qiryat Sefer (not far from Modi'in, famous from the era of the Maccabean revolt). See Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 45-80.

11. Marilyn Chiat, "First-Century Synagogue Architecture: Methodological Problems," *Ancient Synagogues*, 49-60; Kenneth Atkinson, "On Further Defining

What do we know of the activities that occurred in the synagogues? The Theodotos inscription, which likely predates 70 CE, discovered in a 1913–1914 archaeological dig of the City of David (just south of the Jerusalem Temple Mount), offers an interesting list of purposes and activities provided at the synagogue. According to that list, activities in synagogues included reading the law and instructing, and the structure provided lodging for strangers, facilities for dining and water, and hostel services.[12] The first two activities are unremarkable to us as they relate to what we commonly imagine Jesus doing in the synagogues. I already noted that Jesus instructs the crowd gathered at the synagogue concerning his mission after reading from the scriptures (see Luke 4:15–21).

What is remarkable about this inscription is the other activities listed, which are seldom if ever associated in our minds with the synagogue, namely the stranger's lodgings, hostel services, and dining and water facilities. Jesus's work of healing and miracles at synagogues becomes unquestionably clear and expected if we listen to the words of the Theodotos inscription.[13] A study of the Gospels indicates that on several occasions Jesus heals people *at* the synagogue.[14] No one disputes that healing in the synagogue is an appropriate and legitimate activity. Notice that no one gets upset with Jesus for *where* he heals, such as the synagogue. However, *when* Jesus conducts his healings is a matter of dispute. Healing on the Sabbath is a sacrilege according to some (see John 5:1–18). Similarly, in the Gospel of Luke the ruler of the synagogue angrily told the people to return to the synagogue on a day *other than the Sabbath* to be healed, "And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said

---

the First-Century C.E. Synagogue: Fact or Fiction? A Rejoinder to H.C. Kee," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 491-502; James F. Strange, "Archaeology and the Pharisees," in *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees*, eds. Jacob Neusner and Bruce D Chilton (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 237-51, 462-64.

12. In my translation of the text, the Greek inscription reads "as an inn for the needy from foreign lands." See also, John S. Kloppenborg, "Dating Theodotus (CIJ II 1404)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 51 (2000): 243-80; John S. Kloppenborg, "The Theodotus Synagogue Inscription and the Problem of First-Century Synagogue Buildings," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 236-82.

13. According to Levine, the primary function of ancient synagogues included prayer, study, sacred meals, repository for communal funds, courts, general assembly hall, hostel, and residence for synagogue officials. Levin, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 3-4.

14. Some examples include Mark 1:21-27; Mark 3:1-5; Mark 6:2-5; and Luke 13:10-13.

unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day" (Luke 13:14).

Why would people in need be at the synagogue? What better location to receive food, water, and lodging? Hospitals and care hospices as we know them did not exist in the ancient world. However, rudimentary hospitals (edifices dedicated to Asclepius), hospices, and ancient inns did exist throughout the Mediterranean world where people could receive such services. In ancient Jewish communities it may be that synagogues served as a gathering place not just for community purposes, but also for the community to care for those who required special assistance. What better location for Jesus to find the sick, the afflicted, the lame, and the downtrodden than at the ancient community center? Note, however, that Jesus also found and healed the sick, the afflicted, the lame, and the downtrodden at the Jerusalem temple. The temple of Jerusalem and the synagogues scattered throughout the land of Israel both seem to have attracted the needy in their respective communities. This may suggest why the Gospel writers often locate Jesus healing at a synagogue when he was not in Jerusalem, but when he was in Jerusalem, he healed at or near the temple instead of the synagogue.

Additionally, if ancient synagogues did function in part as a place for the needy, physically afflicted, and foreigners to gather for wellbeing, Jesus's announcement of his mission in Luke 4:16–21 becomes all the more remarkable.[15]

> And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. (Luke 4:16–21)

---

15. Jesus's announcement is based on Isaiah 61:1-2.

Of significance is that Jesus's mission is to "preach the gospel to the poor" and to "heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." Jesus's healing miracles *at* the synagogue fulfill this mission statement. Again, if anciently, synagogues played a role as a gathering place for the needy, both spiritually and physically, it is therefore perfectly appropriate contextually that Jesus first proclaims his mission to the needy at the synagogue and performs many of his acts of compassions on behalf of the needy at the synagogue — the ancient Jewish community center.

A few final notes on ancient Palestinian synagogues as physical structures provide intriguing possibilities. Recently, it has been proposed that synagogues, in addition to the other purposes highlighted above, were built as a geographical and symbolic extension of the Jerusalem temple.[16] The temple was rectangular in shape; so too were the synagogues. The outer walls of the temple enclosure (not the temple itself) contained step seating; so too did the synagogues. The temple was ringed by columns through which a worshipper could observe the procession of the sacrifice he had handed over to the temple priest; so too in the synagogues, congregants viewed the proceedings from between the columns that ringed the synagogue. Finally, the location within the synagogue where individuals read from the scriptures may have been physically analogous to the location of the altar at the temple. Just as one found communion with God in the temple at the altar of worshipful sacrifice, so too, reading the word of God was an act of worship that brought communion with Him.

In summary, the physical presence of a building for the Jewish community to gather served important purposes in the ministry of Jesus. It was at the synagogue that Jesus found an immediate audience accustomed to the procedures of public scripture reading and exposition. But even more surprisingly to us, perhaps, it was at the synagogue that Jesus found those in great need through whom he could publicly display with miracles that the Kingdom of God had indeed arrived.

Paul and Diaspora Synagogues

Similar to the evidentiary challenges we face when trying to reconstruct knowledge concerning first century Palestinian synagogues, so too is our experience when we cast our attention to first century Diaspora

---

16. Donald D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), see especially 204-26.

synagogues. Despite meager evidence, we do have sufficient to build a case for what Diaspora synagogues looked like and how they were used.[17]

We can produce our summary from the two most ancient Diaspora Jewish synagogues for which we have physical evidence. They are located first on the Greek island of Delos[18] and second at ancient Ostia,[19] on the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy, not far from Rome's modern day Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino International Airport.[20] Some of the remarkable physical features of the earliest Diaspora synagogues are the stepped seating built into three of the four walls and the Jerusalem-oriented entrance. Though a universal architectural plan for ancient synagogues never existed, the synagogues at Ostia and Delos share striking resemblance to synagogues in Palestine. Therefore, what we learned from first century synagogues in Palestine applies to Diaspora synagogues as well. The seating arrangement provided everyone unobstructed visual access to each other, truly creating a sense of community and brotherhood. Additionally, the entrance facing toward Jerusalem served as a constant reminder that the synagogue represented a geographical and symbolic extension of the holy temple in Jerusalem, similar to the first century Palestinian synagogues.

In addition to sharing physical features, Diaspora synagogues shared purposes similar to their counterparts in first century Palestine: ritual bathing, scripture reading and exposition, prayer, festivals, holy-day and communal dining, treasury, museum, documentary archive and school, refuge, manumission, council hall, court, and society house.[21] Notice that only a small portion of the synagogue's purposes constituted what we would consider to be religious activities. As a friend helpfully reminded me as I wrote this, in the ancient world there was no distinction between

---

17. Stephen K. Catto, *Reconstructing the First-Century Synagogue: A Critical Analysis of Current Research* (New York: TT Clark, 2007).

18. In addition to the Jewish synagogue on Delos, apparently Samaritans even had a synagogue on the island. A.T. Kraabel, "New Evidence of the Samaritan Diaspora has been Found on Delos," *Biblical Archaeologist* 47 (1984): 44-46. For a view arguing against a synagogue on Delos see Lidia Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 5 (2007): 81-115.

19. *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies*, eds. Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht and Olof Brandt (Stockholm, SWE: Forlag, 2001).

20. In fact, the ancient Jewish synagogue at Ostia was discovered in the 1960s when construction crews were building the highway that would link the international airport to Rome.

21. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, see especially 297-317, 322-36, 389-450.

the secular and religious. Everything was on a continuum of a religious spectrum. Therefore, these synagogue buildings, like their Palestinian counterparts, truly were multi-purpose community centers.

In our day it would strike us as strange to have an itinerant preacher from a different religious sect show up at one of our religious meetings and there be granted carte blanche to speak. When we recognize the centrality of the synagogue in Jewish Diaspora community life, it is only natural that we find Paul and other early Christian missionaries integrating themselves among established Jewish communities by means of the public synagogue.[22] As a community center, it may be possible that Paul and others made use of the synagogue's lodging services when they first arrived at the town as they sought to establish more permanent housing and income.[23]

That synagogues were more community centers than religious centers helps us also to understand why non-Jewish Greeks are in the audience when Paul preaches in the Jewish synagogue at Iconium (see Acts 14:1–5). Additional evidence unearthed by archaeologists reveals dedicatory inscriptions for synagogues made on behalf of "God-fearing" gentiles, non-Jews who believed and worshiped God as did the Jews but never fully converted to the practices of Judaism (such as being circumcised). Though it may sound strange to our ears that a non-member would provide the monetary means to build and support a church building, synagogues were esteemed as community cultural centers, and so it was a badge of pride to be named as patron of such an important community institution, regardless of one's religious sentiments.[24]

There is one final feature characteristic of some early Jewish Diaspora synagogues that needs to be considered — they were built or modified from pre-existing non-public structures or private homes.[25] A similar

---

22. Incidentally, many of the early Christian missionaries at this time still considered themselves Jews — Jews who believed that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth — and hence all the more reason to share their message of Jesus at the community center.

23. Some scholars believe that Paul was a manual laborer who set up shop with fellow Christian missionaries in *insulae* where they could work, live, and worship in a close-knit community atmosphere.

24. As one of this paper's anonymous peer reviewers insightfully noted, "Because of the institutions associated with *charis* (reciprocity) in the Greco-Roman world, the Gentile patron would now receive benefits from his Jewish clients. It was often a political/social arrangement to create and maintain relationships. For this reason so many Gentiles are associated with the synagogue."

25. These statements do not apply to the synagogue at Ostia, however, where we have compelling archaeological evidence that the original building was constructed

phenomenon occurred as Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire. Early church members first met in private homes, often of a wealthy member or patron who may have also served in a leadership position. Over time as the Christian population grew, as meetings became more formal, and as church institutional structure became more pronounced, Christians began converting private homes into formal meeting places. I mention this phenomenon of early Christianity as a reference point to share that Diaspora Judaism followed a similar trajectory in many instances. As Jews settled throughout the Roman Empire, they would initially gather in private homes for community or religious activities. Then, as their population grew and their wealth increased, they would modify the existing private home used for meetings into a more formal community structure — the synagogue.[26] That Paul established Christian house-churches in various cities may simply be indicative of practices common in his day, especially among his Jewish contemporaries.

Conclusion

Though ancient Jewish synagogues scattered across the Roman Empire did play a religious role for community gatherings in the time of Jesus and Paul, perhaps similar to the way modern members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints view their meeting houses, ancient synagogues had multiple purposes and functions serving as a community center for local Jewish groups. In addition to their spiritual role of providing a location to pray and read and interpret scriptures, ancient synagogues also provided services to meet the physical needs of people, offering them shelter and food while traveling, a place to gather for social events, and a place to receive healing. Recognizing the

---

first as a synagogue for religious purposes and *not* modified from a pre-existing structure. This suggests that the Jewish population at Ostia was sufficiently large, wealthy, and established in the Roman community from early in the first century CE to support a synagogue. Anders Runesson, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora: A Response to L. Michael White," *Harvard Theological Review* 92, no.4 (1999): 409-33.

26.   L. Michael White, *Building God's House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); L. Michael White, "The Delos Synagogue Revisited: Recent Fieldwork in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora," *Harvard Theological Review* 80 (1987): 133-66; L. Michael White, "Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence," *Harvard Theological Review* 90 (1997): 23-58; L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture,* vol. 2: *The Christian Domus Ecclesiae in its Environment* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1997).

multi-purpose nature of these buildings helps to provide a compelling context for New Testament passages depicting Jesus and Paul conducting their ministry activities. Synagogues, then, would have been the perfect place to fulfill Isaiah's Messianic prophecy, quoted when Jesus announced his Messianic mission, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18–19; see also Isaiah 61:1–2).

Taylor Halverson is a BYU Teaching and Learning Consultant, a member of the Book of Mormon Central executive committee, founder and co-director of the BYU Virtual Scriptures Group, a columnist for the Deseret News, founder and co-director of the BYU Creativity, Innovation, and Design group, a travel leader to Mesoamerica and the Holy Land, and the Chief Innovation Officer at Vereo Training. At BYU Taylor has taught Book of Mormon, Old Testament, History of Creativity, Innovation Boot Camp, Basic Entrepreneurship Skills, and an interdisciplinary design course called "Illuminating the Scriptures: Designing Innovative Study Tools." His education includes: BA in Ancient Near Eastern Studies (BYU), MA in Biblical Studies (Yale), MS in Instructional Systems Technology (Indiana University), PhD in Instructional Systems Technology (Indiana University), PhD in Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity (Indiana University). Taylor has published and presented widely on scripture, innovation, entrepreneurship, technology, teaching, and learning (more at taylorhalverson.com).

Appendix

New Testament references to synagogues:

    Matthew 4:23; 6:2, 5; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 23:6, 34.

    Mark 1:21, 23, 29, 39; 3:1; 5:22, 35-36, 38; 6:2; 12:39; 13:9.

    Luke 4:15–16, 20, 28, 33, 38, 44; 6:6; 7:5; 8:41, 49; 11:43; 12:11; 13:10, 14; 20:46; 21:12.

    John 6:59; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2, 18:20.

    Acts 6:9; 9:2, 20; 13:5, 14–15, 42; 14:1; 15:21; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 7-8, 17, 19, 26; 19:8; 22:19; 24:12; 26:11.

    Revelation 2:9; 3:9.

Memory and Millennials:
A Review of *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins*

———

Spencer R. Marsh

Abstract: *The multiple historical accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision have been an area of intense study, debate, and discussion for several decades. The newest addition to the discussion is a specialized monograph engaging the various accounts of the First Vision through the lens of psychology and, particularly, memory studies. This book, authored by Steven C. Harper, proves to be a valuable resource in answering some pressing questions about the integrity of the First Vision accounts, even though that was not the book's explicitly stated purpose. This review highlights these contributions as interpreted through the lens of a Millennial reviewer — a demographic widely assumed to be facing challenges today in recontextualizing, repurposing, and appreciating the First Vision, with which this new book can help.*

The multiple historical accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision have been the subject of intense study and debate for the past several decades.[1] They have been published and discussed in both popular and academic venues.[2] Elder Russell M. Nelson wrote in 1996:

———

1. For some of the major contributions made to First Vision studies over the years, see Steven C. Harper and Samuel Alonzo Dodge, eds., *Exploring the First Vision* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2012). For a review of that work, see Neal Rappleye, "Trusting Joseph," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013), 75–83, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/trusting-joseph/.

2. For an informal survey of publications discussing the First Vision accounts see "First Vision accounts in Church publications," FairMormon,

The most prominent account of the First Vision, from which I have quoted, was prepared by the Prophet in 1838. At least three other accounts of the vision were also recorded. These accounts were given under different circumstances to different audiences and for different purposes. Because each account emphasizes different aspects of the same experience, some of the detractors of the Church have attempted to point out discrepancies in the several accounts. In the January 1985 Ensign appears a most noteworthy article by Milton V. Backman Jr., entitled "Joseph Smith's recitals of the First Vision." You will want to study this and become familiar with each of the recorded accounts of the First Vision so that you will not be disarmed if you hear that more than one account was given.[3]

In the October 1984 Ensign, President Gordon B. Hinckley wrote:

I am not worried that the Prophet Joseph Smith gave a number of versions of the first vision any more than I am worried that there are four different writers of the gospels in the New Testament, each with his own perceptions, each telling the events to meet his own purpose for writing at the time.[4]

Finally, Elder James E. Faust stated in the April 1984 General Conference:

There are several accounts of the magnificent vision near Palmyra recorded by the Prophet's associates or friends before the Prophet's death, who, at various times, heard the Prophet recount the First Vision. These accounts corroborate the First Vision as written by Joseph Smith himself.[5]

The latest contribution to First Vision studies is Steven C. Harper's book *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins.*

Brief Overview of Contents

The book is divided into three parts and twenty-eight chapters, with a small introduction at the beginning and a short afterword — all spanning 262

---

https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Joseph_Smith%27s_First_Vision/First_Vision_acounts_in_Church_publications.

3. Russell M. Nelson, "At the Heart of the Church," in *The Prophet and his Work: Essays from General Authorities on Joseph Smith and the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 53.

4. Gordon B. Hinckley, "First Presidency Message: God Hath Not Given Us the Spirit of Fear," *Ensign* (October 1984).

5. James E. Faust, "The Magnificent Vision Near Palmyra," *Ensign* (May 1982).

pages. That makes chapter length average about nine pages. This is a blessing, however. The chapters are quick, they're informative, and they're specific — allowing Harper to educate as well as entertain the reader.

The first part of the book is dedicated to the *individual memory* of the First Vision by Joseph Smith, the middle to the *collective memory* of the First Vision by the Saints up through the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century, and the latter part to the *contested memory* of the First Vision, in which Harper traces the history of criticism that arose at the latter half of the twentieth century and that has continued into today. Harper writes:

> The goal is to explain how [Joseph Smith] remembered his first vision, how others have remembered it, and what difference those memories have made over time. The book tells what Smith's various vision records reveal about the nature of memory both individual and collective, about the culture of Mormonism, and about the cultures in which it emerged and has since lived.

> Put most simply, the book shows that the mere survival of Smith's vision memory depended on numerous contingencies, and the fact that it has become the genesis story of the Latter-day Saints was anything but inevitable. (p. 4)

Why I Am Writing This Review

I should preface the following review with a small personal introduction. I am a 23-year-old student in pre-business at Brigham Young University. I do not have a degree in history or psychology. I participated as a student in Harper's "Foundations of the Restoration" course at BYU, have read much of Harper's work on the First Vision, and hold personal admiration for him as a person, scholar, and faithful member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My review will focus on the value Harper's volume can hold for a Millennial/Generation Z population — a population widely assumed to be struggling most predominately with historical issues in the Age of Information.[6] My review will highlight only a few parts of this volume that may resolve challenging apologetic

---

6. See Jana Riess, *The Next Mormons: How Millennials are Changing the LDS Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). For reviews of this work see Stephen Cranney, "The Next Mormons: How Millennials Are Changing the LDS Church," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2019): 177–83; Armand L. Mauss, "The Next Mormons: How Millennials Are Changing the LDS Church by Jana Riess," *Journal of Mormon History* 45, no. 3 (July 2019): 133–42.

issues related to the First Vision and help those navigating challenges to its reality find renewed confidence in the integrity of its historical accounts. This is not Harper's stated purpose. It is actually explicitly the contrary. Harper writes:

> This is not a book for those interested in determining whether the vision actually happened, and if so whether it was in 1820 or 1824, or which of Smith's vision memories is more authentic or accurate than others (p. 3).[7]

That mentioned, the volume still confronts and answers some major objections to the reality of the First Vision using the tools of psychology and, particularly, studies in memory. What seems to emerge is both a scholarly reconstruction of events as Smith, in the words of Harper, *consolidated* his memories to fit the needs of the audiences he was communicating to and a narrative that can support faith in Joseph's story — even when that faith may or may not be challenged.

Individual Memory

Part one is dedicated to Joseph's *individual memory* of the First Vision. Harper dedicates 5 chapters contained in 34 pages of text to his study and proceeds somewhat opportunistically through the First Vision accounts to establish historical context — starting with the 1838 account, returning to the 1832 account in Joseph's personal history, then to the 1835 account(s) with Robert Matthews, and finishing with the 1842 account contained in Joseph's letter to John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat.*[8] The goal is to establish historical background to each of the accounts and the thread starts with the rejection that Joseph faced from the Methodist minister he speaks of in the 1838 account (likely Reverend George Lane or Reverend Jesse Townsend[9]) after recounting

---

7. Harper has done other work geared toward providing a defense of the First Vision. For example, see Steven C. Harper, "Evaluating Three Arguments Against Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 2 (2012): 17–33, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/evaluating-three-arguments-against-joseph-smiths-first-vision/. See also Steven C. Harper, *Joseph Smith's First Vision: A Guide to the Historical Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012).

8. To read all of the accounts see "Primary Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision of Deity," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision.

9. "Sermons of a Palmyra Preacher," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 31 July 2015, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/museum-treasures-jesse-townsend-sermons?lang=eng.

the appearance of God and Christ. Only in the 1838 account is this rejection remembered by Joseph. Thus the reason for Harper's ordering of the accounts for commentary. Harper writes:

> The resulting rejection fractured Joseph Smith into an *ought self,* prescribed by cultural authorities like the clergyman, and an *actual self,* or what he knew from his own experience. Smith had approached God in crisis, desperate for salvation. Instead of assuring Smith that the resolution to his crisis was real, the minister's rejection caused dissonance within Smith — a divided self he innately had to reconcile. (pp. 9–10)

Harper returns to this rejection by the minister throughout his commentary on consolidation and how it affected Joseph's retellings of the vision. He writes:

> Both the 1832 and 1838/39 memories are best read as responses to the Methodist minister. In 1832 Smith remembered to please him and the authority he represented. In 1838/39 he remembered to reject and replace the minister and the authority he represented. (p. 32)

Several important insights provided by Harper in this part include:

- The fracture Joseph supposedly felt from the minister, which may help us understand the paucity of historical documentation for retellings of the First Vision from 1820 to 1830.
- An introduction to the concept of *consolidation* or how a memory of an event is *remembered* after *dismembering*, which can explain why Joseph remembered the First Vision the way he did in the historical context of each account.
- An explanation of how the dichotomy between authentic and distorted memory is a false one, which can give us a robust answer to those that would seek to hold an infallible standard to Joseph's claims — one in which there isn't *any* contradiction or tension between accounts.
- Explaining that *how Joseph felt* during the vision would have been more memorable to him can help account for variation in or omission of technical details between accounts, like the exact month of the vision, what beings — whether God, Christ, angels, or some combination of

them — appeared to him, whether he saw light or fire around him during the vision, and so forth.

One question came up in the second chapter of the book. Writing on Joseph's claim of persecution after the vision in the 1838 account, Harper writes, "Aside from the specific, stinging rejection by the Methodist minister, *there is no factual memory in this part of his 1839 narrative. His memory of persecution in childhood was vague and impersonal*" (emphasis added) (p. 18). Other researchers seem to have taken a slightly more conservative approach. Latter-day Saint historian Richard Lyman Bushman, commenting on the same claim, wrote, "What Joseph said explicitly was that the vision led to trouble, though his youthful sensitivity probably exaggerated the reaction."[10] Where Harper denies almost any such trouble after the vision, Bushman affirms at least *some* commotion that was then exaggerated during this recital:

> The talk with the minister, he remembered, brought on ridicule by "all classes of men, both religious and irreligious because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision." Local people seemed to have discussed his case, even though he said nothing to his parents. Eighteen years later when he wrote his history, the memories of the injustices still rankled. For whatever reason, his father's family suffered "many persecutions and afflictions," he recalled, deepening a previous sense of alienation. William Smith remembered people throwing dirt, stones, and sticks against the Smith house. Later, after Alvin died, it was rumored someone had disturbed his body, and Joseph Sr. published a notice in the paper that the body had been exhumed and found to be untouched. Once someone fired a shot at young Joseph for no apparent reason.[11]

Perhaps the inclusion of these events in Harper's analysis would have been more helpful to establishing everything that Joseph might have been responding to in the 1838/39 recital of events.

Collective Memory

The middle part of the book is dedicated to the *collective memory* of the Saints of the First Vision and how that consciousness has formed over

10. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 43.

11. Ibid.

the years. This part takes up most of Harper's study at roughly 130 pages. A few of the more helpful parts of this section include commentary about how the 1832 account didn't get consolidated into Latter-day Saint memory from the late nineteenth century into the middle of the twentieth century.

The 1838 account began to take precedence during this broad period from the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, through the John Taylor administration, and shortly beyond. Orson Pratt takes the central role in this part of the book as "the foremost relater in the process of consolidating a collective memory of the first vision" (p. 74). Pratt "was influenced in his selection and presentation by his argument about the materiality of God" (p. 75). Harper writes:

> By choosing to attend to Joseph Smith's first vision as he did, Orson Pratt taught the Latter-day Saints to pay attention to it. He tagged attention in the saints' memory in a way that made it the specific referent in the otherwise general narrative of apostasy and restoration. (pp. 75–76)

The centrality of the 1838 account was solidified with the great publicity given to it by Orson Pratt, the composition of George Manwaring's "Joseph Smith's First Prayer" in the late 1870s, the abandonment of polygamy in the late 1890s through the very early twentieth century, and the questioning of the objective reality of the First Vision beginning in the mid 1890s. The 1838 account became especially appealing because, as Harper quotes:

> "[W]hen a group feels physically, economically, or otherwise threatened, it often turns to the discursive realm" to remember in ways that facilitate survival. (p. 77)[12]

This insight is potentially useful in understanding how the Church as an organization has treated the memory of the First Vision over time. The battle seems always to have been uphill. There have always been critics to counter, a place to establish among mainstream Christianity, and a message to proclaim to the world with small numbers to proclaim it. It follows that Joseph's 1838 account, which contains more memory of persecution than any of Joseph's other accounts, would become the frontispiece on our rhetorical coat of arms. From this it is easy to extrapolate how little attention the other accounts of the First Vision

---

12. Harper cites Thomas J. Anastasio et al., *Individual and Collective Memory Consolidation: Analogous Processes on Different Levels* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 152.

would receive over time. The 1832 and 1835 accounts, in particular, receive a more focused treatment in this portion of the book — starting from when they were placed inside a trunk belonging to Willard Richards when he became the Church Historian after returning from his mission to Britain in 1841

> Richards had not selected them for consolidation by the saints, not related them meaningfully to their shared story, and not repeated them so they could become common knowledge. (p. 67)

The 1832 and 1835 accounts would be brought back to collective consciousness during a new wave of questioning that surfaced in the mid-twentieth century surrounding the historical reality of the vision.

Contested Memory

The last part of Harper's book is dedicated to the *contested memory* of the First Vision by critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is a historical survey of critical scholarship that surfaced beginning with Dale Morgan, who began a new wave of source criticism into the Church's historical origins beginning in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Morgan was raised a Latter-day Saint but switched "faith-based explanations for psychological ones and began to view his society through a sociological lens" (p. 187). Harper then proceeds faithfully through the authoring of *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* by Fawn M. Brodie, the appearance of Sandra and Gerald Tanner's opposition to the Church beginning in the early 1960s, the work done by faithful historians in response to the criticism of Reverend Wesley P. Walters beginning in the late 1960s, the authoring of *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* by Grant H. Palmer in 2002, and ends with a review of the criticism seen today by popular critics such as John Dehlin and Jeremy T. Runnells. I was quite impressed with the charitable yet fair treatment Harper gives each of the critics who have sparked such controversy around the historical origins of the Church he remains a faithful member of today. I was impressed with his resistance to responding harshly to their critiques or to taking unjustified swipes at his "opponents" (though he does make measured critiques of each of their approaches).

This section is useful for indicating where we are today in the saga of memory of the First Vision — with the reestablishment of all of the historical accounts of it in our conscience, potentially causing a disruption in our collective memory of it and forcing some to find new

ways to remember it that are intellectually stable and spiritually useful. Harper points out that the type of disruption we see today was basically inevitable when the 1838 account had gained such prominence for more than 100 years.

He notes that Latter-day Saint historians working on the First Vision during the latter half of the twentieth century

> were nearly powerless to alter the saints' collective memory or make it more resilient to critics. The disruptive potential of the newly discovered records and ways of interpreting them remained latent, waiting for an information age to unleash it. (p. 226)

This information age seems to be a challenge in that many people report that faith in the First Vision is diminished or even lost because of disruption to their memory of it and they are having to undergo a process of recontextualizing and repurposing it in their own minds. But this age also appears to be a zeitgeist for good in that we get to remember the First Vision and all accounts of it in a way that will both address contemporary concerns and provide something sustainable "for the rising generations" (Doctrine and Covenants 69:8). It doesn't seem, in Harper's analysis, that we haven't tried to prevent such developments but that we have simply relied on the strength and prowess presented in the 1838 account to take us through the more pressing concerns we faced in the first two centuries of the Church's existence. How we consolidate our collective memory (and how we reconcile both the good and bad ways we have attempted to consolidate that memory) now will be important for the growth of the Church moving forward as has been expressed by more articulate authors than myself.[13]

Conclusion

Harper's seems to be one of the most unique studies to have been undertaken to approach the First Vision,[14] but it appears to be one of the most needed and most valuable approaches to the historical accounts. It answers some of the most heavy-hitting objections to the First Vision. That

---

13. Nathan B. Oman, "Welding Another Link in Wonder's Chain: The Task of Latter-day Saint Intellectuals in the Church's Third Century," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019): 141–60.

14. A similar yet less lengthy approach was taken in Robert A. Rees, "Looking Deeper into Joseph Smith's First Vision: Imagery, Cognitive Neuroscience, and the Construction of Memory," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 67–80.

this volume was published with Oxford University Press is also significant. It can indicate a high level of quality in scholarship. It certainly indicates the repute and qualifications of the scholar that brought it together. This is a book that seems accessible to both layperson and scholar alike. Latter-day Saints will appreciate the (perhaps even unintended) strength that Harper's scholarship gives to Joseph's story. This is a work that I believe will be valuable to anyone who reads it.

Spencer R. Marsh *is an undergraduate student at Brigham Young University with plans to study business and healthcare administration. He has done volunteer work for organizations such as FairMormon, The Interpreter Foundation, and Book of Mormon Central.*

THE BRASS PLATES VERSION OF GENESIS

Noel B. Reynolds

Abstract: *The Book of Mormon peoples repeatedly indicated that they were descendants of Joseph, the son of Jacob who was sold into Egypt by his brothers. The plates of brass that they took with them from Jerusalem c. 600 BCE provided them with a version of many Old Testament books and others not included in our Hebrew Bible. Sometime after publishing his translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith undertook an inspired revision of the Bible. The opening chapters of his version of Genesis contain a lot of material not included in the Hebrew Bible. But intriguingly, distinctive phraseology in those chapters, as now published in Joseph Smith's Book of Moses, also show up in the Book of Mormon text. This paper presents a systematic examination of those repeated phrases and finds strong evidence for the conclusion that the version of Genesis used by the Nephite prophets must have been closely similar to Joseph Smith's Book of Moses.*

[**Editor's Note:** This paper appeared first in the 1990 festschrift published to honor Hugh W. Nibley.[1] It is reprinted here as a convenience for current scholars who are interested in intertextual issues regarding the Book of Mormon. It should be noted that *Interpreter* has published another paper that picks up this same insight and develops considerable additional evidence supporting the conclusions of the original paper.[2]

---

1. Noel B. Reynolds, "The Brass Plates Version of Genesis," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990*, eds. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT and Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1990), II: 136–73. At the time this paper was written, the recently published critical edition of the Book of Moses was not available. See Kent Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2005).

2. Jeff Lindsay, "'Arise from the Dust': Insights from Dust-Related Themes in the Book of Mormon, Part 1: Tracks from the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016), 179–232.

This reprint uses footnotes instead of endnotes, and there are two more footnotes in this reprint than there are endnotes in the original paper.]

When Lehi and his followers left Jerusalem, they took with them an unnamed book of scripture (known simply by its description — "the plates of brass"), which provided their cultural and religious groundings over a thousand-year period. Many Book of Mormon references to this record indicate that it was most likely a Josephite version of the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Nephi 5:10–16). It contained the writings of Isaiah substantially as they have come down in our textual tradition, and it reports many experiences of Moses and Israel as we know them from the Bible. But several intriguing references indicate that it contained materials that are not familiar to students of the Bible: Joseph of Egypt is cited at some length, and on subjects not mentioned in Genesis; otherwise unknown prophets, such as Zenos and Zenock, are important to Lehi's descendants; and David seems to play little or no role in the Book of Mormon understanding of the covenant between Israel and God.[3] The question raised in this paper is whether there are indirect evidences of further distinctive contents of the plates of brass. Can we learn anything else about those plates and their contents through an examination of indirect textual evidence in the Book of Mormon?

The Logic of This Inquiry

This paper reports a simple exercise in which a number of key phrases and concepts occurring in Joseph Smith's book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price and in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible are checked against both the Book of Mormon and the King James Bible.[4] My original impression that a number of these which show up prominently in the Nephite record are absent from the Bible was dramatically vindicated. Whereas most previous comparisons of the Book of Mormon with the Old Testament have emphasized their similarities, I wish here to call attention to some instructive differences. My hypothesis is that the brass plates version of Genesis used by generations of Nephite prophets may have been much more like the version we have received from Joseph

---

3. See John L. Sorenson, "The 'Brass Plates' and Biblical Scholarship," *Dialogue* 10 (Autumn 1977): 35–36.

4. This study is limited to the translation in the King James Version. I assume that checking the following study against original texts may lead to some modification of my list of correlations.

Smith as a result of his inspired revision of the Bible published as the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price than the Genesis version handed down in our traditional Bible.[5] This in turn has other possible implications, some of which will be discussed. For reasons that will be spelled out below, it is not plausible to conclude that the Book of Mormon is the source for the book of Moses, or that Joseph Smith is the source of both, as some of his critics might want to believe.

It seemed most appropriate to compare the Book of Mormon text with the Old Testament since these two are roughly contemporary in their initial composition and because those who wrote the Book of Mormon saw themselves as belonging to that culture which we would identify with the Old Testament. The Hebrew scriptures available to the Nephites were all in existence by 600 B.C. All the examples presented below are correlations between Moses and Book of Mormon language that do *not* occur in the Old Testament. My approach is built on an initial list of terms, phrases, and concepts common to both the Book of Mormon and the book of Moses. This list was then checked against the Old Testament, and any elements clearly present in that text were eliminated. For a variety of reasons, other sets of parallel references were found unconvincing and were also dropped. The final list contained thirty-three key book of Moses references that show up notably in 145 Book of Mormon passages (see the table in the appendix).

The second stage of my study was to assess the evidence for and against the hypothesis that these texts are independent of one another. The seven criteria of dependence used are listed briefly below and in more detail (along with their assessments) in the appendix:

1. The greater the number of significant terms repeated in parallel phrasings in two texts, the less likely they are to be independent. (F)

2. The more precise the similarities between parallel phrasings in two texts, the less likely they are to be independent. (G)

3. The more deliberately shaped the repetition in parallel phrasings in two texts, the less likely they are to be independent. (H)

4. The more similar the contexts in which parallel phrasings occur, the less likely they are to be independent. (I)

---

5. Nephi explicitly records that he read to his brothers out of the brass plates, including the books of Moses and Isaiah (1 Nephi 19:21–23).

5. Author awareness of a brass plates source reduces the likelihood of independence. (J)

6. The more distinctive the terminology repeated in parallel phrasings in two texts, the less likely they are to be independent. (K)

7. Presence of weak or strong versions of the parallel terminology in the New Testament, and even more so, in the Old Testament, increases the possibility that the book of Moses and Book of Mormon passages are independent. Although clear Old Testament parallels do not prove independence, their existence was considered sufficient reason to drop the occurrence altogether as evidence of dependence. (L)

For each of these seven criteria, two or more levels of persuasiveness are suggested and linked to features of the particular occurrence (see the appendix for these explanations). In all cases, the issue is the likelihood that the particular textual parallel listed could occur independently of any connection between the two texts. The listing in the table of the appendix also includes a linearized calculation performed as a rough means of combining the relative values of the seven categories into a common score to indicate approproximate importance for showing dependency between the two texts. The result indicates greater or lesser probability of dependence, but is not intended as a rigorous measure of distances between probabilities or of confidence levels.

By selecting the highest scores for dependence, I was able to identify a group of parallels between these two texts, each of which is highly persuasive on the basis of criteria ordinarily used by scholars evaluating possible sources of texts. Given the uniqueness of some of these individual parallels and the brevity of the source text, the hypothesis that the texts are independent should be rejected. This conclusion is further illuminated and substantiated by reference to a second and larger group of passages that also fit the pattern, but with less persuasiveness. Textual dependence between the two texts could logically run in either direction. Examination of this question reveals the implausibility of the view that the book of Moses could be derived from the Book of Mormon, even though the latter was published first by Joseph Smith.

Correlations of Words, Phrases, and Concepts

Newcomers to studies of textual sources are often surprised at the small amount of shared material that must generally be demonstrated before scholars will agree that there is some connection between two culturally associated texts. I will first discuss a group of twenty Book of Mormon passages (Group 1 in the table) that present strong parallels with book of Moses materials. This first group is distinguished from the second in that none of these parallels finds expression in the Bible (with the noted exception of Moses 6:52 being found in Acts 4:12).

Moses records "*by reason* of *transgression* cometh the *fall*, which *fall* bringeth *death*" (Moses 6:59). This source cannot be missed in Jacob's sermon which, emphasizing resurrection as the answer to death, explains: "*resurrection* must needs come unto man *by reason* of the *fall*; and the *fall* came *by reason* of *transgression*" (2 Nephi 9:6). Here we have double intensification of an implicit reference to the source—first by substituting "resurrection" for "death," and second by reversing the order of the four terms. This reversing is a technique of biblical writers noticed by M. Zeidel. It is referred to as Zeidel's law or as "inverted quotation," and is particularly characteristic of quotations.[6] Jacob also emphasizes his own adaptation of the distinctive verbal construction "to come *by reason* of" by doubling it.

The book of Moses account of Adam's baptism is followed by the bestowal of the *priesthood* on Adam with the following words: "And thou art *after the order of him* who was *without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity*" (Moses 6:67). This phrasing is reproduced in whole by Alma in his discourse on the priesthood when he said, "This *high priesthood* being *after the order of his Son*, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being *without beginning of days or end of years*, being prepared *from eternity to all eternity*" (Alma 13:7; cf. Alma 13:9). In slightly altered contexts, both Enoch and two additional Book of Mormon writers use the latter half of this expression to describe the Lord, saying of him that he "is *from all eternity to all eternity*."[7] Although a version of the first half of the larger formula appears in the New Testament (Hebrews 7:3), the second half, and therefore the combination, are both unique to book of Moses and Book of Mormon passages. John W. Welch has identified seven or

---

6. See P. C. Beentjes, "Inverted Quotations in the Bible," *Biblica* 63 (1982): 506–23.

7. Cf. Moses 7:29, 31, with Mosiah 3:5 and Moroni 8:18.

eight other similarities between Alma 13 and JST Genesis 14, further indicating that Alma possessed an expanded text of the early history of the patriarchs similar to that now found in Joseph Smith's works.[8]

Some of the best examples of connections between these two texts are more complex, involving teachings and ways of thinking about something without exact replication of words or phrases. The doctrine of divinely given free *agency* is implicit in all of scripture, but is only taught explicitly as a fundamental concept in the book of Moses and the Book of Mormon. In Moses we learn that "Satan . . . sought to destroy the agency of man" (Moses 4:3), that God "gave unto man his agency" (Moses 7:32; 4:3), and that men are therefore "agents unto themselves" (Moses 6:56). Lehi picks up these same themes in a major discourse on freedom of choice or agency and teaches that "God gave unto man that he should act for himself" (2 Nephi 2:16); that by the redemption "they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon" (2 Nephi 2:26); and that men "are free to choose liberty and eternal life, . . . or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil" (2 Nephi 2:27).

Moses points out to Satan that because the Lord's "*spirit hath not altogether withdrawn*" from him he can distinguish between God and Satan (Moses 1:15). The Book of Mormon writers frequently used this same language when warning people not to sin lest the Lord's Spirit be withdrawn from them, too. Alma specifically cites this explanation to show why the devil has successfully gained power over certain people (Alma 34:35). Mormon borrows Alma's language several times to explain the weakness of the Nephites, saying that "the *Spirit of the Lord* did no more preserve them; yea, it *had withdrawn from them* because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples" (Helaman 5:24).[9] Here we see a string of passages in which the Book of Mormon writers follow one another in a particular application of a phrase from Moses' account, using it to explain a withdrawal of the Lord's Spirit and a corresponding expansion of Satan's power (which Moses had successfully resisted). There is some complexity introduced in this variation, but the concept remains the same and takes on an independent life in the tradition of the Nephites.

---

8.   See John W. Welch, "The Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13–19," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 238–72.

9.   Cf. also Helaman 6:35 and 13:8. King Benjamin gives the same phrase an interesting turn by accusing the wicked of *withdrawing themselves from the Spirit of the Lord* through disobedience (Mosiah 2:36).

Centuries of Christian theology testify to the lack of direct biblical teaching on the salvation of little children. But the book of Moses states simply that because of the atonement, "*children . . . are whole from the foundation* of the world" (Moses 6:54). Two Book of Mormon prophets provide a clear and ringing statement of the doctrine that little children are saved by the atonement of Christ. King Benjamin stated this clearly in his famous discourse (cf. Mosiah 3:16, 21), and Mormon wrote a long epistle on the subject at the end of Nephite history. In particular, Mormon said that "little *children* are *whole*," and that they are "alive in Christ, even *from the foundation* of the world" (Moroni 8:8, 12). An additional persuasive link between these two texts is that both King Benjamin's and Moses' teachings are in the immediate context of a statement that beside the name of Christ there will be "no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come" (Mosiah 3:17).[10]

One sentence from Moses seems to have spawned a whole family of formulaic references in the Book of Mormon: "And he became Satan, yea, even the *devil*, *the father of all lies*, to *deceive* and to *blind* men, and to *lead* them *captive at his will*, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice" (Moses 4:4). This language is echoed precisely by both Lehi and Moroni, who, when mentioning the devil, add the stock qualification: "who is *the father of all lies*" (cf. 2 Nephi 2:18; Ether 8:25), while Jacob says the same thing in similar terms (2 Nephi 9:9). Incidentally, the descriptive term *devil*, which is used frequently to refer to Satan in both Moses and the Book of Mormon, does not occur at all in the Old Testament. New Testament occurrences do not reflect this context.

The Book of Mormon sometimes separates and sometimes combines the elements of this description of the devil from Moses and portrays Satan as one deliberately engaged in "*deceiving* the hearts of the people" and in "*blinding their eyes*" that he might "*lead them away*" (3 Nephi 2:2).[11] Particularly striking is the repeated statement that the devil *will lead* those who do not hearken to the Lord's voice "*captive at his will*" (Moses 4:4). In Alma we find that those who harden their hearts will receive "the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are *taken captive by the devil*,

10. Cf. Moses 6:52. Acts 4:12 contains nearly the same formula. Because of this New Testament parallel, this passage belongs in Group 2, but is listed in the appendix table in the order it appears in the text with the Group 1 statement to which it is linked contextually.

11. Compare Lehi's account of the devil's efforts to lead the children of men into captivity in 2 Nephi 2:17–29.

and *led by his will* down to destruction" (Alma 12:11). Much later, Alma invokes the same phrasing to warn his son Corianton of the plight of the wicked who, "because of their own iniquity," are "*led captive by the will of the devil*" (Alma 40:13). In the passage discussed above, Lehi taught his son Jacob that men "are free to choose liberty and eternal life, . . . or to choose *captivity* and death, according to the *captivity and power of the devil*; for he seeketh that men might be miserable" (2 Nephi 2:27).

A remarkable passage in the first part of the Book of Mormon pulls all these book of Moses themes about Satan together — to describe someone else. The implication is unmistakable when Laman characterizes his brother Nephi as one who *lies* and who *deceives our eyes*, thinking to *lead us away* for the purpose of making himself "*a king and a ruler over us*, that he may do with us *according to his will and pleasure*" (1 Nephi 16:38). Laman insinuates that Nephi, who chastises his wayward brothers, is himself like the devil. And resistance against him is not only righteous, but required. This account has the added complexity that it is a speech of Laman, who is quoted here in a record written by the very brother he attacks. If we accept the possibility that this text is dependent on a passage in the ancient book of Moses, we then recognize a major new dimension of meaning, not only in Laman's speech, but in Nephi's decision to preserve the speech, thus showing his descendants, and any other readers familiar with the Moses text, the full nature of the confrontation between the brothers, as well as the injustice of the attacks he suffered. The full irony is revealed when we reflect on the facts reported in Nephi's record and realize that Laman's false accusation against Nephi is an accurate self-description.

Tracing the Direction of Dependence

The foregoing discussion of Book of Mormon parallels to a number of book of Moses passages constitutes substantial evidence that the two texts are in some way dependent on one another or some common source. The question that follows next concerns the direction of influence. The first of the two major possibilities is that the book of Moses (received by Joseph Smith in June and December of 1830) was based on the Book of Mormon (translated mainly from April to June of 1829), which theory, of course, will be most attractive to those who believe Joseph Smith invented both. Several reasons showing why such a view does not explain the connections between these two texts are advanced below. This leaves only the other hypothesis as the leading explanation — namely, that the writers of the Book of Mormon had access to the book of Moses text.

The Book of Mormon authors explicitly identify their version of the Hebrew scriptures as a lineage history handed down through the descendants of Joseph (1 Nephi 5:10–16). The fact that there are some differences between the record on the brass plates and the Old Testament we have today is evident in the Book of Mormon text. The argument of this essay is that the brass plates account of the creation and the founding generations of the human race might include the material restored in Joseph Smith's book of Moses. This suggests the possibility that by checking the Book of Mormon text against other noncanonical manuscripts we might identify further texts that seem to have been available to the Nephite prophets through the brass plates. That such other manuscripts were once in existence seems clear from some of the New Testament parallels, and particularly the concentration of such usages in the writings of John and Paul.

The idea that the brass plates contained a different Moses account than now survives in Genesis or the Jewish tradition may be consistent with David Noel Freedman's theory that our present Genesis through Kings is a relatively recent edition or compilation designed to shift the emphasis from history to law.[12] The Book of Mormon itself reports a prophecy to the effect that the Bible which would come down to us in the latter days would have had many "plain and precious truths" removed from the original texts (see 1 Nephi 13:26–29, 32, 34–40; 14:23). These observations jointly suggest that the brass plates could contain earlier versions of several books. We might also want to test the hypothesis that our Old Testament version was rewritten for political reasons, as Freedman suggests.[13] Does it justify one particular competing tradition of Jewish origins? If so, it might constitute an early example of the textual corruptions described in the Book of Mormon.

Some people may be tempted to use these findings to argue that Joseph Smith was the common author of Moses and the Book of Mormon. But carefully considered, the evidence runs the other way. First, there is the matter of chronology. We can historically document the fact that Joseph began the Moses translation after the Book of Mormon was published.

---

12. See David Noel Freedman, "The Formation of the Canon of the Old Testament: The Selection and Identification of the Torah as the Supreme Authority of the Post-Exilic Community," Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch, eds., *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 315–32. Freedman, who is a prominent American biblical scholar, developed his thesis independently of any of the materials used in the present study.

13. Ibid.

But it is clearly Moses that provides the unity and coherence to a host of scattered Book of Mormon references. It is the story of creation and subsequent events that supplies meaning to Book of Mormon language connecting (1) the transgression, fall, and death; (2) explaining the origins of human agency; (3) describing the character and modus operandi of Satan; (4) explaining the origins and character of secret combinations and the works of darkness — to mention only a few of the most obvious examples. The Book of Mormon is the derivative document. It shows a number of different authors borrowing from a common source as suited their particular needs — Lehi, Nephi, Benjamin, and Alma all used it frequently, drawing on its context to give added meaning to their own writings.

Perhaps most significantly, we have at hand a control document against which to check this hypothesis. A few years after receiving Moses, Joseph Smith translated an Abrahamic text. In spite of the fact that this new document contained versions of some of the same chapters of Genesis that are paralleled in the book of Moses, and in spite of the fact that the Book of Mormon has a large number of direct references to the Abraham, the person, detailed textual comparison demonstrates that this second document does not feature any of the phrases and concepts that have been reported above linking Moses to the Book of Mormon textual tradition. Nor does the distinctive, non-Old Testament phraseology of the book of Abraham show up in the Book of Mormon. The logic that would lead skeptics to conclude that these common concepts and expressions provide evidence that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon and the book of Moses runs aground on Abraham, as the skeptical hypothesis would seem to require a similar pattern there. But such a pattern is not even faintly detectable.

It is also impressive that most of the influence from the book of Moses in the Book of Mormon shows up early in the small plates and the writings of the first generation of Book of Mormon prophets — significantly, those who had custody and long-term, firsthand access to the brass plates. Many of the later passages that use book of Moses terminology and concepts tend to repeat earlier Nephite adaptations of the original materials.

When there is evidence of interdependence between two texts, and one of these contains passages which play on parallel passages in the other in ways that assume the reader's familiarity with the other, the first one can be considered to be dependent on the second. The parallel passages discussed above, and some that will be discussed below, contain

several examples, in all of which the Book of Mormon writer appears to leave unarticulated much of the meaning he wants to convey, assuming the reader will make the connection with the book of Moses material in his own mind, make a comparison, and draw inferences from both the changes and the similarities that he finds. This is trivially true of inverted quotations (1 Nephi 19:12; 2 Nephi 9:6). But in this latter passage, Jacob substitutes a word to make a point about death and resurrection, depending on our knowledge of the original to help us see his point. Similarly, and perhaps most dramatically, Laman's speech discussed above is significantly more meaningful once we see how it draws on the book of Moses descriptions of the devil to identify Nephi implicitly with the devil. Seeing the dependence of Laman's speech on the book of Moses text transforms a rather routine complaint into the most aggressive indictment possible, and helps explain the life-and-death struggle that eventually grew out of it. However, I could not identify any passages in Moses which depended on the Book of Mormon's context for meaning. These are not the kinds of subtle dependence that could reasonably have been reconstructed by Joseph Smith in 1830 as he produced the book of Moses. There is no reason to believe they are the kinds of things he would ever have noticed himself under any circumstances. His interests, knowledge, and background did not extend to this kind of textual analysis.

Other Book of Mormon Parallels

The above two sections of this paper set out and support the hypothesis that the Book of Mormon writers had access in the brass plates to a document substantially the same as the book of Moses given to Joseph Smith by inspiration in 1830. That hypothesis in turn illuminates a large number of additional parallel passages, which in and of themselves may not constitute the strong kind of evidence given above for dependence of one text on the other. However, this second group of passages corroborates the hypothesis in a cumulative way. These additional passages are treated in groupings below. There are quite a number of less powerful correlations which in and of themselves would not compel us to accept a historical connection between the book of Moses and the Book of Mormon. Some of these may have occurred by chance, and others have recognizable New Testament parallels, but read in light of the much stronger examples listed above, they too seem to add some additional weight to my thesis.

Both the book of Moses and the Book of Mormon are remarkable for their claims to a full revelation of Christ to ancient prophets before New Testament times. While the presence of New Testament teachings and phraseology in these books might be made to fit the view that these books are Joseph Smith's nineteenth-century creations, that approach ignores a number of other significant factors, as indicated in the preceding section of this paper. For those who accept or are even willing to consider the ancient origins of the texts produced by Joseph Smith, correlations between them that include New Testament terminology will be of interest, and will contribute additional evidence for the evaluation of the thesis of dependence between these texts.

The first example shows how a statement from the book of Moses account can permeate the Book of Mormon, providing the stock terminology that will be used at widely separated times to describe the same prophesied event. As reported in Joseph Smith's Moses, Enoch the prophet is shown in vision the future crucifixion of the Lord, at which point he reports that "the *earth groaned*; and the *rocks* were *rent*" (Moses 7:56). Nephi chose nearly the same language to report what he saw in his great vision of what occurred immediately after the crucifixion, for he heard "thunderings and earthquakes, and all manner of *tumultuous noises*," and he saw "the *earth* and the *rocks*, that they *rent*" (1 Nephi 12:4). This passage is recognizably derived from the Moses passage, especially given that it is used as a description of the same future event. But later, Nephi quotes Zenos's description of the same events, saying "the *rocks* of the *earth* must *rend*; and because of the *groanings* of the *earth*, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God to exclaim: The God of nature suffers" (1 Nephi 19:12). Not only does this passage report the exact four terms of the Moses cluster and in the same context, but it nearly reverses them, again following Zeidel's law.

Here we have a complex but exact parallel in a context which indicates the author is consciously quoting, that he has reformulated the material to play on his readers' awareness of the original source, and a stated claim that the brass plates provide the source. We cannot tell whether it is Nephi who reverses the order of terms from the Zenos version (presumably quoted from Moses), or whether Nephi reports straight the reversal written by Zenos. Hundreds of years later the Nephite record described the actual events using the same language of the prophecy, again referring to Zenos: "The *earth* did cease to tremble, and the *rocks* did cease to *rend*, and the dreadful *groanings* did cease,

and all the *tumultuous noises* did pass away" (3 Nephi 10:9; cf. also 3 Nephi 10:16; Helaman 14:21; 3 Nephi 8:18–19).

Although the Old Testament does not contain any version of these descriptions, the case for dependence is weakened by the occurrence of a relatively close parallel in one New Testament account of these events where it is reported that "the earth did quake, and the rocks rent" (Matthew 27:51).[14] Still, the character of the parallels outlined above would suggest direct Book of Mormon dependence on the book of Moses source, and a possible distant connection of Matthew with a similar text.

Several examples of idiosyncratic phrases from Moses which are simply repeated by Book of Mormon writers (but not by any biblical authors) seem to indicate a special relationship between these texts. The Moses account introduces a novel phrase to describe the redemptive mission of the Savior of mankind. According to Enoch, the Lord told Adam: "This is the *plan of salvation* unto all men" (Moses 6:62). In his brief writings, Jarom reminds his people of "the *plan of salvation*," which has been revealed (Jarom 1:2). Alma also speaks of angels making "the *plan of salvation*" known to men (Alma 24:14; cf. also Alma 42:5).[15]

One of these recurring phrases in Joseph Smith's Moses is "*eternal life.*" In a sweeping verse, now familiar to all Latter-day Saints, the Lord explains to Moses that his work and glory is "to bring to pass the immortality and *eternal life* of man" (Moses 1:39). In other Moses passages the same concept is restated in the same terms (Moses 5:11; 6:59; 7:45). Although this language does not occur in Old Testament texts, the Book of Mormon, like the New Testament, is full of it from beginning to end. It begins in 2 Nephi 2, the chapter that reminds us most strongly of the Moses texts, and is echoed thirty times by Nephi and every major writer of the book.[16] The companion concept of immortality or immortal

---

14. Cf. also Romans 8:22: "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Clearly Paul means something altogether different in this passage.

15. See also Jacob 6:8; Alma 12:25–26, 30, 32–33; 17:16; 18:39; 22:13; 29:2; 34:16, 31; 39:18; 42:11, 13, which refer to "the plan of redemption," an idiosyncratic Book of Mormon variant on "plan of salvation."

16. See 2 Nephi 2:27–28; 10:23; 31:18, 20; Jacob 6:11; Enos 1:3; Mosiah 5:15; 15:23–25; 18:9, 13; 26:20; 28:7; Alma 1:4; 5:28; 7:16; 11:40; 13:29; 22:15; Helaman 5:8; 3 Nephi 9:14; 15:9; Moroni 9:25. For sample New Testament parallels see John 6:54; 6:68.

glory shows up three times in Moses, twice in conjunction with "*eternal life*" (Moses 1:39; 6:59, 61). It is not clearly present in the Old Testament, but occurs in similarly clear passages throughout the Book of Mormon.[17]

Enoch appealed to the language of Adam to show that "*no unclean thing can dwell* there, or dwell *in his presence*" (Moses 6:57). Nephi made exactly the same point in urging people to repent because "*no unclean thing can dwell with God*" (1 Nephi 10:21; cf. also 1 Nephi 15:33; Alma 7:21; Mormon 9:4). This one also shows up in the New Testament (Ephesians 5:5), and even faintly in the Old Testament (cf. Leviticus 22:3; Psalm 140:13).

In this same vein, Enoch records that Adam and his sons, as preachers of righteousness, "*called upon all men*, everywhere, *to repent*" (Moses 6:23, 5:14, and 6:57 all use similar phrasing). This universal call to repentance is duplicated in key sermons of Lehi and Alma (2 Nephi 2:21; Alma 12:33; see also how the Savior used it at 3 Nephi 11:32). And the concept is used twice by Moroni (Moroni 7:31; 8:8) and occurs in the New Testament (Acts 17:30).

These same passages are sometimes characterized by the additional stipulation that unless men do repent, they "*can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God*" (Moses 6:57). According to Enoch, Adam was commanded to teach this to his children (Moses 6:58). The exact phrase is used in similar contexts in five Book of Mormon speeches (cf. Mosiah 27:26; Alma 5:51; 9:12; 39:9; 3 Nephi 11:38). There are a handful of similar statements in the New Testament, with Galatians 5:21 being the closest.

In the Enoch passages the Lord draws a distinction between "*things which are temporal* and *things which are spiritual*" (Moses 6:63). The Book of Mormon invokes the same distinction in precisely the same words on several occasions. In the small plates Nephi twice explicates visions or scriptures by saying that they refer to "*things* both *temporal and spiritual*" (1 Nephi 15:32; 22:3). King Benjamin reminded his people that those who keep the commandments "are blessed *in all things*, both *temporal and spiritual*" (Mosiah 2:41). Alma encouraged people to pray for whatsoever *things* they needed, "both *spiritual and temporal*" (Alma 7:23). And he also distinguished between the *spiritual* death and the *temporal* death (Alma 12:16), and between the *temporal and spiritual*

---

17. The terms "immortal" or "immortality" occur in the following passages: 2 Nephi 9:13, 15; Enos 1:27; Mosiah 2:28, 38; 16:10; Alma 5:15; 11:45; 12:12, 20; 40:2; 41:4; Helaman 3:30; 3 Nephi 28:8, 15, 17, 36; Mormon 6:21.

things the Lord provides for our benefit (Alma 37:43).[18] This concept of spiritual things shows up in the New Testament, but not paired with references to temporal things (1 Corinthians 2:10–14). Other New Testament passages vary even more as the equation of things temporal and eternal with things seen and not seen (2 Corinthians 4:18; cf. Romans 15:27; 1 Corinthians 9:11).

Speaking first of the city of Enoch, and later of the millennial period, the Moses text says that the Lord's people will "*dwell in righteousness*" (Moses 7:16, 65). Nephi also used the phrase in the same context to describe what would happen in the Millennium. Nephi's usage illuminates the meaning of the phrase even more by suggesting that it is because the people "*dwell in righteousness*" that Satan will be bound and have no power over their hearts during this period (1 Nephi 22:26). A somewhat similar phrase does occur in the New Testament where it also refers to the Millennium. Peter looked forward to "a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13).

The Moses account also differs sharply from the Old Testament versions in its clear references to the Savior. Moses reports that God instructed Adam to be baptized "in the name of *mine Only Begotten Son*" (Moses 6:52), and informed him that he would receive the Holy Ghost. Numerous other passages in Moses refer to "*mine only begotten.*"[19] Whereas this phrase occurs six times in the New Testament (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; Hebrews 11:17; 1 John 4:9), it occurs even more frequently in the teachings of the Book of Mormon prophets. Jacob explains the point in some detail (cf. Jacob 4:5, 11), and Alma raises it again in his preaching (Alma 12:33–34). This is all in addition to the multitude of direct references to Jesus Christ which distinguish both of these texts.

Describing the infernal conspiracies hatched by Cain and his associates, Enoch said that "their *works* were in the *dark*, and they knew every man his brother" (Moses 5:51). From that time, he observed that "the *works of darkness* began to prevail among all the sons of men" (Moses 5:55). Nephi spoke repeatedly of those whose works were "*works of darkness,*" using the precise phrasing of the Moses text.[20] His younger brother Jacob and a later Nephi also complained of the "*secret*

18. Samuel the Lamanite was able to combine all of these uses of the distinction in one statement. See Helaman 14:16.

19. Cf. Moses 1:6, 16–17, 32–33; 2:1, 26–27; 3:18; 4:1, 3, 28; 6:52, 59, 62; 7:62. Cf. further Moses 7:50, 59.

20. 2 Nephi 25:2; 26:10, 22. See also Alma 37:21, 23; Helaman 6:30; Mormon 8:27.

works of darkness" (2 Nephi 9:9; 10:15; Helaman 8:4; 10:3). Enoch also refers to these conspiracies as "*secret works*" (Moses 6:15). This phrase is also used repeatedly in the Book of Mormon to refer to the same kind of conspiracies[21] and has New Testament parallels (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:11).

The other phrase used in Moses to refer to these conspiracies is "*secret combinations*," for "from the days of Cain, there was a *secret combination*" (Moses 5:51). The phrase occurs throughout the Book of Mormon[22] in exactly the same contexts as "secret works" and always carries the much richer and fuller connotations of Enoch's descriptions than do the Old Testament accounts of murderous conspiracies.

Enoch's history twice indicates that the wickedness of men invariably produces "*wars and bloodshed*" (Moses 6:15; 7:16). This is the general term used throughout the Book of Mormon as well,[23] with some occasional variations which reinforce the prominence of the stereotype. Mormon described the opposite condition as "*peace . . . [and] no bloodshed*" (Mormon 1:12).

Moses reports that for their sins Adam and Eve (and later Cain) were "*shut out from [the Lord's] presence*" (Moses 5:4, 41). Enoch later reports that as men are tempted by Satan, they "become carnal, sensual, and devilish, and are *shut out from the presence of God*" (Moses 6:49). In this same general context Jacob taught the early Nephites that without an atonement "our spirits must have become like unto [the devil], and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be *shut out from the presence of our God*" (2 Nephi 9:9).

Joseph Smith's Moses reports the sins of Cain and his descendants in much greater detail than the biblical account. Of particular interest is the evil conspiracy hatched by Cain to murder for gain: "And Cain said: Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret, that I may *murder* and *get gain*" (Moses 5:31). The Book of Mormon describes several similar conspiracies. Helaman reports the nefarious band led by Kishkumen and how "it was the object of all those who belonged to his band to *murder*, and to *rob*, and to *gain power*" (Helaman 2:8). From a much earlier period, Moroni reports a group that also administered secret

---

21. See 2 Nephi 9:9; 10:15; Alma 37:21, 23, 25; Helaman 8:4; 10:3; 3 Nephi 3:7.

22. 2 Nephi 9:9; 26:22; Alma 37:30–31; Helaman 2:8; 3:23; 6:38; 3 Nephi 4:29; 5:6; 7:6, 9; 9:9; 4 Nephi 1:42; Mormon 8:27; Ether 8:18–19, 22, 24; 9:1; 11:15; 13:18; 14:8, 10. Cf. Helaman 6:30; 11:10, 26; Ether 8:9; 9:26; 13:15.

23. Jacob 7:24; Omni 1:3, 24; Alma 35:15; 62:35, 39. Cf. also Mosiah 29:36; Alma 45:11; 60:16; Helaman 6:17; Mormon 8:8; Ether 14:21.

oaths "to keep them in darkness, to help such as sought to *gain power*, and to *murder*, and to *plunder*, and to lie, and to commit all manner of wickedness and whoredoms" (Ether 8:16).

It is characteristic of the Book of Mormon account of evil conspiracies that they are "*seeking for power.*" When the lower judges became corrupted, and when the kingmen revolted, they were all "*seeking for power*" (Alma 46:4; 60:17). Alma reports an interesting variation where the wicked were "*seeking* to put down all *power* and authority which cometh from God" (Moroni 8:28). Enoch uses the same phrase in the Moses account to describe horrible conspiracies of earlier times in which men fought against their own brothers "*seeking for power*" (Moses 6:15).

Many commentators on the Book of Mormon have noted the unique phrase describing the condition of fallen men as "*carnal, sensual, and devilish.*" The phrase is not known in the Bible,[24] but occurs twice in the Book of Mormon, both times in this precise formulaic way. Synonyms are never used, and the three words always occur in the same order (Mosiah 16:3; Alma 42:10; cf. Alma 41:13).

Such usage demands a source in a prominent text or ritual. The book of Moses provides both. For it is here in this key ritual text that we learn how Satan came among the children of Adam and Eve and commanded them not to believe the teachings of their parents. "And they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be *carnal, sensual, and devilish*" (Moses 5:13). The point is exactly restated later when it says "Satan hath come among the children of men, and tempteth them to worship him; and men have become *carnal, sensual, and devilish*, and are shut out from the presence of God" (Moses 6:49).

One phrase that occurs only once in each text still seems quite distinctive. Speaking of an apostate group, the Moses text reports simply that "their *hearts have waxed hard*" (Moses 6:27). When Alma saw "that the *hearts* of the people began to *wax hard*, . . . his *heart* was exceedingly *sorrowful*" (Alma 35:15).[25] This text expands on the phrase by illustrating its opposite in Alma's righteous response.

In a similar vein, the Moses account characterizes the wicked of Noah's day, who defended their ways, as "*lifted up in the imagination of the thoughts of [their] heart*" (Moses 8:22). This is invoked holistically as an implicit comparison when Alma reports the defensive speech of

---

24. See James 3:15, where a similar phrase occurs: "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish."
25. Cf. Matthew 13:15; Acts 28:27; Jacob 1:15; Alma 21:3.

the apostate Nehor who was "*lifted up in the pride of his heart*" (Alma 1:6).[26] This is another case similar to 1 Nephi 16:38, where much of the meaning of the parallel is signalled more by the similarity of context than by the words that are repeated.

The Book of Mormon is notable for what would appear as a unique invention, the cursing of half of Lehi's family and their descendants, and the marking of the cursed group with a dark skin that produced a social isolation between them and their relatives who did not have the curse. But in Moses we see the same thing happening to Cain and his descendants (Moses 5:25; 40–41; 7:22). These passages go far beyond the information available in Genesis, particularly concerning the effect of the skin color upon Cain's descendants (Genesis 4:11, 15).

Describing his encounters with Deity and with the devil, Moses remarks that he was able to look upon Satan "*in the natural man*" (Moses 1:14). The Book of Mormon prophets picked up this same term to distinguish men who did and did not have the Spirit of God upon them. Benjamin explained that "*the natural man* is an enemy to God" and that men can become Saints only by "[putting] off *the natural man*" (Mosiah 3:19). Alma carries the theme forward by inquiring "what *natural man* is there that knoweth these things?" (Alma 26:21). A similar usage crops up in the New Testament once (1 Corinthians 2:14).[27]

In addition to phrase correlations, we have one unique name correlation between Moses and the Book of Mormon. *Omner* was a name of one of the four sons of Mosiah.[28] But in Moses it is the name of a city, and in the Book of Mormon the name of a land (Moses 7:9; Alma 51:26). (The term *shum* also occurs uniquely in these two sources, though it is a name in Moses and a unit of measure for gold in the Book of Mormon.)[29]

Finally, an important form of linguistic punctuation which is used by several Book of Mormon writers and which does not obviously appear in the Old Testament, is used in Moses in the same way. Moses ends an important segment of text with the statement: "And thus it is. Amen."[30] It can be shown that Nephi used this same phrase to mark

---

26. Cf. Daniel 5:20; 1 Timothy 3:6; Jacob 2:13; Mosiah 11:5, 19; Alma 6:3; 7:6; 31:25; 45:24; 3 Nephi 16:10; Mormon 8:28, 36.

27. Cf. Mosiah 16:5; Alma 41:11–12; 42:10.

28. Cf. Mosiah 27:34 and numerous other references to this great missionary.

29. Enoch refers once to the valley of Shum (Moses 7:5) and twice to the people of Shum (Moses 7:5, 7). Alma mentions a "shum of gold" twice (Alma 11:5, 9).

30. Cf. Moses 5:59 with 1 Nephi 9:6; 14:30; 22:31; Alma 13:9; Helaman 12:26. Cf. also 1 Nephi 15:36; 2 Nephi 33:15; Mosiah 3:27; Alma 6:8; 7:27; Moses 6:68.

significant structural junctures in the text.[31] Allusions to final judgment and testimony of the gospel provide additional contextual parallels for some of these passages.

Conclusion

Some final caveats are in order. Any project like this is unavoidably handicapped by the fact that none of the texts being compared is available in the original languages. For those who do not believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet, this point alone would make this entire exercise quite uninteresting. But those of us who do recognize Joseph as an inspired restorer of ancient texts need not be precluded from thoughtful investigation of this matter. It should be sufficient for us to see that neither Joseph's language, nor the language of the Old Testament that was familiar to him, accounts for the correlations we have observed in the foregoing comparisons. New Testament influence is also largely excluded for the primary cases of the first group on which the conclusions of this study rest. Furthermore, there has been no effort made to identify appearances of the key phrases in this study in either the Doctrine and Covenants or Joseph Smith's own writings. Their presence or absence in those texts is equally compatible with the hypothesis developed in this paper. A casual survey suggests that some show up there, and others do not.

Reliance on computerized text comparisons has both advantages and dangers. Many phrases were included only because the computer picked up what was otherwise unnoticed. On the other hand, the computer cannot make judgments of relevance or significance. Computer analyses must always be supplemented by a careful reading and rereading of the text, as the machine cannot pick up more subtle parallels of meaning and context. And because the King James Version is the only biblical text used, there remains a significant likelihood that some of the parallels assembled in this study will eventually be found to have some kind of Old Testament counterparts, thus reducing their contribution to the conclusions drawn here. Unless, however, such future discoveries include most of what is identified here, the textual evidence will continue to favor the thesis that the brass plates version of Genesis had contents similar to the book of Moses and that phrases found in the book of Moses/brass plates would also appropriately be found in the Book of Mormon.

---

31.   See Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," *BYU Studies* 20 (Winter 1980): 134; reprinted in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), 58.

Noel B. Reynolds *(PhD, Harvard University) is an emeritus professor of political science at Brigham Young University, where he taught a broad range of courses in legal and political philosophy, American heritage, and the Book of Mormon. His research and publications are based in these fields and several others, including authorship studies, Mormon history, Christian history and theology, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.*

Appendix: Analytical Chart of Book of Moses References That Appear in the Book of Mormon

I am grateful to John W. Welch for giving me the extra encouragement I needed to undertake the following exercise. The point of the chart provided below is twofold. The first purpose is merely to list the passages included in the paper. The second is to attempt a crude computation of statistical probability of dependence between the texts. This is not the kind of thing that scholars have done much with. I offer this analysis only because I think it does produce some useful information, if not clear and precise measures of probability. A key to the chart precedes the specific data, and following the table is a discussion of the assumptions that underlie it.

Column	Description
A.	Cluster number (1–33)
B.	List of key terms in cluster in original order
C.	Book of Moses key reference (multiple references not listed)
D.	Book of Mormon reference
E.	Cluster type (a, b, c) a. single word b. phrase c. synonymous term or phrase
F.	Number of significant repeated terms
G.	Precision of reference (same terms, same order) 1. possible variant, recognizable similarities 2. variant, but recognizably the same 3. minor variation only 4. no variation

H.   Deliberate reshaping or manipulation of source
1.   casual or even accidental reference
2.   paraphrase or other loose reference
3.   adaptation of source to context
4.   exact repetition
5.   play on original terms or word order such that present formulation requires knowledge of original to convey full meaning (including inverted quotations)

I.   Similarity of context
1.   Weak similarity of context
2.   Define similarity of context
3.   Exact context evident or evoked by repetition of contextual language

J.   Author's awareness of a brass plates source
1.   consciousness of source not implied or meaning not precisely the same and access to brass plates unclear
2.   aware of either book of Moses or intermediary Book of Mormon sources and meaning close to source
3.   stated use or awareness of brass plates as source

K.   Distinctiveness of the concept or the terms (in American discourse)
1.   English terminology common to nineteenth-century Americans
2.   somewhat distinctive terminology
3.   unique or distinctive terminology

L.   Other occurrences (clear Old Testament reference disqualify items from this study)
1.   strong New Testament parallel and/or weak Old Testament parallel
2.   weak New Testament parallel and no Old Testament
3.   no biblical parallels found, strong or weak

M.   Score. This number is calculated in the following manner: The seven criteria (G through L) are weighted modestly to ensure that the more

important ones have a larger effect. The values in columns G, H, I, and K are doubled, and the values in L are tripled. All seven values are then multiplied in a linearized calculation that combines them roughly into a common score designed to indicate relative degrees of dependence between the two texts. For convenience, the score is reduced by a factor of .001 and rounded to the nearest whole number to arrive at the score listed in column M.[32] The only object in presenting the results of these calculations is to emphasize differences and not to claim any numerical or quantifiable relationship or to ascribe any particular meaning to the distance between scores.

Group 1

A	B	C	D	Type	Terms	Precision	Intention	Context	Awareness	Distinctiveness	Biblical	Score
				E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	transgression-fall, fall-death	Moses 6:59	2 Nephi 9:6	b	4	4	5	3	3	2	3	207
2	order-days-years-eternity	Moses 6:67	Alma 13:7	b	6	3	3	3	3	3	2	140
3	Lord-from all eternity-to	Moses 7:29	Mosiah 3:5	b	3	4	4	2	2	3	3	83
3	Lord-from all eternity-to	Moses 7:29	Moroni 8:18	b	3	3	4	2	2	3	3	62
4	God-gave-man-agency	Moses 7:32	2 Nephi 2:16	d	4	3	5	3	3	3	3	233
5	Lord's Spirit-withdraws-from-man	Moses 1:15	Alma 34:35	b	3	4	3	2	2	3	3	62
5	Lord's Spirit-withdraws-from-man	Moses 1:15	Helaman 4:24	b	3	4	5	2	2	3	3	104
5	Lord's Spirit-withdraws-from-man	Moses 1:15	Helaman 6:35	b	3	3	5	2	2	3	3	78
5	Lord's Spirit-withdraws-from-man	Moses 1:15	Helaman 13:8	b	3	3	5	2	2	3	3	78
5	Lord's Spirit-withdraws-from-man	Moses 1:15	Mosiah 2:36	b	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	47
6	children-whole-from foundation	Moses 6:54	Moroni 8:8, 12	b	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	140
7	only name-given-salvation*	Moses 6:52	Mosiah 3:17	b	3	3	5	3	2	3	1	39
8	devil-father-of all lies	Moses 4:4	2 Nephi 2:18	b	3	3	5	3	3	3	3	175
8	devil-father-of all lies	Moses 4:4	Ether 8:25	b	3	3	4	3	2	3	3	93

*This Group 2 item is listed here because it is linked to the preceding item in the text.

Group 1

A	B	C	D	E Type	F Terms	G Precision	H Intention	I Context	J Awareness	K Distinctiveness	L Biblical	M Score
8	devil-father-of all lies	Moses 4:4	2 Nephi 9:9	b	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	105
9	devil-lead-captive-his will	Moses 4:4	Alma 12:11	c	4	4	3	2	3	3	3	124
9	devil-lead-captive-his will	Moses 4:4	Alma 40:13	c	4	3	3	3	2	3	3	93
9	devil-lead-captive-his will	Moses 4:4	2 Nephi 2:27	c	4	2	3	3	3	3	3	93
10	devil-deceive-blind-lead	Moses 4:4	3 Nephi 2:2	c	4	4	3	2	2	3	3	83
11	lies-lead-well-deceive-eyes	Moses 4:4	1 Nephi 16:38	c	5	3	5	1	2	3	3	65

Group 2

A	B	C	D	E Type	F Terms	G Precision	H Intention	I Context	J Awareness	K Distinctiveness	L Biblical	M Score
12	earth-groans; rocks-rend	Moses 7:56	1 Nephi 12:4	b	4	3	3	3	2	3	1	31
12	earth-groans; rocks-rend	Moses 7:56	1 Nephi 19:12	b	4	4	4	3	3	3	1	83
12	earth-groans; rocks-rend	Moses 7:56	3 Nephi 10:9	b	4	3	3	3	3	3	1	47
13	plan of salvation	Moses 6:62	Jarom 1:2	b	2	4	4	1	2	3	3	28
13	plan of salvation	Moses 6:62	Alma 24:14	b	2	4	4	2	2	3	3	55

Group 2

A	B	C	D	Type (E)	Terms (F)	Precision (G)	Intention (H)	Context (I)	Awareness (J)	Distinctiveness (K)	Biblical (L)	Score (M)
13	plan of salvation	Moses 6:62	Alma 42:5	b	2	4	4	3	3	3	3	124
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	2 Nephi 2:27	b	2	4	4	2	3	2	1	18
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	2 Nephi 2:28	b	2	4	4	2	3	2	1	18
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	2 Nephi 10:23	b	2	4	4	2	3	2	1	18
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	2 Nephi 31:18	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	2 Nephi 31:20	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Jacob 6:11	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Enos 1:3	b	2	4	4	2	1	2	1	6
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Mosiah 5:15	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Mosiah 15:23	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Mosiah 15:24	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Mosiah 15:25	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Mosiah 18:9	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Mosiah 18:13	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Mosiah 26:20	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12

Group 2

A	B	C	D	Type (E)	Terms (F)	Precision (G)	Intention (H)	Context (I)	Awareness (J)	Distinctiveness (K)	Biblical (L)	Score (M)
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Mosiah 28:7	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Alma 1:4	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Alma 5:28	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Alma 7:16	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Alma 11:40	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Alma 13:29	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Alma 22:15	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Helaman 5:8	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	3 Nephi 9:14	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	3 Nephi 15:9	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
14	eternal life	Moses 1:39	Moroni 9:25	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
15	unclean-dwell-presence-God	Moses 6:57	1 Nephi 10:21	b	4	3	3	2	2	2	2	28
15	unclean-dwell-presence-God	Moses 6:57	1 Nephi 15:34	b	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	41
15	unclean-dwell-presence-God	Moses 6:57	Alma 7:21	b	4	2	3	2	2	2	2	18
16	call on-all men-to repent	Moses 6:23	2 Nephi 2:21	b	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	12

Group 2

A	B	C	D	Type	Terms	Precision	Intention	Context	Awareness	Distinctiveness	Biblical	Score
				E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
16	call on-all men-to repent	Moses 6:23	Alma 12:33	b	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	12
16	call on-all men-to repent	Moses 6:23	3 Nephi 11:32	b	3	4	3	2	2	1	1	7
16	call on-all men-to repent	Moses 6:23	Moroni 7:31	b	3	3	3	1	2	1	1	3
17	nowise-inherit-kingdom of God	Moses 6:57	Mosiah 27:26	b	3	4	4	3	1	1	1	7
17	nowise-inherit-kingdom of God	Moses 6:57	Alma 5:51	b	3	4	4	2	2	1	1	9
17	nowise-inherit-kingdom of God	Moses 6:57	Alma 9:12	b	3	4	4	2	2	1	1	9
17	nowise-inherit-kingdom of God	Moses 6:57	Alma 39:9	b	3	4	4	2	2	1	1	9
17	nowise-inherit-kingdom of God	Moses 6:57	3 Nephi 11:38	b	3	4	4	2	1	1	1	5
18	things-temporal-spiritual	Moses 6:63	1 Nephi 15:32	b	3	4	3	2	2	2	3	41
18	things-temporal-spiritual	Moses 6:63	1 Nephi 22:3	b	3	4	3	1	2	2	2	14
18	things-temporal-spiritual	Moses 6:63	Mosiah 2:41	b	3	4	3	3	2	2	2	41
18	things-temporal-spiritual	Moses 6:63	Alma 7:23	b	3	4	3	2	2	2	2	28
18	things-temporal-spiritual	Moses 6:63	Alma 12:16	b	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	5
18	things-temporal-spiritual	Moses 6:63	Alma 37:43	b	3	4	3	1	2	2	2	14
18	things-temporal-spiritual	Moses 6:63	Helaman 14:16	b	3	4	3	3	2	2	2	41

Group 2

A	B	C	D	E Type	F Terms	G Precision	H Intention	I Context	J Awareness	K Distinctiveness	L Biblical	M Score
19	people-dwell-in righteousness	Moses 7:16	1 Nephi 22:26	b	3	4	4	3	3	2	2	83
20	mine Only Begotten Son	Moses 6:52	Jacob 4:5	b	4	3	2	2	3	2	1	14
20	mine Only Begotten Son	Moses 6:52	Jacob 4:11	b	4	3	2	2	3	2	1	14
20	mine Only Begotten Son	Moses 6:52	Alma 12:33	b	4	3	4	3	3	2	1	41
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	2 Nephi 25:2	b	2	4	4	1	2	2	1	6
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	2 Nephi 26:10	b	2	4	4	1	2	2	1	6
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	2 Nephi 26:22	b	2	4	4	3	2	2	1	18
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	2 Nephi 9:9	b	2	4	4	3	2	2	1	18
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	2 Nephi 10:15	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	Alma 37:21	b	2	4	4	3	2	2	1	18
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	Alma 37:23	b	2	4	4	3	2	2	1	18
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	Alma 45:12	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	12
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	Helaman 6:28	b	2	4	4	3	2	2	1	18
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	Helaman 6:30	b	2	4	4	3	2	2	1	18
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	Helaman 8:4	b	2	4	4	3	2	2	1	18

Group 2

A	B	C	D	Type	Terms	Precision	Intention	Context	Awareness	Distinctiveness	Biblical	Score
				E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	Helaman 10:3	b	2	4	4	3	2	2	1	18
21	works of darkness	Moses 5:55	Mormon 8:27	b	2	4	4	3	2	2	1	18
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	2 Nephi 26:22	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Alma 37:30	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Alma 37:31	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Helaman 2:8	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Helaman 3:23	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Helaman 6:38	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	3 Nephi 4:29	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	3 Nephi 5:6	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	3 Nephi 7:6	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	3 Nephi 7:9	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	3 Nephi 9:9	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	4 Nephi 1:42	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Mormon 8:27	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83

Group 2

A	B	C	D	Type	Terms	Precision	Intention	Context	Awareness	Distinctiveness	Biblical	Score
				E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 8:18	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 8:19	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 8:22	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 8:24	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 8:27	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 9:1	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 11:15	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 13:18	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 14:8	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
22	secret combination(s)	Moses 5:51	Ether 14:10	b	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	83
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Jacob 7:24	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	3	37
23	war(s) and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Omni 1:3	b	2	4	3	1	1	2	3	7
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Omni 1:24	b	2	3	3	1	1	2	3	5
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Alma 35:15	b	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	21
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Alma 62:35	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	3	37

Group 2

A	B	C	D	Type (E)	Terms (F)	Precision (G)	Intention (H)	Context (I)	Awareness (J)	Distinctiveness (K)	Biblical (L)	Score (M)
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Alma 62:39	b	2	4	4	2	2	2	3	37
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Mormon 1:12	b	2	2	5	1	2	2	3	12
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Mosiah 29:36	b	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	9
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Alma 45:11	b	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	9
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Alma 60:16	b	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	9
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Helaman 6:17	b	2	2	5	3	2	2	3	35
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Mormon 8:8	b	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	9
23	wars and bloodshed	Moses 6:15	Ether 14:21	b	2	2	5	3	2	2	3	35
24	shut out-from presence-God	Moses 6:49	2 Nephi 9:9	b	3	4	4	3	3	3	1	62
25	murder-get gain	Moses 5:31	Helaman 2:8	c	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	47
25	murder-get gain	Moses 5:31	Helaman 7:21	c	2	3	3	2	2	3	3	31
25	murder-get gain	Moses 5:31	Ether 8:16	c	2	2	3	3	2	3	3	31
26	seeking for power	Moses 6:15	Alma 46:4	b	2	4	4	2	2	1	3	18
26	seeking for power	Moses 6:15	Alma 60:17	b	2	4	4	2	2	1	3	18
26	seeking for power	Moses 6:15	Moroni 8:28	b	2	2	2	1	2	1	3	2

Group 2

A	B	C	D	Type	Terms	Precision	Intention	Context	Awareness	Distinctiveness	Biblical	Score
				E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
27	carnal, sensual, devilish	Moses 5:13	Alma 42:10	b	3	4	4	3	3	3	1	62
27	carnal, sensual, devilish	Moses 5:13	Mosiah 16:3	b	3	4	4	3	3	3	1	62
27	carnal, sensual, devilish	Moses 5:13	Alma 41:13	b	3	2	5	2	2	3	1	17
28	hearts-wax-hard	Moses 6:27	Alma 35:15	b	3	4	3	2	2	2	1	14
29	lifted up-imagination-his heart	Moses 8:22	Alma 1:6	c	3	3	3	3	2	3	1	23
30	natural man	Moses 1:14	Mosiah 3:19	b	2	4	4	1	1	2	3	9
30	natural man	Moses 1:14	Mosiah 3:19	b	2	4	4	1	1	2	3	9
30	natural man	Moses 1:14	Alma 26:21	b	2	4	4	2	1	2	3	18
31	Omner	Moses 7:9	Mosiah 27:34	a	1	4	4	2	2	3	3	28
32	shum	Moses 7:5	Alma 11:5	a	1	4	4	1	2	3	3	14
33	and thus-it was (is)-Amen	Moses 5:59	1 Nephi 9:6	b	4	4	5	1	2	2	3	46
33	and thus-it was (is)-Amen	Moses 5:59	1 Nephi 14:30	b	4	4	5	1	2	2	3	46
33	and thus-it was (is)-Amen	Moses 5:59	1 Nephi 22:31	b	4	4	5	3	2	2	3	138
33	and thus-it was (is)-Amen	Moses 5:59	Alma 13:9	b	4	4	5	3	2	2	3	138
33	and thus-it was (is)-Amen	Moses 5:59	Helaman 12:26	b	4	4	5	2	2	2	3	92

Assumptions of This Model

1. The model assumes a linear relationship between the seven items used in each score calculation. This assumes that each of the seven criteria adds plausibility independently of each of the others. This assumption would be compromised to the extent that any of the seven criteria were interdependent.

2. The model mainly attempts to give greater value to intuitively less likely features of references. A rough effort is made to weight actual differences used to calculate probabilities. Scores indicate greater or lesser probability but not magnitudes.

3. Probability assumptions for categories F through L:

F. *Number of Terms*. The greater the number of significant terms repeated in parallel phrasings in two texts, the less likely they are to be independent.

G. *Precision of reference*. The more precise the similarities between parallel phrasings in two texts, the less likely they are to be independent.

H. *Deliberate reshaping or manipulation of source*. The more deliberately shaped the repetition in parallel phrasings in two texts, the less likely they are to be independent. Intentionality is inferred from contextual adaptation, exact repetition, or intentional manipulation (including inverted quotations) that creates additional meaning for those who recognize the intended reference to the source text. The latter category is deemed least likely to be independent because the intended meaning of the passage is only communicable to a reader who shares the author's awareness of the source. The author not only is influenced by the source, he uses it in new ways to communicate his intentions.

I. *Context*. The more similar the contexts in which parallel phrasings occur, the less likely they are to be independent. The evidence for dependence between two passages where the same concepts or terms occur is stronger when there are additional similarities in the two contexts. Context similarity can take different forms. For example, the two passages might refer to similar situations, feature the same accompanying statement, or be located in similar doctrinal discourses or historical explanations.

J. *Author's awareness of a brass plates source.* Author awareness of a brass plates source reduces the likelihood of independence. This awareness must be inferred contextually with explicit references to brass plates writings as the strongest evidence.

K. *Distinctiveness of the concept or the terms (in American discourse).* The more distinctive the terminology repeated in parallel phrasings in two texts, the less likely they are to be independent.

L. *Other occurrences (biblical).* Presence of weak or strong versions of the parallel terminology in the New Testament, and even more so, in the Old Testament, increases the possibility that the book of Moses and Book of Mormon passages are independent. But if these parallel expressions are not found in the Bible, this readily available text is removed as a possible source for Joseph Smith's translation language, thus increasing the probability that Book of Mormon writers are reflecting a source known to them from the brass plates. As already explained, clear Old Testament parallels were considered sufficient reason to drop the occurrence altogether as evidence of dependence.

The Joseph Smith Papers and the Book of Abraham: A Response to Recent Reviews

Matthew J. Grow and Matthew C. Godfrey

Abstract: The Joseph Smith Papers welcomes engagement with its work and gratefully acknowledges the important work of various scholars on the Book of Abraham. Recent reviews in the Interpreter *of* Revelations and Translations, Volume 4, *however, significantly misunderstand the purposes and conventions of the project. This response corrects some of those misconceptions, including the idea that the transcript is riddled with errors and the idea that personal agendas drive the analysis in the volume. The complex history of the Book of Abraham can be understood through multiple faithful perspectives, and the Joseph Smith Papers Project affirms the value of robust, respectful, and professional dialogue about our shared history.*

[**Editor's note:** We are pleased to present this response to two recent book reviews in the pages of *Interpreter*. Consistent with practice in many academic journals, we are also publishing rejoinders from the review authors, immediately following this response.]

The *Interpreter* recently published two reviews of a volume released last year by the Joseph Smith Papers Project: *Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Documents.*[1] The volume reproduces the Book of Abraham manuscripts as well as the entire

---

1. See Jeffrey Dean Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019), 13–104, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/a-precious-resource-with-some-gaps/; and John Gee, "The Joseph Smith Papers Project Stumbles," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019), 175–86, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-joseph-smith-papers-project-stumbles/.

collection of extant documents associated with efforts by Joseph Smith and his associates to study the Egyptian language and translate ancient papyri. The volume provides, for the first time, high-resolution photographic facsimiles of all the relevant documents, along with a side-by-side transcription. We are proud to have published this volume.

The various volumes of *The Joseph Smith Papers* have received dozens of reviews over the years. The reviews have been very positive overall but not without critique. Following the tradition of academic scholarship, we have not responded to negative reviews. The reviews in the *Interpreter* by Jeff Lindsay and John Gee, however, appear to have misunderstood the goals and practices of the Joseph Smith Papers Project to such a degree that they have spread unfortunate misconceptions in various online discussions. Those misconceptions are serious enough that we feel compelled to supply clarification.

The reviews make two serious arguments to which we will respond: that an agenda that could be harmful to the faith of Latter-day Saints permeates this volume of *The Joseph Smith Papers* and that the book is riddled with technical errors. We reject both characterizations.

Does a Personal and Faith-Destroying Agenda Permeate the Book?

The process of writing each volume of *The Joseph Smith Papers* ensures that no one personal viewpoint dominates any book. Each volume is prepared by a large team of professional historians, editors, and source checkers. Our volume on the Book of Abraham was then reviewed by at least six scholars in the Church History Department; the Joseph Smith Papers National Advisory Board, which includes seven experts in documentary editing, Latter-day Saint history, and religious studies, and at least eight external scholars, including Egyptologists and historians of the nineteenth century, both Latter-day Saints and not. In addition, the book was reviewed by a panel of General Authorities and approved for publication by Church leaders.

As is our practice with every volume, the team working on *Volume 4* consulted the work of numerous scholars of various faiths and areas of expertise. Some of these scholars answered questions throughout the volume's development, and some provided crucial feedback during a month-long review period. As we write in our acknowledgments, "Their expertise and insights improved the quality of our work."[2] While

2. Robin Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*

our task was primarily to present and analyze the documents in the volume in their nineteenth-century historical context, our work was made better by four Egyptologists — including John Gee — who helped us understand the ancient context of the papyri and other matters. We respect the expertise of our Egyptologist colleagues and acknowledge their significant contributions to scholarship on the Book of Abraham. We are only the latest in a long line of scholars to work on the Book of Abraham, and we are grateful for and have learned from the work of those who have gone before us. No single discipline — and certainly no single scholar — holds all the answers to the complex questions raised by the Book of Abraham.

Our engagement with the work of Egyptologists did not start with their review of our manuscript. Throughout our work, we closely consulted published works by Egyptologists. Indeed, *Volume 4* cites nine of John Gee's own works — more than any other author. When we received proposed revisions from Gee and other Egyptologists during their review, we carefully considered each comment and gratefully incorporated many of them. On some topics, we do read the historical evidence in Joseph Smith's journal and elsewhere as well as the textual evidence in the manuscripts differently than Gee does. For instance, we believe the evidence suggests that Joseph Smith translated portions of the Book of Abraham in Kirtland and then later in Nauvoo, while Gee asserts that all of the translation occurred in Kirtland. However, contrary to the assertions of both Lindsay and Gee that a particular perspective was "assumed" and those of others were "ignored," we carefully weighed many perspectives before making such decisions — and we qualify our explanations in terms of their probability. It has been a rich and rewarding process to see the training and expertise of multiple fields come together to produce this complex and valuable resource.

The reviews by Lindsay and Gee suggest that the volume takes a particular view on the theological question of precisely how and when Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham. Over time, Latter-day Saints have proposed two basic ways of thinking about the relationship between the Book of Abraham text and the various documents produced in Kirtland to understand the Egyptian language. The first approach suggests that Joseph translated the Book of Abraham first and then used that text to "reverse engineer" an understanding of the Egyptian characters on the papyri. The second approach suggests that Joseph and his associates first studied the ancient papyri, producing documents

(Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2018), 381.

as they puzzled over the meaning of the characters on the papyri. The second approach suggests that, as a result of this study, Joseph received the text of the Book of Abraham by revelation. The dating of the associated documents and their relationship to the Book of Abraham text thus become evidence for one position or another. Each of these approaches can be held by faithful Latter-day Saints. The question of how and when Joseph translated the Book of Abraham is a complex one — but it is not the question that this volume strives to answer.

Rather, we have attempted through detailed textual analysis to date the documents associated with the effort by Joseph Smith and his associates to understand the Egyptian papyri. But we also try to be clear as to the limits of our knowledge, repeatedly using words like "likely" or "perhaps" or "probably." While we have placed the documents in what we judge to be the most sensible order, we are also clear that the order of the documents in the volume does not necessarily represent the relationship among the documents. The ambiguities in the historical record preclude such certainty. The dating of the documents and the order in which they appear do not close doors to any of the most prominent interpretations of the question of how and when Joseph Smith's translation occurred. Nor does the volume preclude any theory regarding the relationship of the Book of Abraham text to the ancient papyri. We hold that either of the two prevailing theories of the Book of Abraham's origins — either that the text of the Book of Abraham was on portions of the papyri that are now lost or that the papyri served as a catalyst for a revelation by Joseph Smith — is a faithful approach to understanding the book.

Lindsay laments that the volume does not provide adequate "first aid" for members struggling to understand the nature of the Book of Abraham translation. In so doing, he misunderstands the scope and purpose of the Joseph Smith Papers, which is to provide reputable and accurate transcriptions of Joseph Smith's papers with contextual annotation for both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars. That is not to say the scholars in the Church History Department do not have an interest in providing information to increase the understanding and support the faith of Church members. Indeed, some of the same historians who contributed to this volume also helped prepare other materials, including the Gospel Topics essay on the translation and historicity of the Book of Abraham. We take very seriously the need to build faith in the restored gospel.

In a related argument, Lindsay implies in his review that there is a "ban" on citing the work of Hugh Nibley in our volume and states

that the book ought to "recognize Hugh Nibley's extensive work on many aspects of the Book of Abraham as a vital foundation that must be acknowledged."[3] This perspective asks the Joseph Smith Papers to engage in historiography, or reciting and evaluating the history of scholarship on a given topic. Because such discussions typically become outdated much sooner than a documentary edition's featured transcripts go out of use, it is the long-established policy of the Joseph Smith Papers Project to refrain from historiographical discussions. We respect Nibley's valuable work on the Book of Abraham and have cited his work in other Church publications, but in this volume we followed our practice of not including historiographic or bibliographic footnotes.

Let us be clear: this volume of *The Joseph Smith Papers* does not advocate an approach to the Book of Abraham that is antithetical to the faith of Latter-day Saints.

Is the Volume Riddled with Technical Mistakes?

While we value the contributions of many scholars of different backgrounds, the Joseph Smith Papers Project has a specific approach and a particular expertise to bring to bear on these documents. We operate within the conventions of both nineteenth-century history and documentary editing. In documentary editing projects, scholars collect, transcribe, annotate, and publish documents for other scholars to use in their own work. Our primary goal is and has been to make available these documents for any and all to read and analyze. We disagree with the implication in both Gee's and Lindsay's reviews that Egyptologists offer the most valuable or the *only* path to understanding the documents in *Volume 4.* Most of the documents were, after all, created in the nineteenth century, and even the ancient papyri were studied, preserved, and copied by nineteenth-century clerks.

Each volume of *The Joseph Smith Papers* includes a lengthy statement of editorial method, which is based on a systematic study of the American tradition of historical documentary editing. We were thus surprised that the *Interpreter* published two reviews that misunderstood the practices and aims of the Joseph Smith Papers. Many of their criticisms are a result of misaligned expectations. For example, Gee writes that we "provided no concordance of other major labels for the documents, as is standard in scholarly editions."[4] This may be standard in Egyptological editions, but it is not standard in the American tradition of historical documentary editing.

---

3. Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," 22.
4. Gee, "The Joseph Smith Papers Project Stumbles," 176.

In his review, Gee complains of "numerous questionable editorial decisions."[5] The Joseph Smith Papers Project has robust conventions for presenting documents. Our experience with the entire corpus of Smith's papers and our access to the actual documents has given our team deep expertise in document provenance, early church record keeping, scribal practices, handwriting identification, and transcription. While Gee alleges that there are numerous errors in the transcripts, the "errors" or "problems" he cites follow the Joseph Smith Papers style guide in every instance. Our thorough approach to transcription is laid out in our statement of editorial method:

> To ensure accuracy in representing the texts, transcripts were verified three times, each time by a different set of eyes. The first two verifications were done using high-resolution scanned images. The first was a visual collation of these images with the transcripts, while the second was an independent and double-blind image-to-transcript tandem proofreading. The third and final verification of the transcripts was a visual collation with the original document. At this stage, the verifier employed magnification, ultraviolet light, and multispectral imaging as needed to read badly faded text, recover heavily stricken material, untangle characters written over each other, and recover words canceled by messy "wipe erasures" made when the ink was still wet or removed by knife scraping after the ink had dried.[6]

The editorial method further states:

> Text transcription and verification is … an imperfect art more than a science. Judgments about capitalization, for example, are informed not only by looking at the specific case at hand but by understanding the usual characteristics of each particular writer…. Even the best transcribers and verifiers will differ from one another in making such judgments.[7]

Some of the transcription "errors" alleged by Gee are precisely these kinds of judgment calls. Gee implies that our frequent use of the hollow diamond character to symbolize an illegible character in the transcript is somehow a failure or the result of a lack of skill, stating that "the challenge of transcription defeated the editors." On the contrary, if a character is ambiguous, the most

---

5. Ibid.
6. Jensen and Hauglid, *Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, xxxi–xxxii.
7. Ibid., xxxi.

responsible course is to make the reader aware of the uncertainty — to project more certitude than is warranted would be a failure indeed.

Two examples may illustrate why access to originals and understanding of our style guide are crucial to evaluating the accuracy of our transcripts. Gee states that our transcription of "{◊\B}ethcho" on page 58 is in error. In our editorial method, the diamond represents an illegible character and the braces (or curly brackets) represent a superimposition (or "writeover"). In this passage, the scribe wrote an illegible character and then inscribed "B" over the previous character. Gee states that "there is no overwriting on the character although there is some touch-up." A careful examination of the original manuscript under magnification reveals that he is mistaken. A mark or character was written and then overwritten by a capital "B," as our transcription indicates. In another instance, Gee writes that "descendant" on page 261 should be transcribed "{d\<d>}escendant". Our editorial style, however, dictates that we not include writeovers when a letter is written over by a second instance of that same letter. While a few of Gee's twenty-three alternative transcriptions may be correct under a different system of transcription, none represents an actual error in our volume, and many are likely the result of his working with images of the documents rather than the documents themselves.

Conclusion

Scholarship at its best is a conversation. We value dialogue with scholars of all fields, regardless of whether or not they agree with our conclusions, and we seek to be good citizens in the scholarly community by collaborating rather than competing, by continuing in good faith to learn from ongoing scholarship, and by taking seriously criticisms offered by our colleagues. We know that no book is perfect, and ours is no exception. Every volume of *The Joseph Smith Papers* has an online errata page at josephsmithpapers.org, where we list errors we find or are brought to our attention. As the reviewers point out, this volume did mistakenly include an upside-down image of a document. Such are the perils of publishing! When we were informed of the error before the book's release, we corrected it online and pointed it out in an online errata sheet. We are not shy to correct our errors.

Scholarly communities thrive when their members engage in vigorous debates of ideas rather than attacks on the character of colleagues. We reject the notion that calling into question the faith of fellow Latter-day Saints has any place in public discourse — scholarly or otherwise.

As the Church's Gospel Topics essay recognizes, there is ample room for a variety of faithful Latter-day Saint perspectives on the complex history of the Book of Abraham. We further believe that *Revelations and Translations, Volume 4* can affirm faith in the extraordinary Book of Abraham. We believe in Joseph Smith's prophetic calling and in the profound spiritual truths of the Book of Abraham. We believe that Joseph Smith's record can stand up to scrutiny. That is why we are committed to publishing his documentary record in as transparent and professional a manner as we are able.

Matthew J. Grow *is managing director of the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a general editor of the Joseph Smith Papers. He served as director of publications at the Church History Department from 2010 to 2019. He has coedited two recent volumes from the Church Historian's Press:* The First Fifty Years of Relief Society *and* The Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846. *He has also authored or coauthored books with Oxford University Press and Yale University Press, including award-winning biographies of Parley P. Pratt and Thomas L. Kane. He was previously an assistant professor of history at the University of Southern Indiana. Grow received his PhD in American history from the University of Notre Dame.*

Matthew C. Godfrey *is a general editor and the managing historian of the Joseph Smith Papers. He holds a PhD in American and public history from Washington State University. Before joining the Joseph Smith Papers, he was president of Historical Research Associates, a historical and archeological consulting firm headquartered in Missoula, Montana. He is the author of* Religion, Politics, and Sugar: The Mormon Church, the Federal Government, and the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company, 1907–1921 *(2007), which was a co-winner of the Mormon History Association's Smith-Petit Award for Best First Book. He is also the coeditor of* The Earth Shall Appear as the Garden of Eden: Essays in Mormon Environmental History *(2018). He has published articles in* Agricultural History, The Public Historian, Pacific Northwest Quarterly, Journal of Mormon History, BYU Studies Quarterly, Mormon Historical Studies, *and various collections of essays.*

A Welcome Response,
but Flaws Remain

Jeff Lindsay

Abstract: *After* Interpreter *published my lengthy paper that discussed apparent bias and flaws in scholarship in the Joseph Smith Papers volume on the Book of Abraham, two members of the JSP Project team have responded with a defense of their volume. Their reply is welcome and points to some of the strengths in the methodology behind much of the volume. However, the specific evidence for bias and flawed scholarship seems to stand and merits further attention.*

After feeling compelled to point out some painful gaps and apparent bias in what is nonetheless a remarkably valuable resource on the Book of Abraham from the Joseph Smith Papers Project,[1] I was happy to see a response from some of the people involved with publication of Volume 4 of *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations* (hereafter JSPRT4).[2] Criticizing any aspect of such an important and beautiful volume published by the Church that I love is not something I did with any pleasure, but I felt that readers of the volume and those who follow the public lectures or podcasts of the editors must be aware of the problems I noticed.

I am grateful for the thoughtful response from Matt Grow and Matthew C. Godfrey, two of the series editors for the Joseph Smith Papers Project. I can imagine that it must be frustrating and perhaps even offensive for such an important work to have received criticism

---

1. See Jeffrey Dean Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019), 13–104, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/a-precious-resource-with-some-gaps/.

2. *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations*, Volume 4: *Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, eds. Scott Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2018).

from a fellow member of the Church who cannot be aware firsthand of just how much care went into that project.

Considering Bias and Unintended Consequences

Grow and Godfrey state that I misunderstand "the scope and purpose of the Joseph Smith Papers, which is to provide reputable and accurate transcriptions of Joseph Smith's papers with contextual annotation for both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars" and not to provide "first aid" for apparent problems associated with the Book of Abraham.

I appreciate their reiteration of the reasonable policies and goals of the Joseph Smith Papers and the assurance that many people were involved in carefully reviewing many aspects of the work to give us this remarkable production with detailed photographs and extensive transcripts. I appreciate their assurance that policies and procedures were followed.

My question remains, though: Is there evidence of potentially harmful bias, or does the volume simply "provide reputable and accurate transcriptions of Joseph Smith's papers" with unbiased "contextual annotation"? Based on the after-publication public statements of the volume editors — statements not publicly challenged, countered, or disavowed by either Grow or Godfrey — we can gain insight into the volume editors' personal views and can see extensive evidence that these views appear to have influenced many choices and judgments made in JSPRT4. The specifics of these choices and judgments raised in the reviews of this volume[3] are not addressed in the series editors' reply and cannot be resolved simply through a recounting of the editorial and production processes of JSPRT4.

I was both surprised and disappointed that the volume editors of JSPRT4 were not included as co-authors in the reply to our reviews, as some of the perspectives they have published elsewhere seem to exude a different spirit from the calm, conciliatory, and welcome views expressed by Grow and Godfrey. Brian Hauglid, for example, has stated that he finds the "apologetic" views of two BYU Egyptologists to be "abhorrent."[4] He further expresses his firm conclusion "that the [Kirtland] Egyptian papers

---

3. Besides my review, see also John Gee, "The Joseph Smith Papers Project Stumbles," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019), 175–86, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-joseph-smith-papers-project-stumbles/.

4. Brian Hauglid, November 9, 2018, comment on Dan Vogel, "Truth of the Book of Abraham (Part 6) — Joseph Smith As a Student of Hebrew," Facebook, November 9, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/dan.vogel.35/posts/1398006876998582.

were used to produce the BoA."[5] He has changed his mind from his earlier public statements on the origins of the Book of Abraham and says that as a result, the JSPRT4 volume he co-edited is "much more open" to the views of a leading critic of the Book of Abraham.[6]

Grow and Godfrey's response is that "the question of how and when Joseph translated the Book of Abraham is a complex one — but it is not the question that this volume strives to answer." However, in several places JSPRT4 belies this statement of neutrality. For example, John Gee mentions in his review this bold statement in the volume's commentary: "No evidence indicates that JS studied any of the hieroglyphs from the hypocephalus in his 1835 effort to understand the Egyptian language. However, the explanation of Facsimile 2 is clearly related to that effort, since some of the entries in this document borrow heavily from the Grammar and Alphabet volume."[7] This is one of numerous statements where *a controversial position is taken without alerting the reader that a controversy exists.* What evidence is there to support the editors' personal opinion here rather than the overlooked and arguably more plausible alternative that related entries in the GAEL were derived from Joseph's existing comments on Facsimile 2? The volume editors' statement suggesting the translation of Facsimile 2 derives or borrows from the GAEL is a questionable assumption made even more explicit in subsequent public comments by Hauglid. Can we really accept that this volume is free of bias and even mischief, however unintended?

My review points out several other examples of such bias that merit a more complete response, including the statement suggesting there is "some evidence" that Abraham 1:1–3 was derived from the GAEL, based solely on a critic's publication which asserts derivation because those verses strike him as choppy.[8] Of particular importance is the claim that the "twin" Book of Abraham manuscripts represent live dictation directly from Joseph Smith of either live original translation or newly edited translation of the Book of Abraham, thus ignoring significant textual evidence that this was not a case of Joseph's dictating new scripture but represented work with an existing manuscript.[9]

---

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Gee, "The Joseph Smith Papers Project Stumbles," 181, citing Jensen and Hauglid, *Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, 276.

8. See Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," beginning at p. 72.

9. Ibid., 61–76.

Astonishingly, the overlooked evidence includes the reasonably supported position given in an earlier JSP volume which explains why it is clear that an existing manuscript was being used by the scribes writing the "twin" manuscripts rather than taking direct translation from Joseph. It also overlooks significant additional evidence from the text which I illustrate in detail in my review but which is not mentioned by Grow and Godfrey. The position taken by the volume editors, apparently reflecting personal bias rather than scholarly consensus, gives credence to the assertion of critics that these manuscripts represent a "window" into how Joseph translated (that is, turning one character into large chunks of English), which was also the theme of the volume editors' January 2019 seminar at BYU, which profoundly disturbed some members of the Church.[10]

Assurances about policies and procedures do not address the many issues around the subtle but serious mishandling of the "twin" manuscripts, including the volume editors' failure to consider the reasonable views of other scholars (including their own JSP peers) and the failure to account for textual evidence discussed in my review and the very heading or title given at the top of the twin manuscripts. This suggests that their intent is to support further entries for a section in the GAEL, as discussed in my article for *Meridian Magazine*,[11] which underscores the role of Joseph's translation as a *source* for the GAEL and not the other way around. But all such evidence is brushed aside with assertions that, as Hauglid stated after publication, are surprisingly "open" to the views of a leading critic of the Book of Abraham.[12] Such errors can occur unintentionally and in good faith, but they do not align with the high ideals of the Joseph Smith Papers Project as very ably expressed in the Grow and Godfrey response. If they are not errors, and my analysis is unfounded, I welcome a more detailed response explaining why. This is one case in which I would sincerely like to be wrong in my misgivings.

---

10. Brian Hauglid and Robin Jensen, "A Window into Joseph Smith's Translation" (Neal A. Maxwell Institute seminar, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, Jan. 11, 2019), https://mi.byu.edu/news-events/01-11-jensen-hauglid/.

11. Jeff Lindsay, "Dealing with 'Friendly Fire' on the Book of Abraham," *Meridian Magazine* (August 25, 2019), https://latterdaysaintmag.com/dealing-with-friendly-fire-on-the-book-of-abraham/; and Jeff Lindsay, "The Meaning of the Twin Book of Abraham Manuscripts," *Meridian Magazine* (August 26, 2019), https://latterdaysaintmag.com/the-meaning-of-the-twin-book-of-abraham-manuscripts/.

12. Hauglid, November 9, 2018, comment on Dan Vogel's Facebook page, discussed in Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," 19–21.

Other issues I feel Grow and Godfrey have not addressed include:

- An easily demonstrated error in the historical treatment of "Egyptomania without Champollion," which helps support the critic's framework that Joseph and the Saints were ignorant of the nature of Egyptian revealed from the Rosetta Stone and the work of Champollion.[13]
- Failure to consider Joseph's own statements and the Book of Mormon's teachings on the nature of the "reformed" Egyptian language that undermine assertions from critics on how Joseph thought one character of Egyptian could explode into hundreds of words of English when translated.[14]
- Errors in dating of documents that tend to favor positions taken by some critics while overlooking recent scholarship from Latter-day Saint authors that gives other date ranges. Statements on what was translated in 1842 vs. 1835 also display a similar lack of balance.[15]

In all this, I do not intend to call into question the faithfulness of the volume editors, but all involved with the Joseph Smith Papers Project should understand the unavoidable consequences of the publicly stated positions of the volume editors and the impact of the numerous positions taken in JSPRT4 that seem to align improperly with views of some critics while undermining reasonable positions that can be and have been taken by other scholars.

Lauding the process of transcription and production is one thing, but catching unstated assumptions and unquestioned biases can be painfully difficult. For example, I would not expect the many reviewers who assisted with the preparation of JSPRT4 to recognize the errors and potential harm from the hidden assumptions and biases in the way the "twin" Book of Abraham manuscripts are presented unless they were dealing with the details of some current arguments from critics of the Book of Abraham. These are unnecessary gaps in scholarship that can also incidentally and unintentionally lead to gaps in testimonies of those struggling with Book of Abraham issues.

I believe my review demonstrates with abundant examples that the commentary, footnotes, omissions, and many other editorial choices nudge the reader toward specific views while undermining the views of others in ways that don't reflect objectivity. I would urge any readers

---

13. Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," 76–86.
14. Ibid., 79–80.
15. Ibid., 35, 58–61, 69–70.

to evaluate the examples I provide and make up their own minds as to whether they exhibit the objectivity that Grow and Godfrey rightly indicate is the ideal.

Historiography and the Missing Hugh Nibley

One fact I mentioned in my review as a potential indicator of possible bias was the complete absence of any reference to Hugh Nibley and his extensive writings concerning the Book of Abraham, the Joseph Smith papyri, and the Kirtland Egyptian Papers.[16] Grow and Godfrey assert that in noting this I am asking "the Joseph Smith Papers to engage in historiography, or reciting and evaluating the history of scholarship on a given topic." They correctly state that it is "the long-established policy of the Joseph Smith Papers Project to refrain from historiographical discussions."

After reading Grow and Godfrey's response, I fear that perhaps my concern regarding Nibley was not stated clearly enough, for which I apologize. I am certainly not asking for historiography per se, or a study of the history of who said what. I am asking for appropriate scholarship in commenting on what is discussed in JSPRT4. The volume makes numerous interpretive comments that guide the reader in understanding key issues related to the nature of the documents it covers. The editors discuss issues such as the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, the nature of Joseph's translation, Joseph's understanding of the nature of the language he was looking at, the nature of the Egyptian documents, the meaning of the Egyptian characters and figures, the dating of the documents, the manner in which Joseph translated, and what was translated when, etc. As Grow and Godfrey recognize, a variety of viewpoints exist on all these issues and others. Fortunately, important scholarship has been carried out by scholars like Hugh Nibley and others, though in my opinion none are so prolific, wide-ranging, and influential as Nibley's. Readers of JSPRT4 wouldn't know that, however, because the works of Nibley are not referenced once in over a thousand citations.

For example, in terms of translating the Egyptian characters to understand their meaning, to my knowledge three key scholars have historically contributed extensive translation: Michael Rhodes, Robert K. Ritner (a scholar openly skeptical of Joseph Smith's translations), and Hugh Nibley. Of these three, the one most extensively cited in JSPRT4 is Ritner, with citations of Rhodes coming in a distant second. Nibley, as I noted, is never cited — not even once.

---

16. Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," 21–24.

The neglect of Nibley is clearly an editorial choice I cannot fathom as being simply a matter of policy regarding historiography. Is it possible that an unstated and unrecognized bias against apologetics resulted in a failure to consider referencing Nibley's analysis of the papyri and their place in Egyptian history, Nibley's analysis of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers or any of the many volumes of scholarship on the Book of Abraham that Nibley produced?

Conclusion

JSPRT4 is a precious resource, and I am grateful for the vision of the Joseph Smith Papers Project team and the Church for making it available. However, the painful possibility of improper bias aligned with some common but debatable views of our critics needs to be recognized by those who use the volume, lest those views be assumed to be the consensus of sound scholarship and the implicit position of the Church. Such bias needs to be recognized by those who encounter past presentations by or interviews of the editors as they discuss the origins and purported warts of the Book of Abraham.

The messaging resulting from this volume and subsequent public statements by the volume editors has done damage to the testimonies of some vulnerable members of the Church. A more balanced approach would overtly leave the door open to other views, which arguably have a stronger evidentiary basis than some of the questionable positions taken by the editors of JSPRT4. Again, my concerns are not about historiography or even apologetics but about sound and even-handed scholarship. That's the most painful gap my review seeks to address. It is also the gap not directly addressed by Grow and Godfrey.

Again I am thankful for the response provided by Grow and Godfrey and congratulate all members of the Joseph Smith Papers Project on the string of breakthroughs their project has brought in many related areas. I hope my warnings regarding this unusual volume, as painful as they may be, will not dampen the appreciation of many of us for what the Joseph Smith Papers Project has achieved.

Jeffrey Dean Lindsay *and his wife, Kendra, are residents of Shanghai, China. Jeff has been providing online materials defending the Latter-day Saint faith for over twenty years, primarily at JeffLindsay.com. His Mormanity blog (http://mormanity.blogspot.com) has been in operation since 2004. He also wrote weekly for Orson Scott Card's* Nauvoo Times

(NauvooTimes.com) from 2012 through 2016 and is currently on the Board of Advisors for The Interpreter Foundation. Jeff has a PhD in chemical engineering from BYU and is a registered US patent agent. For the past eight years he was the Head of Intellectual Property for Asia Pulp and Paper, but has just started a new role as Head of R&D and IP for Lume Deodorant. Formerly, he was associate professor at the Institute of Paper Science and Technology (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) at Georgia Tech, then went into R&D at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, eventually becoming corporate patent strategist and senior research fellow. He then spent several years at Innovationedge in Neenah, Wisconsin, helping many companies with innovation and IP strategy. Since 2015, Jeff has been recognized as a leading IP strategist by Intellectual Asset Magazine *in their global IAM300 listing based on peer input. He is also lead author of* Conquering Innovation Fatigue *(John Wiley & Sons, 2009). He is active in the chemical engineering community and was recently named a Fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. Jeff served a mission in the German-speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission and currently serves as counselor in the district presidency of the Shanghai International District. He and his wife Kendra are the parents of four boys and have ten grandchildren.*

TAKING STOCK

_____

John Gee

Abstract: *In a response to my review of their* Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts *volume, the series editors of the Joseph Smith Papers provided feedback and commentary on two important items. There are other, unaddressed issues this rejoinder examines.*

I am grateful to the editors of the Joseph Smith Papers for their thoughtful response to my review[1] and to the editors of *Interpreter* for allowing me to write this rejoinder. The American historian Peter Novick noted when he was invited to respond to reviews of his work, "There is nothing more tedious than the spectacle of disgruntled authors complaining that they have been misrepresented or, even worse, whimpering that they have been 'misunderstood.' Academic authors, above all others, should be immunized from such concerns, after years of seeing the versions of our lectures we get back in blue books at the end of the term."[2] I hope I do not fall into that trap.

The series editors of the Joseph Smith Papers are good men. I have enjoyed working with them in the past and hope to do so in the future. They are intelligent, conscientious, sincere, faithful, skilled, and generally thoughtful and competent. Overwhelmingly, the Joseph Smith Papers Project is a testament to the skills of the respective authors and editorial teams. Having said that, JSP-R4[3] has academic failings. Due to the limited space accorded me in this rejoinder, I cannot further detail them

_____

1. John Gee, "The Joseph Smith Papers Project Stumbles," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019), 175–86, https://journal. interpreterfoundation.org/the-joseph-smith-papers-project-stumbles/.

2. Peter Novick, "My Correct View on Everything," *American Historical Review* 96/3 (June 1991): 699.

3. *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations*, Volume 4: *Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, eds. Robin Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2018), hereafter referred to as JSP-R4.

here. However, a more comprehensive response to these shortcomings will appear in future publications. In this rejoinder, I will take stock, generally, of where discussions of these issues stand at the moment.

Unaddressed Issues

While I appreciate the time and care the series editors took to craft their response, they addressed only a subset of the concerns raised in the reviews by Jeff Lindsay[4] and me. In addition to the lack of response to some of the technical errors in JSP-R4 that I pointed out in my review, several problematic editorial decisions remained unaddressed in the response:

- **Placement and Grouping Issues.** The response notes that an upside-down image in JSP-R4 (p. 47) was caught immediately after publication and corrected in the online errata. This is commendable, but the response glosses over my comments regarding the placement and grouping of the papyri in the printed volume. It is the entire purpose of a book review to make readers aware of such issues in the book being reviewed.[5]

- **Dating Issues.** In my review, I claimed that the volume "editors date the copying of Egyptian characters to early July based on their assumptions rather than any evidence."[6] There was no response to this important concern, as there was not for my comments regarding the dating of the Egyptian Alphabet documents.[7] The dates used by the volume editors do not match the Joseph Smith journals or statements made by volume editors in previous volumes of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, a fact not noted anywhere in JSP-R4.

---

4. Jeffrey Dean Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019), 13–104, https://journal. interpreterfoundation.org/a-precious-resource-with-some-gaps/.

5. Further, the online version has its own problems, including an image that is sideways. See https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/ egyptian-papyri-circa-300-bc-ad-50/15.

6. Gee, "The Joseph Smith Papers Stumbles," 179.

7. Ibid.

- **Editorial Bias.** The series editors assert the ideal of neutrality in the production of JSP-R4.[8] They state that "the question of how and when Joseph translated the Book of Abraham is a complex one — but it is not the question that this volume strives to answer." Despite this assurance, there are several examples (some of which I pointed out) where the volume editors made unsupported assumptions about the translation process. As I observed, some of these assumptions are implicit in how they chose to organize the documents in the volume.[9] These demonstrable concerns remain completely unaddressed.

- **Ignoring Evidence.** In my review, I cited the volume editors' claim that "there is no evidence before early 1842, however, that JS had translated more Book of Abraham material than what survives in the extant Kirtland-era manuscripts" (p. 243). However, as I pointed out, a statement of this sort can be made only if one turns a blind eye to evidence adduced by scholars that does not agree with the claim.[10] Readers should be made aware that the volume editors completely failed to mention evidence and arguments that differ with their personal perspectives.

I realize that it would have been difficult for the series editors to address every specific issue within their response. However, saying nothing at all about these significant, unaddressed categories of shortfalls might lead some readers of the response to incorrectly assume that the scope of controversy remains limited to the circumscribed set of items mentioned in the response.

Issues of Disagreement

There were two points addressed by the series editors where we simply do not agree:

---

8. Neutrality in reconstructing history is an unattainable ideal. Historians, despite desires and assertions to the contrary, approach source documents with presuppositions and biases that are impossible to remove from the product of their work. That is reality; it is true of all historians, including those who created JSP-R4.

9. An examination of representative examples can be found in Gee, "The Joseph Smith Papers Stumbles," 181, 182–85.

10. Ibid., 184.

- • **The Concordance.** The series editors rightly note my observation that the volume abandoned traditional numbering of the historical documents in favor of a new numbering system.[11] They attempt to resolve this concern by asserting "misaligned expectations" on my part. Because I have worked extensively with these documents, it is not difficult for me to correlate references to a given document across different numbering systems. However, other readers may have more difficulty than I do, and noting what would have been a helpful addition is well within the purpose of a book review. Pointing out that a cross-referencing aid for the traditional and new referencing systems in a book review seems no more a case of "misaligned expectations" than it would be for a reviewer of a Joseph Smith Papers volume on revelation manuscripts to note that correspondences between the original manuscript revelation books and important publications derived from them ought to be included as a help to readers. (Thankfully very useful cross-referencing aids were made available in the Joseph Smith Papers volumes on the revelations of Joseph Smith.[12])

- • **Transcription Issues**. In their response, the series editors make a very strong claim that a "few of [my] twenty-three alternative transcriptions may be correct under a different system of transcription, [but] none represents an actual error in our volume, and many are likely the result of his working with images of the documents rather than the documents themselves." Perhaps the series editors missed my statement that my transcriptions were based not only on high-resolution photographs but also on "personal examination of the original documents."[13] Most disciplines — though, regrettably, the series editors' response notes that American history is not one of them — have productive ways to make use of independent collations. I am sorry that for manuscripts

---

11. Ibid., 181–82.

12. See, e.g., Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Manuscript Revelation Books, Facsimile Edition,* eds. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 690–705.

13. Gee, "The Joseph Smith Papers Stumbles," 176.

as complex and controversial as those contained in JSP-R4 this option was not considered. Ironically, an independent collation of an early Latter-day Saint manuscript published on the Church History Library website recently provided an important and hitherto unutilized witness to the translation of the Book of Mormon.[14]

On these issues we shall have to agree to disagree.

The Avoided Issue

In my review I limited my discussion to academic concerns; I deliberately did not address the potential consequences of the volume for faith. One recent survey claimed the most significant historical or doctrinal reason why individuals leave the Church is because of doubts "about the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham," significantly outranking the concern over Joseph Smith's polygamy.[15] If this is true, then JSP-R4 is arguably among the most important volumes within *The Joseph Smith Papers*. Jeff Lindsay addresses this issue in his review and his rejoinder, so I will not do so here. For my own part, I would have expected the volume editors to be more concerned about this than they appear to have been.[16]

Conclusions

As should be obvious to readers of this rejoinder, the most troubling problems raised in my original review were left unaddressed in the series editors' response. Despite these remaining concerns, I am grateful they took the time to address both intellectual and spiritual concerns. In this respect, they were "standing in" for the volume editors on whom the

---

14. See the further discussion about this in "Edward Stevenson's Journal Entry about Martin Harris," *Studio et Quoque Fide* (October 29, 2019), http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2019/10/edward-stevensons-journal-entry-about.html.

15. Jana Riess, *The Next Mormons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 223–24.

16. There is much relevant and pointed counsel in Boyd K. Packer, "The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect," *BYU Studies* 21/3 (1981): 1–18. If that seems too far removed, similar council is found in Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Maxwell Legacy in the 21st Century," *BYU Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship Annual Report 2018* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2019), 8–21. Additionally, Elder Holland's address can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpUN29orJmM.

primary responsibility for any defects in JSP-R4 rests. It is my sincere wish that these defects will be explicitly acknowledged and repaired.

John Gee *is the William (Bill) Gay Research Professor in the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages at Brigham Young University.*

A Passover Setting for Lehi's Exodus

Don Bradley

Abstract: *Later in his life, former Palmyra resident Fayette Lapham recounted with sharp detail an 1830 interview he conducted with Joseph Smith Sr. about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Among the details he reports that Lehi's exodus from Jerusalem occurred during a "great feast." This detail, not found in the published Book of Mormon, may reveal some of what Joseph Sr. knew from the lost 116 pages. By examining the small plates account of this narrative in 1 Nephi 1–5, we see not only that such a feast was possible, but that Lehi's exodus and Nephi's quest for the brass plates occurred at Passover. This Passover setting helps explain why Nephi killed Laban and other distinctive features of Lehi's exodus. Read in its Passover context, the story of Lehi is not just the story of one man's deliverance, but of the deliverance of humankind by the Lamb of God. The Passover setting in which it begins illuminates the meaning of the Book of Mormon as a whole.*

[**Editor's Note:** This article is an excerpt from Chapter 7 of the author's new book, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Lost Stories* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2019).]

This chapter examines the narrative of 1 Nephi 1–5 as a series of events occurring at the Passover season, beginning with Lehi's theophany (vision of God) at the start of the Passover month of Nisan and culminating with Nephi's slaying of Laban on the final day of the Jewish Passover celebration.[1] Although this text comprises five chapters in the current Latter-day Saint edition of the Book of Mormon, it

---

1. I am grateful to my friends Joe Spencer and Kirk Caudle for helping me link the feast mentioned by Fayette Lapham with the Passover. Kirk also provided valuable assistance in researching the biblical Passover and mapping out early efforts to present this research.

constitutes just one chapter — the original 1 Nephi Chapter I — in the first edition of the Book of Mormon and presents a single overarching narrative of the escape of Lehi's family from destruction in Jerusalem and the beginning of their exodus to a new promised land. Read against the backdrop of the Passover season, the narrative of Lehi's exodus is not merely a narrative of one family's deliverance from temporal destruction but also a typological narrative of the redemption of humanity by the divine Lamb of God.

Fayette Lapham's Interview with Joseph Smith Sr.

In early 1830, shortly before the Book of Mormon came off the Grandin press, Palmyra businessman Fayette Lapham and his brother-in-law Jacob Ramsdell called at the Joseph Smith Sr. home in Manchester to get information on the forthcoming book.[2] As Palmyra residents, Lapham and Ramsdell would have heard the considerable buzz in town about the Book of Mormon but were not yet able to satisfy their curiosity by reading its pages. Instead, the two young men enjoyed the rare privilege of hearing the Prophet's father relate the story of the Book of Mormon's emergence, and they were given an oral sneak preview of its contents. Four decades later, Lapham published an extensive account of this interview

---

2. Lapham dates his interview with Joseph Smith Sr. to 1830 but does not specify a month. However, his narrative enables us to place the interview more precisely. Lapham reports that his curiosity about the Book of Mormon was aroused by the hubbub surrounding its printing in Palmyra. That Lapham journeyed to neighboring Manchester in order to learn more rather than examining one of the five thousand printed copies of the book in Palmyra indicates that such copies were not yet available, as well as the fact that Lapham does not describe Joseph Sr. attempting to sell or show him a copy. In recounting the emergence and contents of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Sr. was fulfilling the instructions of an earlier revelation given for his benefit. As Colby Townsend explains, the February 1829 revelation (D&C 4) that instructed him to thrust in his sickle and reap souls for the Lord "nudged Joseph Sr. to engage in the work of spreading the story about Smith's discovery of the plates and the forthcoming book based on those plates." Colby Townsend, "Rewriting Eden with the Book of Mormon: Joseph Smith and the Reception of Genesis 1–6 in Early America" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 2019). The connection of Doctrine and Covenants 4 with Fayette Lapham's interview with Joseph Sr. was suggested to me by Colby Townsend, personal communication, July 19, 2019.

in an 1870 issue of *The Historical Magazine*.[3] Despite the lapse of years and the account's occasional garbling of fact, Lapham's narration is filled with firsthand information that demonstrates his reliance on a primary source with knowledge of the actual information and events, indicating that he may have written his newspaper account from detailed notes of his interview with Joseph Sr.[4] Whether Lapham's source was interview notes or an extraordinary memory, his accuracy on many obscure but confirmable details, such as the order in which Joseph Smith translated Mormon's abridgement and Nephi's small plates after the manuscript loss, lends credence to additional, unique details he provides.[5]

In relating Nephite history, Lapham's account largely retells familiar Book of Mormon stories. Yet at key points it also adds to the existing narrative some story elements not found in the published Book of Mormon. These additional pieces of Nephite narrative, though new or unknown, fit remarkably well into the familiar, known narrative, suggesting that they are not errors but echoes of narrative from the lost pages. Surprisingly, the interview account gives nearly five times as much

---

3. Fayette Lapham, "Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, Forty Years Ago. His Account of the Finding of the Sacred Plates," *The Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries concerning the Antiquities, History, and Biography of America* [second series] 7 (May 1870): 305–9, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 1:462.

4. The scholar who has given Lapham's interview account the finest level of analysis is Mark Ashurst-McGee, who identifies some errors in Lapham's account but concludes from Lapham's reporting of "remarkable details (several of which can be corroborated) four decades later" that "Lapham must have had some notes of his conversation with Joseph Smith Sr." Mark Ashurst-McGee, personal email message to the author, September 26, 2017.

5. Lapham's account is notable for the detail it provides regarding the emergence of the Book of Mormon and for its surprising accuracy on a number of points in that narrative. For instance, he reports that after the manuscript theft Joseph Smith Jr. resumed translating at the point in the narrative "where they left off," rather than immediately shifting over to replacing the purloined manuscript with the small plates of Nephi. Modern textual criticism confirms Lapham's report — that Joseph Jr. resumed translating where the current Book of Mosiah begins rather than start over with the First Book of Nephi at the head of the small plates. As the earlier of only two historical sources reporting this detail of the translation process order (the other being another member of the family, the Prophet's sister Katharine Smith Salisbury), Lapham's interview with Joseph Sr. appears to have, indeed, been informed by a close insider. Kyle R. Walker, "Katharine Smith Salisbury's Recollections of Joseph's Meetings with Moroni," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2002): 16.

space to the period of the narrative covered by the lost pages as it does to the period that follows the lost portion. One wonders if the Prophet's father, realizing his interviewers would not be able to read the fuller Nephite narrative given in the lost manuscript, attempted to provide more of that early narrative than the published book would provide. This seems to be the most probable explanation for the additional Nephite narrative given in Lapham's account.

Despite his intellectual interest, Lapham was never a believer in Joseph Jr. as a prophet and appears to have never even read the Book of Mormon. In fact, Lapham came away from his interview with Joseph Sr. believing the Book of Mormon to be a hoax, which obviated his need to read it. Given this lack of familiarity with the book, and especially its missing pages, it is unlikely that Lapham could have identified what was missing from lost manuscript narrative and constructed elements that fill those gaps and fit the pattern of Book of Mormon narrative.

Fayette Lapham's Account of Nephi's Quest for the Brass Plates

Among the stories Fayette Lapham relates from Joseph Smith Sr.'s narration are those of Lehi's flight from Jerusalem and Nephi's quest for the brass plates. The interview account of these events is as follows:

> In answer to our question as to the subject of the translation, he said it was the record of a certain number of Jews, who, at the time of crossing the Red Sea, left the main body and went away by themselves; finally became a rich and prosperous nation; and, in the course of time, became so wicked that the Lord determined to destroy them from off the face of the earth. But there was one virtuous man among them, whom the Lord warned in a dream to take his family and depart, which he accordingly did; and, after traveling three days, he remembered that he had left some papers, in the office where he had been an officer, which he thought would be of use to him in his journeyings. He sent his son back to the city to get them; and when his son arrived in the city, it was night, and he found the citizens had been having a great feast, and were all drunk. When he went to the office to get his father's papers he was told that the chief clerk was not in, and he must find before he could have the papers. He then went into the street in search of him; but every body being drunk, he could get but little information of his whereabouts, but, after searching a long time, he found him lying in the street, dead

drunk, clothed in his official habiliments, his sword having a gold hilt and chain, lying by his side — and this is the same that was found with the gold plates. Finding that he could do nothing with him in that situation, he drew the sword, cut off the officer's head, cast off his own outer garments, and, assuming those of the officer, returned to the office where the papers were readily obtained, with which he returned to where his father was waiting for him. The family then moved on, for several days, when they were directed to stop and get materials to make brass plates upon which to keep a record of their journey.[6]

Readers familiar with the opening narratives of the present Book of Mormon will immediately note the several garbled elements of the familiar story: (1) it mistakenly identifies Lehi's family as beginning the narrative already separate from the main body of Jews; (2) while accurately affirming the presence of "brass plates" in the story, it identifies the object of Nephi's quest as "papers" rather than those plates; (3) it describes only one of Lehi's four sons (obviously Nephi) seeking this record; (4) it implies that the record's possessor was the "chief clerk" of an "office"; (5) it implies that Lehi had once worked at this office; and (6) it reports that Laban was absent when Nephi first went to acquire the record from him.

In making the errors he does, Lapham is often responding to authentic features of the story. His first error, identifying the Book of Mormon as the story of a group of Jews who separated from the main body of the Jews at the time of the biblical Exodus, conflates two different exodus narratives. While the Book of Mormon is indeed "the record of a certain number of Jews, who . . . left the main body and went away by themselves," Lapham's timetable is confused because he confuses *Lehi's* exodus near the Red Sea with *Moses's* Exodus across it. Lapham's third error, describing only one son making the quest for the record, is unremarkable given that one son plays the lead role in that story and acquires the record single-handedly. And Lapham's fourth error, making the record's possessor a "chief clerk" is probably not a blatant misidentification but a conflation of the record's two possessors: Laban and Zoram. While Laban, who was the record's *owner*, appears to be an "officer" of a military sort — one who can "command fifty" (1 Ne. 3:31)

---

6. Lapham, "Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith," 305–9.

— Zoram, who was the record's *custodian*, might fittingly be identified as a "clerk."

Even with its demonstrable confusions, the essence of Lapham's account and a number of its details clearly echo an encounter with the accurate story. It and the present Book of Mormon text share this core narrative in common: A wicked Israelite nation is about to be destroyed, but God warns a righteous man in that nation by a dream to take his family and flee into the wilderness. Notably, in both cases there are opening journeys by the Red Sea. They travel three days in the wilderness. God then commands him to send his son, here highlighting the main protagonist Nephi, back to retrieve a document. The son makes multiple attempts to obtain the record and ultimately succeeds when he finds the record's current possessor lying drunk in the street. He draws the man's sword, the fine workmanship and gold hilt of which are noted, and then, out of necessity, beheads the man with it. He then takes the sword and dresses in the man's clothes. In this disguise he obtains the record, which he takes to his father in the wilderness, immediately after which the narrator in each case discusses the "brass plates."

Lapham's account adds a crucial new story element that suggests that the officer who possessed the brass plates was drunk when Nephi found him *because of a feast being celebrated at the time*, one which would fit the characterization of a Jewish festival. While the published Book of Mormon does not mention such a feast being celebrated at the time of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, it does provide details that would fit naturally in such a festival context:

- Laban had been out that night with "*the elders of the Jews*" prior to Nephi finding him drunk in the street (1 Ne. 4:22).
- Zoram appears to find nothing suspicious in Laban (actually Nephi in Laban's clothing) wanting to go out again late that night, this time with the precious sacred record, to meet with the elders by the city gates (1 Ne. 4:26).
- Lehi offered sacrifice — a requirement for many of the feasts — both before his sons went to retrieve the brass plates and after their return (1 Ne. 2:7; 5:9).

Each of these details would fit well into a festival context reported by Lapham.

Lapham's plausible report of a festival context for the Book of Mormon's opening narrative (1 Nephi 1–5 and its lost pages counterpart) raises the question of which festival best fits that narrative. The evidence presented below will demonstrate that the celebration of *Passover* closely

fits this narrative's details, enabling us to draw fresh insights about both the available Book of Mormon text and its lost pages. The value of these new insights will, in turn, confirm one of the central premises of the present book — that mining nineteenth century sources about the content of the lost Book of Mormon text helps illuminate the Book of Mormon text we already have.

At the outset of our examination, a question naturally arises: if the narrative of 1 Nephi 1–5 occurs during the Passover season, why doesn't the text explicitly mention such a celebration? The "great feast" in Lapham's account suggests that the lost manuscript did, in fact, mention this festival. According to Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, the extant Book of Mormon possibly omits explicit mentions of Jewish celebrations because of the assumptions its authors have about its readers:

> While the Book of Mormon never mentions Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, or any other religious holiday specifically by name, several reasons can be suggested to explain this omission. The ancient writers may have assumed that their readers would naturally understand. A person does not have to say the word *Christmas* to refer implicitly to that special day. Even a casual mention of "wise men" or "decorating a tree" is enough. In just the same way, the words *Passover* or *Pentecost* do not need to appear in the Book of Mormon to evoke images alluding to the Israelite holidays.[7]

However, while the extant Lehi and Nephi narrative never mentions the celebration of the Passover festival explicitly, it refers to it implicitly through action in the narrative. Evidence from Nephi's small plates account dovetails perfectly with the lost manuscript having situated Nephi's acquisition of the brass plates in the context of a Jewish festival and helps to identify that festival as Passover. Recognizing this evidence requires having in mind certain features of the Jewish Passover celebration and its origin in the Israelites' Exodus out of Egypt, as described in the Hebrew Bible.

---

7. Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in *King Benjamin's Speech: That Ye May Learn Wisdom*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 153.

Historical and Biblical Context of Passover

Passover is a spring festival that commemorates Israel's exodus out of Egypt. As prelude to the Exodus, Moses is confronted by God at the burning bush on Mt. Sinai and told to go and ask Pharaoh to let the Israelites travel three days into the wilderness to make sacrifices. Moses and Pharaoh repeatedly negotiate on the issue, but Pharaoh refuses to yield despite a series of divine curses on his land (Ex. 8–10). He is at last persuaded by the final curse — the coming of "the angel of death" for each firstborn male in the land. The Israelites were told to protect themselves and their children by offering the divinely commanded sacrifice of an unblemished lamb and marking their door posts with the lamb's blood. Those who complied were "passed over" by the angel of death, but those who did not saw the death of their firstborn. Surrendering to Moses and the Lord, Pharaoh finally gave permission for the Israelites to go (Ex. 11–12).

Before leaving, the Israelites took advantage of the situation and implored their former Egyptian overlords for gold and silver, which the Egyptians, now eager to be rid of them, were willing to give (12:35). The Egyptian surrender was only momentary, however, and when Pharaoh changed his mind and ordered his armies to pursue the Israelites, God parted the Red Sea for the Israelites to pass over on dry ground but closed it on the armies of Pharaoh, swallowing them up (Ex. 12–14).

In commemoration of the Lord redeeming Israel from Egyptian bondage, God commanded that subsequent celebrations of the Passover begin on the fifteenth day of the first calendar month, Nisan, and then last seven days (Ex. 13:3–4). Each family was to collect one unblemished lamb "in the tenth day of [Nisan]" and keep that lamb until it was time to sacrifice it on "the fourteenth day of the same month" (12:3, 6). The lamb was to be killed, the blood was to be put over the door posts, and in turn the angel of death would again pass over Israel (vv. 5–13, 23). Finally, pointing to the urgency of the original Passover, the meal was commanded to be eaten "in haste" so that the participants could be ready to leave in a moment's notice (v. 11), symbolizing an immediate deliverance from sudden destruction.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

While the Passover feast was to be observed in perpetuity, it was not always observed in the same way. King Josiah (reigned ca. 641–609 BC), who initiated the first stages of the Deuteronomic reform, held a vast Passover celebration that apparently marked an innovation in how

the feast was celebrated (2 Chron. 35:1–19). Happening just over two decades before Lehi's family left Jerusalem, Josiah's notable Passover was punctiliously patterned on the Law, centering the celebration on "the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses" (v. 6). Despite so scrupulously focusing on the Law in celebrating Israel's deliverance from Egypt, Josiah tragically did not obtain a similarly miraculous deliverance. In an ironic reversal of Israel's deliverance from the armies of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, Josiah eventually died facing Egyptian armies (vv. 19–27). Josiah's Passover itself, however, was still remembered as an unparalleled success:

> And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (2 Chron. 35:18)

It is this Passover, and the Deuteronomic reforms of which it was part, that comprise the most immediate biblical background for Lehi and Nephi's Passover some twenty years later.

A Passover Setting for Lehi's Exodus

Although a Passover context is never made explicit in our available Book of Mormon, on a close examination of the text of 1 Nephi 1–5 we can see that it already points to Lehi's calling from God having both a Passover *context* and Passover *content*. The chronological context of Lehi's calling vision, disclosed by close reading of the text, is that of the Passover season. And the content Lehi receives in that vision reveals the Book of Mormon's ultimate meaning behind the Passover: the sacrifice of the messianic Lamb of God. After this Passover-themed vision, the narratives of Lehi's exodus and Nephi's brass plates quest continue to reflect their Passover context by reenacting events of the original Passover, reflecting the observance of the festival of Passover, and verbally referencing Passover events in the Bible.

All of these echoes of Passover support Lapham's account that "a great feast" was being celebrated in Jerusalem during early events of this first narrative of the Book of Mormon.

The Passover Context of Lehi's Vision

Close attention to the detail of Lehi's initial calling and theophany in 1 Nephi 1 places that event, and therefore the beginning of the Book

of Mormon itself, early in the Passover month of Nisan, setting Lehi's vision and the events that follow in the Passover season.

The familiar account of Lehi's calling theophany, in the opening verses of the extant Book of Mormon, puts it "in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah" (1 Ne. 1:4). This phrase's familiarity to the Book of Mormon's readers may obscure its significance. When was "the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah," and how, exactly, was his reign commenced? In the biblical narratives, Zedekiah's reign begins during an invasion of Jerusalem by the forces of Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar II, and Jerusalem reportedly fell to Babylon's siege in Adar, the twelfth month in the Jewish calendar. As a result, Jehoiachin, king of Judah at the time of the siege, was dethroned and replaced by the Babylonians at the end of the calendar year. As the Chronicler puts it, "[W]hen the year was expired, king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him [Jehoiachin] to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem" (2 Chr. 36:10). The inauguration of the first year of Zedekiah's reign was therefore timed to coincide with the ringing in of the new calendar year with the month of Nisan.

The Book of Mormon offers multiple clues for determining when Lehi's warning and prophetic call occurred. The specific meaning of the phrase "in the commencement of the [nth] year" can be gleaned from its use elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, and, in fact, in one instance, the phrase is used in conjunction with an exact calendar date, enabling us to discern how literally "in the commencement" can be taken: Alma 56:1 narrows "the commencement of the . . . year" to a specific date — "the second day in the first month" (i.e., the second day of the entire calendar year) — suggesting that such phrasing is meant to be taken quite literally. When the narrative places Lehi's calling and warning vision "in the commencement of" Zedekiah's first year, this should be taken at face value: it means in the very first days of Zedekiah's reign, which coincidentally were the very first days of the new calendar year (2 Chr. 36:10). Thus, coming "in the commencement" of that year, Lehi's calling theophany should have occurred shortly before Passover, which began on the fourteenth of Nisan.[8]

---

8.   Given the common dating of Zedekiah's reign as commencing in 597 BC, the relevant Passover would have begun on April 26 of that year, placing the final day of Passover on May 3 or 4, 597 BC, depending on whether the celebration was ended on the biblical seventh day or a later traditional eighth day.

Additional dating within the Book of Mormon provides further support for such timing. The occurrence of Lehi's exodus during the Passover season is implied by the date on which Jesus was crucified in the Nephite calendar system. According to 3 Nephi 8:5 this happened on "the first month, the fourth day of the month." What this means can be best understood by pulling together various Book of Mormon data points about the Nephite calendar.

1. Nephite calendar dates were marked from when Lehi left Jerusalem (Jacob 1:1; Enos 1:25; Mosiah 6:4, 29:46; 3 Ne. 1:1, 2:6, 5:15).[9]
2. The time of Lehi's exodus is also used as a benchmark to predict the coming of the Messiah, and in Passover language that symbolically connects Lehi's exodus to the birth of Jesus, the "Lamb of God" (e.g., 1 Ne. 10:4–10).[10]
3. The time of Jesus's crucifixion — at Passover — aligns closely with the beginning of the Nephite calendar year. In the Gospel of John, the Crucifixion occurs on the fourth and final day of the Passover preparatory period (John 19:14); in 3 Nephi it occurs on the fourth day of the Nephite calendar year (3 Ne. 8:5).

Collectively, these three points establish that the Nephite calendar year began with the Passover season: if Jesus's crucifixion was on the fourth day of the preparatory period preceding Passover *and* on the fourth day of the Nephite calendar year, then that would mean that *the Nephite calendar began with the opening of the four-day preparation for Passover.* And given that the Nephite calendar was based on Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, this, in turn, would mean that Lehi and his family began their exodus from Jerusalem at the beginning of the preparation for Passover.[11]

---

9. See Randall P. Spackman, "The Jewish/Nephite Lunar Calendar," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1, (1998): 48–59.

10. John P. Pratt, "Passover: Was It Symbolic of His Coming?" The Ensign, January 1994, 38–45n7; John P. Pratt, "Lehi's 600-year Prophecy of the Birth of Christ," *Meridian Magazine* (March 31, 2000), available at http://johnpratt. com/items/docs/lds/meridian/2000/lehi6apr.html; John P. Pratt, "The Nephite Calendar," *Meridian Magazine* (January 14, 2004), available at https://www. johnpratt.com/items/docs/lds/meridian/2004/nephite.html#4.2.

11. This timetable is complicated by the question of whether the Nephite calendar was re-centered on a new initial day when its year count was restarted at the time Jesus' birth was portended by the appearance of a new star. However,

A less technical and more typological reading of scripture and sacred history similarly implies a Passover timing for Lehi's exodus: in a pattern of redemptive events preceding and following Lehi's exodus, Passover is the time at which the Lord redeems His people. Crucial redemptive events in the history of Israel share this same precise timing.

- **The Mosaic Exodus.** Lehi's exodus echoes the contours of Moses's Exodus in the Bible. That exodus, *the* Exodus, began with Passover. There is thus no more natural time for Lehi's exodus to begin.
- **The Crucifixion of Christ.** The ultimate redemptive event, the Crucifixion of the Lamb of God, was made at the time of Passover.
- **The coming of Elijah to the Kirtland temple.** As pointed out by Stephen Ricks, Elijah's restoration of the sealing keys on April 3, 1836, happened precisely when Jews were inviting Elijah to join their Passover celebration.[12]

The original Passover was the time the Lord set His hand to deliver Israel from bondage in Egypt. The much later Passover following Zedekiah's enthronement would have been, on our argument here, when the Lord set His hand to deliver Israel *again* by leading Lehi's family preemptively from bondage to Babylon. The Passover some six centuries later was when Christ, the Lamb of God, was offered up as *the* Passover lamb. And it was again on Passover in 1836 that the keys to seal and redeem the living and the dead were restored in the Kirtland Temple. Again and again, Passover has been a time at which God delivers His people.

---

3 Nephi indicates that despite the new year count, time — including time for the purposes of calculating when the Messiah would come — was still being marked "from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem" (3 Ne. 1:1–9; cf. 1 Ne. 10:4; 19:8; 2 Ne. 25:19). It seems remarkable for the purposes of assessing the timing of Lehi's exodus relative to Passover that the 1 Nephi evidence places the beginning of Lehi's narrative "in the commencement" of the traditional Jewish calendar year (i.e., just before Passover) and the Nephite New Year began just days before the Passover at which Jesus was crucified.

12.   Stephen D. Ricks "The Appearance of Elijah and Moses in the Kirtland Temple and the Jewish Passover," *BYU Studies* 23, no. 4 (1983): 1–4. As suggested in Chapter 3, another major event in the redemption of Israel that may have been timed to coincide with Passover is the beginning of Joseph Smith's work of translating the Book of Mormon in March 1828.

The Passover Content of Lehi's Vision

The visionary *content* of Lehi's theophany carries Passover themes, revealing the divine reality behind the symbols of Passover to be the messianic Lamb of God, further placing Lehi's exodus in the context of the Passover month. The available Book of Mormon text opens with Lehi seeing God sitting on his throne surrounded by angels and being shown the impending destruction of Jerusalem (1 Ne. 1:8–14). Shortly after this vision, Lehi preached to the people that he had seen in his vision not only Jerusalem's coming demise but also "the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world" (1 Ne. 1:19). Furthermore, there were many other things that Lehi saw that Nephi did not include in his abridgement of his father's vision (v. 16). One of these things that Lehi saw is later discussed in his sermons to his children and almost certainly further detailed in lost Book of Lehi: the Messiah as the Passover lamb.

That the Lamb of God was part of the fuller account of Lehi's vision is subtly revealed later in the narrative when Lehi expounds to his sons the content of his vision and when Nephi seeks to have his own repetition of that vision. After relating to his sons a dream of the tree of life, Lehi expounds to them again what he learned in his vision, using nearly identical language to that theophany — that Jerusalem would be destroyed and that the Lord would raise up "this *Messiah*, of whom he had spoken, or this *Redeemer of the world*" (10:2–5). While Lehi does not, in the terse extant account of his discourse, identify his calling vision as the source of his information, the vision account itself makes clear that it was the source: "the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a *Messiah*, and also the *redemption of the world*" (1:18–19).

As he continues expounding, Lehi describes to his sons in some detail how a future prophet would "baptize the Messiah with water" and how "after he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold and bear record that he had baptized the *Lamb of God*, who should take away the sins of the world" (10:9–10). Given that Lehi could only have learned such detail by a vision or comparable revelation, and that Lehi has to this point used this discourse to expound to his sons the contents of his calling vision, Lehi is probably here continuing to expound contents from his vision — and among these were the Messiah's baptism and his identity as the sacrificial Lamb of God.

That these "Lamb of God" themes were part of Lehi's vision is further confirmed by Nephi's personal reiteration of the vision. Immediately after Lehi concluded teaching his sons about the destruction of Jerusalem, the

Redeemer of the world, and the baptism of the Lamb of God, Nephi petitioned God: "I desire to *behold* the things which my father saw" (1 Ne. 11:3). Tellingly, he was answered with, *"Behold the Lamb of God"* (v. 21). He was shown more than merely the destruction of Jerusalem; he was also given a vision of the life of the Messiah, identified explicitly as the Lamb. Nephi's vision, given so he could see "the things which my father had seen" (v. 1) is so thoroughly imbued with Passover themes, referring some fifty-six times to the Lamb, that one author, unaware of the Passover context of these events, has suggested that Nephi's vision "might be called a paschal [i.e., Passover] vision."[13]

If Nephi's echo of his father's visionary experiences could be called a Passover vision, then it seems all the more certain that his father's original experience was itself a Passover vision. And such Passover content best fits in a Passover context. Lehi's visionary identification of the Messiah as "the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world" (1 Ne. 10:10) *belongs* in the context of the Passover month of Nisan. As the inhabitants of Jerusalem, including Lehi's family, made ready to select an unblemished lamb to be sacrificed as their Passover, what was revealed to Lehi was that the Messiah *was* the "Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

This visionary identification for Lehi of the Messiah as the Lamb of God during Passover season may help explain a puzzling feature of the Lehi narrative. When Lehi teaches his fellow Jerusalem citizens of the coming of a Messiah, they are incongruously angry and seek to kill him (1 Ne. 1:19–20), a strange reaction to the promise of a Messiah and redemption. But if Lehi taught, during the Passover season, that this coming redeemer was *God's lamb* — plainly implying that his role was to be sacrificed rather than to deliver Israel from Babylon — this could account for the anger against him. In the immediate wake of a Babylonian invasion that had humiliated the Jews by dethroning their king, plundering their temple, and carrying their nobles in exile to Babylon, they would have wanted Lehi to promise a liberating conquering Messiah and not a spotless lamb intended for slaughter.

Finally, there is a third way in which Lehi's theophany may have involved the heavenly Lamb of God. Lehi's vision follows the pattern of heavenly-ascent throne theophanies, in which someone sees God sitting on His throne surrounded by singing, worshipping angels, a pattern

---

13.   George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experiences*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 249.

reported not only by Lehi but also by Enoch, Ezekiel, John the Revelator, and Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. Note the similarity of the visions of Lehi, John, and Joseph Smith:

- **Lehi:** "And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw *God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels* in the attitude of singing and praising their God. And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. And he also saw twelve others . . . and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read" (1 Nephi 1:8–11).

- **John the Revelator:** "And I beheld, and, lo, *in the midst of the throne* . . . stood *a Lamb* as it had been slain. . . . [A]nd, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood *before the throne*, and before *the Lamb*, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to *our God which sitteth upon the throne*, and unto *the Lamb*. And *all the angels stood round about the throne* . . . and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever." (Rev. 5:6, 7:9–12)

- **Joseph Smith:** "And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; and saw *the holy angels*, and them who are sanctified before *his throne*, worshiping God, and *the Lamb*, who worship him forever and ever." (D&C 76:20–21)

These heavenly-ascent theophanies all follow the same pattern. Each involves seeing God sitting on his throne surrounded by worshipping angels. However, note that Joseph Smith's and both of John the Revelator's theophanies include not only God on this throne and angels but also the Lamb of God, as Lehi's exposition to his sons implies his theophany had as well. Furthermore, Lehi's throne theophany is immediately followed by Lehi seeing "One" descending and carrying a book. This, of course, parallels John's Revelation, wherein he sees in heaven one bearing a book whom he also identifies as the Lamb (Rev. 5:1–9; 21:27). Lehi's calling theophany is thus echoed by three other theophanies that center on the

Lamb of God. So when Lehi himself expounds his heavenly-ascent theophany by describing to his sons the Lamb of God, he is not changing to an unrelated subject but is instead recounting one of the aspects of Lehi's experience that Nephi did "not make a full account" of in his abridgement (1 Ne. 1:16).

Passover Themes in Lehi's Exodus

After Lehi's vision, the Book of Mormon's narrative of Lehi, Nephi, and Laban continues to provide evidence for its Passover context by (1) *reenacting the original Passover in their lives*, (2) *reflecting their observance of the Passover festival* under celebration at the time, and (3) *rehearsing words spoken to and by them that evoke Passover*. These various reflections of the Passover, in re-creation, celebration, and reference are spread through the narratives of Lehi's exodus and Nephi's quest for the brass plates.

The story resumes with Lehi's exodus, which promptly begins to echo some of the circumstances of the biblical Passover. Upon Lehi's arrival at his home after witnessing an Exodus-like pillar of fire descend on the rock before him, the Lord came to him in a dream and warned him to get his family out of Jerusalem in order to avoid destruction and those in the city that sought to kill him (1 Ne. 2:1). Lehi did not delay in acting on this commandment, leaving so quickly that they failed to bring their most valuable possessions (3:22). This escape from the city then took them toward the Red Sea (2:2, 5).

Lehi's exodus both recapitulates and reverses the biblical Exodus and the setting for the original Passover. With Lehi as their Moses, his family traveled *away* from the biblical Promised Land rather than toward it. Similarly reversing the Exodus narrative, Lehi and his family did not receive gold and silver as they set out on their journey; rather, leaving in haste and taking only the true essentials, they left behind the gold and silver they already had. Their "three day's journey" in the wilderness then took them toward the Red Sea — the final boundary the Israelites crossed to free themselves from Egypt. After thus evoking the original Exodus narrative, the Lehi narrative then describes him offering a sacrifice to God. The occasion for the sacrifice is not specified, but it is consistent with the observance of Passover. Soon thereafter, Lehi was commanded to send his sons back to Jerusalem to acquire the scriptural brass plates that contained the Hebrew scriptures written in Egyptian script (Mosiah 1:2–4).

In the biblical Exodus narrative, the brothers Moses and Aaron negotiated with Pharaoh to allow them to lead the Israelites into the wilderness, ultimately taking with them the remains of the patriarch Joseph. Mirroring this, Lehi's sons sought to bargain with Laban to allow them to take the brass plates into the wilderness — plates Laban possessed because of his descendancy from Joseph (1 Ne. 5:16). They even offered their gold and silver for trade, reversing the Israelites' Passover request for the Egyptians' riches before leaving Egypt. This failed, however, with Laban seizing their gold and silver, keeping the brass plates, and chasing Nephi and his brothers out of the city. Hiding in a cave outside the walls of Jerusalem, Nephi then exhorted his discouraged brothers by turning to sacred history. In Jewish tradition, the first day of the week-long Passover festival commemorates the "passing over" of the Israelites by the angel of death and the final day of Passover commemorates the "passing over" by the Israelites of the Red Sea.[14] Nephi refers directly to this latter passing over or deliverance at the Red Sea to persuade his brothers that God would deliver them as he had their ancestors:

> [L]et us go up, let us be strong like unto Moses, for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea. Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt? Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians. (1 Ne. 4:2–3)

As we have seen, the story recounted in 1 Nephi implicitly connects Laban to both Joseph and Egypt by his inheriting the Egyptian brass plates as a descendant of Joseph of Egypt. Laban thus plays a dual role in the story as both Jew and Egyptian.

Likewise, Lehi's exodus has the dual role of recreating yet reversing the ancient exodus, in both particular and thematic elements. The dual passing-overs that are celebrated during the holiday give parallel significance to the sequence of Lehi's sacrifice (possibly the Passover lamb) followed several days later by Nephi comparing Laban to the Egyptians at the Red Sea and then, later that night, slaying him. If Lehi's wilderness sacrifice was a Paschal lamb, then Nephi's comparing

---

14. Eliyahu Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage: The Jewish Year and its Days of Significance* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1978), 666–68.

Laban to the Egyptians at the Red Sea and then slaying him would have come near the end of the Passover week — the time at which Jews were celebrating the Israelites' deliverance from the Egyptians at the Red Sea.

A Passover Setting for Nephi's Quest for the Brass Plates

After exhorting his brothers, Nephi was "led by the Spirit" as he sneaked into the city to find Laban, who he found passed out drunk in the street. According to Fayette Lapham, this was because of a great feast being celebrated in the city at the time. As Nephi recounted, Laban was "drunken with wine" after being "*out by night among the elders*" (1 Ne. 4:7, 22). Passover was not merely a family celebration but a communal celebration. This was especially the case following the reign of Josiah, who changed the nature of the celebration to place more emphasis on Passover as a community rite with the Law at the center of the celebration (2 Kgs. 23:21–23). As Karen Armstrong summarizes the change, "Passover had been a private, family festival, held in the home. Now it became a national convention."[15] A prominent man like Laban who could "command fifty" (1 Ne. 3:31) would, indeed, have celebrated the Passover with other Jewish elders and elites.

Laban's connection with the Passover in this instance would have extended beyond it merely being an occasion for community socializing and drinking. Laban died at Passover, and this echoes the original, biblical Passover under Moses, when God destroyed those who tried to oppose his people. Laban had been celebrating with the Jerusalem elders, wearing full military dress and carrying a finely crafted sword. In the commandment in the Book of Exodus instituting the celebration of Passover, observance of the feast includes two ceremonial occasions or "holy convocations" (Ex. 12:16). One was on the first day of Passover, related to death passing over Israel's children and landing instead on the Egyptians' firstborn, the other was on the festival's final day, related to passing over the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptians.[16] If Lehi's sacrifice before sending his sons for the plates was a Passover observance accompanying the first convocation, commemorating the deliverance of the Israelites' firstborn, then the occasion of Laban celebrating with the elders would have been the final convocation, commemorating the Israelites' deliverance at the Red Sea and the Egyptians' destruction.

15.   Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of our Religious Traditions* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 195.

16.   Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage*, 666–68.

Viewed from the perspective of God's chosen faithful, Passover was a miraculous deliverance — being passed over by calamity, by the angel of death. But viewed from the perspective of the Egyptian oppressors, it was an occasion of destruction. At the biblical Passover under Moses, the families of the Egyptians were not passed over by death at all, but struck squarely and painfully: the firstborn of each family was slain. While the firstborn in this biblical narrative will not be envied, being a firstborn was generally an enviable thing in the Bible: the firstborn or birthright son was the special inheritor of family property. As inheritor of the brass plates from "his fathers," Laban himself would have likely been the firstborn son of his family (1 Ne. 5:16). As such, he shared the fate of the Israelites' oppressors' firstborn. As firstborn heir, a military leader, and a symbolic proxy for Pharaoh and the Egyptian armies (1 Ne. 4:3), Laban parallels both sets of Egyptians destroyed at the first Passover: those slain by the angel of death on the first evening and those destroyed at the Red Sea on the last day.

When we read 1 Nephi in a Passover festival context, the Spirit's words to Nephi become clearer: "Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Ne. 4:13). Upon hearing this, Nephi again "remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me . . . inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise" (v. 14). Just as the firstborn of the Egyptians needed to die in order for the Lord's people to be delivered, so now Laban needed to die for Lehi's people to be delivered. Nephi learns that Laban must be destroyed, "even as the Egyptians," and then becomes "the angel of death" to Laban, slaying the firstborn in order to lead God's people out of bondage and to the Promised Land.

A final and crucial clue to a Passover setting for the brass plates narrative comes from words spoken at Nephi's killing of Laban. The Spirit's words to Nephi that it is better "that one man perish than that a nation dwindle and perish in unbelief" are striking because they echo Caiaphas' New Testament words about Jesus at the beginning of the Passover week in which Jesus was crucified. Caiaphas, acting as high priest, "prophesied that Jesus should die for" the nation of the Jews, saying, "[I]t is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50).

The implicit juxtaposition in these parallel phrases of the wicked Laban and humanity's sinless Passover lamb Jesus is perplexing. Yet a

clear parallel does exist between the 1 Nephi 4 and John 11 passages. The rationale given for Nephi's beheading of Laban is the same as that given by Caiaphas for the crucifixion of Jesus: it is better that one man perish than that a whole nation perish. So the parallel is in the role of a scapegoat, or one who stands in for all. Although Laban clearly should not be understood as a Passover "sacrifice," he nonetheless plays a role in Lehi and Nephi's Passover that echoes Moses's Passover and may parallel Caiaphas's justification of Jesus's death. If Caiaphas — a skeptic of Jesus's divine mission — intended to compare Jesus to anyone from the Passover narrative, it would not have been the lamb. Rather, it would have been the firstborn among the Egyptians who had to die in order that the nation of Israel might not perish. Similarly to those Egyptian firstborn, here, in the Spirit's words, it is Laban who must die to save a nation.

When Laban's drunkenness, which enables Nephi to acquire the brass plates, is placed in context of a Passover feast, then the Nephite nation can be seen to have been saved from dwindling and perishing because of Passover. *Because* Laban thus celebrated the Passover, Nephi's nation was delivered. The Passover was not only the occasion of the Nephites' deliverance; it also made their deliverance possible.

Implications of a Passover Setting for Lehi's Exodus

Returning to the Passover theme, the clues within 1 Nephi, along with Lapham's account of a "great feast" being celebrated at the time, are strong indications that the lost manuscript story of the Lehite exodus contained more information about its Passover context. Reading the Book of Mormon's opening chapters in light of this Passover festival setting can thus bring greater meaning to those narratives, to the Book of Mormon as a whole, and even to the Passover itself.

The major Passover celebration under King Josiah's rule focused on the Law. The Book of Lehi Passover narrative appears also to have focused on the Law, in the sense that it is primarily about acquiring the Law recorded on the brass plates. Yet the Lehite narrative also introduces some major contrasts to Josiah's Passover. First, Lehi's Passover season begins with a vision equating the Passover lamb with the Messiah, making the latter the "Lamb of God." This would have contrasted with the Josian reform's effort to put down idolatry in Israel and emphasize strict monotheism — something that would have disallowed the existence of multiple divine persons, like a divine Son or a messianic Lamb of God. Second, while Lehi's family sought the Law contained in

the brass plates, they did not do so because they privileged the Law above all else but because they were commanded to by prophetic revelation through the Spirit and "wisdom in God" (1 Ne. 3:19; 4:10–12). One of the most basic of the Law's commandments was "Thou shalt not kill"; yet the Spirit overrode this, commanding Nephi to violate the Law in order to acquire it for his descendants, so they might retain their covenants with God.

The meaning of the Passover to the reformers under Josiah is thus contrasted greatly with the meaning of the Passover in the Book of Mormon. Josiah's Passover centered tightly and literally on the Law, "the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses" (2 Chron. 35:6), while Lehi and Nephi's Passover centered on acquiring the Law by acknowledging a greater importance of the Spirit, which in this case commanded the Law to be seemingly violated. The Lehite Passover also understood the Law as a system of signs pointing *beyond* itself, to the redemption of the world by a divine Messiah, who was also the sacrificial "Lamb of God."

So while the Josian Passover centered on the divine word — the Law — Lehi and Nephi's Passover centered, not on the divine Law, but on the divine Persons. Heading into the Passover season, Lehi saw God sitting upon His throne — i.e., the Father — and then the Son descending to earth (cf. Acts 7:55–56). And during that Passover, Nephi was commanded to contravene or counter the Law by the Spirit of the Lord. Lehi and Nephi's Passover was not a Passover of the Law of God, but a Passover of the Spirit of God, and, more fully, a Passover of the Father, Son, and Spirit, the persons of the Godhead who "are one God" (2 Ne. 31:21; D&C 20:27–28).

Thus, Lehi and Nephi paradoxically rely upon yet also transcend the Law. This is a pattern we will see repeated later, such as in the building of a temple without a Levitical priesthood (see Chapter 10) and in the narrative of King Mosiah (see Chapter 14) — that the Book of Mormon echoes the Josian pattern in *form* but differs from it in emphasis and substance. This simultaneous embrace and transcendence of Josian law in the Book of Mormon narratives is crucial. It reveals a key pattern and significant contribution of the Book of Mormon as an interpretive lens for the Bible. Perhaps one of the most important features of the Book of Mormon resides here — that as a book of scripture, it both embraces and transcends the Bible. It does this as it magnifies and clarifies, reiterates and complicates, revisits and deepens, and recreates and explains the messages in the Bible — in a complex, sophisticated, and unequalled way.

The Passover context of Lehi's vision also provides a further window into the Book of Mormon itself. Lehi's vision of the Lamb of God in the context of the preparation for Passover provides a narrative bridge from a low Christology — a relatively unexalted view of the Messiah that, rightly or wrongly, can be read out of the Hebrew Bible — to the Book of Mormon's inarguably high Christology — its fully divine view of the Messiah, of a Christ who "is THE ETERNAL GOD" (Title Page). If Lehi and Nephi came from the same context as the Jews just before the Exile, why did they have a precocious conception of a Messiah, and of a divine Messiah at that? Lehi's vision of Messiah as Lamb at the Passover season offers an explanation. Given in the context of Passover, Lehi's vision would have provided Lehi and his family a clear notion of a self-sacrificing, divine Messiah. The revelation that the Messiah was the divine Lamb of God, the substance of which the Passover lamb was a mere shadow, would have given the Nephites the radical understanding of a divine Messiah — and of the Passover and the entire Law of Moses as symbols pointing to that divine Messiah.

The Passover setting for the Book of Mormon's opening narrative also recasts the book's opening message. The Book of Mormon begins with the story of Lehi's personal temporal deliverance — from potential captivity and death. Viewed in the context of its Passover setting, this narrative of Lehi's deliverance becomes also an echo or reiteration of Israel's deliverance at the original Passover. And viewed in context of Lehi's revelation about the messianic Lamb of God, it becomes still more: a type of the spiritual deliverance to be wrought by the Messiah. Framed by the festival of Passover and by a revelation of what that Passover means, the story of the temporal deliverance of a family of pre-Exilic Jews becomes a representation of the larger deliverance of humankind, one celebrated in a Passover that points to the Lamb of God.

The Book of Mormon is not just a book about a particular family. Like the heavenly book Lehi saw in his original theophany, from the beginning the Book of Mormon manifested "plainly the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world" (1 Ne. 1:13–16, 19). Our present brief abridgement of the Book of Mormon's opening events, greatly condensed from the initial manuscript, may appear to be simply about the family of a certain Israelite man of the sixth century BC and their deliverance from temporal destruction. However, when these narratives are placed within their original context, once offered by Mormon's intended fuller account in the Book of Lehi, the significance of the events changes dramatically.

Read in light of their Passover context, these narratives prove not to be merely or even mostly about the temporal deliverance of one man; they are about the spiritual deliverance of all men, of humanity as a whole, through "the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). The divine Messiah waits six centuries into Nephite history to make his physical appearance, yet from its very beginnings "in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah" (1 Ne. 1:4), the Book of Mormon is already a witness of Jesus Christ.

Don Bradley is an author and independent historian specializing in the beginnings of the Restoration. He completed a Bachelor's in History at BYU and a Master's in History at Utah State University, where he wrote his thesis on "American Proto-Zionism and the 'Book of Lehi': Recontextualizing the Rise of Mormonism." Don has performed an internship with the Joseph Smith Papers Project working with the earliest Joseph Smith sources. He was the primary researcher for Brian C. Hales's Joseph Smith's Polygamy *series. He has published on the translation of the Book of Mormon, plural marriage before Nauvoo, Joseph Smith's "grand fundamental principles of Mormonism," and the Kinderhook plates. He has forthcoming works on the Kinderhook plates and the First Vision. His first book is* The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Lost Stories *(Greg Kofford Books, 2019). Don does historical research on his own projects and for clients. He lives in Springville, Utah.*

Hugh B. Brown's Program for Latter-Day Saint Servicemen During WWII

David L. Clark

Abstract: *Prior to U.S. involvement in WWII, the First Presidency asked Hugh B. Brown to initiate and serve as coordinator of a program that would reinforce the spiritual welfare of the increasing number of Latter-day Saint men entering the military. Brown initially answered the challenge by organizing religious services at training camps along the West Coast because of the large number of Church-member men training there. However, following Pearl Harbor, he expanded the program to 65 training camps in many parts of the country. He also created USO-type facilities in Salt Lake City and San Diego, distributed pocket-size scriptures, wrote faith-strengthening articles, and answered requests for spiritual support from Latter-day Saint servicemen. In 1943, Brown's program enlarged with the addition of assistant coordinators and became part of the newly formed Servicemen's Committee chaired by Elder Harold B. Lee. In 1944, Brown was recalled as the British Mission president and left 13 assistants to manage his program through the conclusion of the war. Interviews with veterans who experienced Brown's program suggest that the pocket-size copies of the Book of Mormon carried everywhere, even in battle, may have been Brown's most significant contribution to their war-time spiritual maintenance.*

> It is the army's job to armor-plate with steel. I have found the kind of armor-plating that is stronger than any metal…What finer gift could a man receive than the armor of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Such a man is prepared to live and be prepared to die.[1]

---

1. Richard F. Taylor, "News from the Camps," *Improvement Era* 46, no.9 (September 1943): 551. Taylor was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

Anticipating WWII, Latter-day Saint men began joining the military. In 1940, the United States' first peacetime military draft was instituted, and additional Latter-day Saint men became servicemen. At that time the Church had no official contact with Latter-day Saint members in training camps.[2] To support member servicemen, in early 1941 the First Presidency appointed Hugh B. Brown to be coordinator of servicemen's Latter-day Saint activities in training camps, and in 1942 Elder Harold B. Lee was appointed chair of an expanded Church Servicemen's Committee that incorporated Brown's coordinator program.

The Church History Library has no database for the existence, organization, function, or accomplishments of the Church's activities with Church servicemen in training for WWII. This article describes and examines Brown's program to coordinate Latter-day Saint activities at training camps during the war years. Sources for this study include interviews with WWII veterans who experienced some part of Brown's program, the war-time *Improvement Era* and *Church News,* archived reports on WWII military meetings, miscellaneous Hugh B. Brown folders in the Church History Library, and information from several biographies.

Organizing to Support Latter-day Saint Servicemen in Training

With large numbers of Latter-day Saints joining the U.S. military, Church leaders looked for ways to furnish spiritual support for the men while they were in training. Hugh B. Brown was the obvious choice to organize a program because of his military training-camp experience with the Canadian Army during World War I. From 1914 to 1916, Major Brown directed training in Canada and then took troops to England and France. He later returned to Canada, directed more training, and returned to Europe.[3] Brown was released as the British Mission president because of wartime conditions in London, and on May 1, 1941, the First Presidency named him to organize a program for U.S. servicemen.[4] Brown later commented, "The First Presidency had asked me to become coordinator for all Latter-day Saint servicemen and to travel to most of the camps in the United States and Canada, trying to encourage the boys to be true

2. James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 545.

3. Hugh B. Brown, *An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown*, ed. Edwin B. Firmage (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 56.

4. "Elder Brown is Named to New Post," *Deseret News*, April 28, 1941. Eugene E. Campbell and Richard D. Poll, *Hugh B. Brown: His Life and Thought* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 144.

to themselves and to the church during their military service."[5] When called, Brown did not have a full-time job, and Church leaders did not consider his assignment a full-time position, but they did offer him a living allowance and travel expenses to organize a program.[6]

Brown initiated the program when he traveled to San Luis Obispo, California, with his wife Zina on May 18, 1941, his first official military visit. His next objective was to talk to officers at the Chief of Army Chaplains Office in Washington, DC, about his and the Church's status in military camps.[7] Brown's assignment enlarged after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. He later recalled,

> I was holding a conference for the servicemen in San Luis Obispo. When we learned of the attack, we knew, of course, that war would be immediately declared and that the status of these men in the service would change from preparatory training to active service. There was a very strong feeling of despair. Many of the men felt despondent, because we were not prepared to enter into a war with Japan and Germany. … I felt inspired beyond myself as I talked to the men, relating to them incidents from my own life that had helped and inspired me.[8]

As war began, the U.S. government had a difficult time handling the influx of recruits that had accelerated with the military draft in 1940 and was enhanced by enlistments and call-up of National Guard and Army Reserves. "A gigantic mess ensued. … [T]he Army was simply not prepared to assimilate such vast numbers of new manpower" and needed more training camps.[9] More training camps meant that Brown's responsibilities grew beyond California and Washington to coordinating religious activities for Latter-day Saint servicemen training throughout the United States.

In August 1942, Brown met in Los Angeles with Elders Lee and Albert L. Bowen of the Council of the Twelve. Lee became an apostle in April, and one of his first assignments was to work with Brown and the military. The three visited defense facilities together and met with military officials and local Church leaders who could help with Brown's expanded duties. In San Diego, they met with the Chief of Chaplains at the San Diego Naval Training Station and held meetings at Camp Roberts at Oakland

5. Brown, *An Abundant Life*, 97.
6. Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 149.
7. Ibid., 145.
8. Brown, *An Abundant Life*, 97.
9. Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life: An Autobiography by General of the Army Omar. N. Bradley* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 91.

and Fort Ord in the Bay Area. They conferred with military officials at the Presidio in San Francisco before moving on to Oregon, where they paused for a little exercise, a round of golf, and then on to Ft. Lewis, Washington, and officials at the naval base at Bremerton, where the visits concluded.[10]

Brown remained in Washington "to work with local leaders in completing the organization to track and to help servicemen,"[11] while Lee and Bowen returned to Salt Lake City. According to Francis Gibbons, a biographer of Elder Lee, the two apostles agreed that Brown should be called as an assistant to the Twelve. While that did not happen at the time, it showed the importance placed on Brown's work.[12] Lee's report convinced the First Presidency of a need to expand services for the growing number of Church military personnel. As a result, they created the Church Servicemen's Committee, which became the single organization to care for Latter-day Saint servicemen. Lee was named chairman, with Brown and John H. Taylor, of the Seventy as committee members.[13] Brown continued the program he had initiated in 1941 but also assisted in new committee duties. According to Gibbons, this also "began a long association between these two old friends in the interest of Latter-day Saint servicemen."[14]

Latter-day Saint Chaplain Problems

One of the first assignments for Brown and the new committee was to work with "United States military officials to secure the appointments of Latter-day Saint chaplains."[15] Applications for chaplain appointments for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were repeatedly rejected because Latter-day Saint candidates did not meet the requirements of possessing a college degree and having a previous ecclesiastical assignment

10. Francis M. Gibbons, *Harold B. Lee: Man of Vision, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 183–86.

11. Ibid., 186.

12. Ibid., 187. Brown was finally sustained as an Assistant to the Twelve on October 4, 1953.

13. Ibid.; Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 158, L. Brent Goates, *Harold B. Lee: Prophet & Seer* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985). 182.

14. Gibbons, *Harold B. Lee*, 187.

15. Church Educational System, "Chapter Forty: The Saints during World War II," in *Church History in the Fulness of Times Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 530, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/manual/church-history-in-the-fulness-of-times/chapter-forty?lang=eng.

such as a full-time Seminary teacher or a ministry appointment.[16] The Church argued that it had no paid ministry, but many of its candidates had served up to two years as full-time missionaries, and some had previous experience as Seminary teachers. Working together, the committee members presented the Church's arguments in late Fall, 1942. The Church's policy was accepted, and by February 1943, additional Latter-day Saint chaplains were appointed. By the end of the war, there were 45 Church chaplains — 37 in the Army and Air Force and 8 in the Navy — among 12,000 U.S. chaplains who served during WWII.[17]

Brown's Program

Organizing religious services at military bases was the first order of business for Brown. Initial visits to bases included talking to either the base's senior chaplain or the commanding officer to request permission to hold meetings and arrange a meeting place. Announcements of meeting times were posted, and at the initial meeting, a group leader was called from among the servicemen. The group leader assumed responsibility for arranging meetings, and this responsibility continued when he was transferred to a new base.[18]

By May 1943, Brown had organized member services and set apart group leaders at 23 training camps in Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming.[19] A few months later, group

---

16. The path to becoming a chaplain included 1. Ecclesiastical approval, 2. Processing of credentials by General Commission for Army and Navy Chaplains, 3. Selection by office of Chief of Chaplains, 4. Six weeks in Chaplain School at Harvard, and 5. Assignment to military unit. Details are from two unpublished manuscripts: Richard Maher, "For God and Country: Mormon Chaplains During WWII" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 36–39; and "Eugene Campbell Oral History Interview", interview by Richard Maher, LDS Military Chaplains Oral History Project, July 17, 1973. An additional problem for Latter-day Saint candidates was the chaplain quota system. The quota of chaplains for each church was based on the membership of that church in 1916, a WWI rule not changed until a 1939 census was used in 1945. Maher, "For God and Country: Mormon Chaplains During WWII," 39.

17. Maher, "For God and Country: Mormon Chaplains During WWII," 38. Twenty-three of the forty-five chaplains were appointed after January, 1944. Ibid., 116–17.

18. Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 146, and first-hand knowledge of procedure.

19. "The Church Moves On: LDS Organizations in Army Camps," *Improvement Era* 46, no.5 (May 1943): 286–87. Locations included Alaska (Fort Dutch Harbor),

leaders were called and services organized at additional Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana bases.[20] By late 1943, Brown had organized Church services at 42 military training bases in 13 states.

By December, 1943, 45,000 member servicemen were in training, and by 1945 the number increased to 100,000.[21] With the expanded activity, Brown needed help, and the First Presidency called the first assistant servicemen's coordinators, five men who Brown assigned to supervise and organize Latter-day Saints in specific training camps throughout the country. Assistants were given an instruction manual that outlined how to gain recognition at camps, organize camp services, select group leaders, and oversee priesthood ordinances. In areas with no nearby Church organization, assistant coordinators could interview, baptize, confer the Aaronic Priesthood, and approve priesthood advancement, or under special circumstances, authorize group leaders to meet these needs.[22]

In 1942, Brown and his family moved from California to Salt Lake City, and he supervised the assistant coordinators from an office in the Church Administration Building. The move helped ignite Brown's program:

- Brown now had a secretary who helped search stake and ward records for the location of member servicemen. Lists of servicemen and the bases where they were training were

Arizona (Luke Field, Williams Field, Camp Coolidge, Davis-Moathan Field, Maralta Army Air Field Flying School), California (Eleventh Naval District, San Diego; Ship Barracks, Treasure Island; Camp Roberts; 65th Coast Artillery, Inglewood), Florida (Camp Blanding), Idaho (Naval Training, Farragut), Louisiana (Camp Polk), Mississippi (Camp McCain), New Mexico (Deming, Sumner), Oregon (Camp White), Texas (Sheppard Field, Camp Barkeley, Camp Hood), Virginia (Camp Peary), Washington (Ft. Lewis), and Wyoming (Camp Francis E. Warren).

20. "The Church Moves On," *Improvement Era* 46, no. 9 (September 1943): 554. Locations included Mississippi (Camp Shelby, Camp Van Doren, Gulfport Field, Jackson Air Base, Keesler Field, Key Field, Laurel Air Base), Texas (Camp Bowie, Camp Howze, Camp Maxey, Camp Wallace, Camp Walters, Laredo Army Air Field, Lubbock Army Air Force Base, North Camp Hood, San Antonio Cadet Center, San Marcos Army Air Force Base, Texas A&M), and Louisiana (Camp Polk).

21. "The Church Moves On: Service Men," *Improvement Era* 47, no. 2 (February 1944): 94.

22. "The Church Moves On: Coordinator Aides," *Improvement Era* 46, no. 9 (September 1943): 542. A 1943 copy of the Instruction Manual for Assistants was not found in the Church History Library, but a 1948 copy titled "Instructions to Assistant Co-ordinators, LDS Chaplains, MIA Group Leaders, Mission and Stake Representatives" gives instructions in a 29-page manual under the signatures of an expanded Servicemen's Committee: Elders Harold B. Lee, Hugh B. Brown, John H. Taylor, and a then-recent appointee, Mark E. Petersen.

assembled and sent to the assistant responsible for the geographic area of the base. Group leaders were called and assumed responsibility for camp activities as well as off-base chapels when military facilities were not available.[23]

- Brown organized a Latter-day Saint Servicemen's Center in the former mission home on North State Street for those training near or passing through Salt Lake City. Like USO facilities, the center had rooms for reading, for writing, and for recreation. In February 1943, Brown moved his office there.[24]

- In 1943, he opened a similar reception center in the North Park chapel in San Diego[25] for serviceman such as Les Booth, U.S. Army, who called it a "home away from home."[26] This work with Servicemen's Centers was enhanced by Church members who welcomed Latter-day Saint servicemen in their homes, some converting their basements into dormitory-like facilities. There were cots for servicemen on leave, free meals, and members even sponsored birthday or other "aversary" parties for servicemen stationed in their area.[27]

- Perhaps Brown's most significant contribution for Church servicemen was his leadership in printing two small-sized books, the Book of Mormon and Principles of the Gospel. Because of their small size, the books could be placed in a shirt pocket and carried anywhere. Some servicemen called the books their "battlefield copies." Brown wrote the preface for the Principles of the Gospel volume and provided instructions on wearing garments in the military, how to share the gospel, and other items, plus an alphabetical listing and discussion of gospel topics, such as agency, baptism, and chastity, and even a few hymns. Seventy-five thousand copies of the two volumes were distributed to Latter-day Saint servicemen, mostly by Brown's assistant coordinators.[28]

---

23. Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 145–46.

24. Ibid., 161–62.

25. Ibid., 162.

26. Booth was interviewed in April 2019.

27. Richard O. Cowan and William E. Homer, *California Saints: A 150-Year Legacy in the Golden State* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 311.

28. Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 158.

- Late in the war, the Servicemen's Committee also published small-sized "Service Men's Edition of the Church News." This began in May 1944, and 90,000 copies of each edition were eventually printed.[29]

- Brown published a series of articles in the *Improvement Era* advising servicemen to keep the faith and adhere to gospel principals under the worst of circumstances. For example, in one article he specified, "Righteousness, which is obedience to law, exalts an individual as well as a nation; while sin, which is the folly of disobedience, deliberately taking the wrong road, doing things the hard way, is a reproach to any man."[30] All articles stressed the importance for each man to be faithful to his beliefs in spite of despair and gloom that could engulf him, and not to give in to the temptation of ignoring moral standards that others might justify because of what could become a daily threat of death.

- Brown was able to arrange "budget cards" for Latter-day Saint servicemen who were stationed close to local wards, which permitted them to attend all special entertainment events of the local unit free of charge.[31] In response to all of these activities, servicemen were encouraged to write letters describing their experiences during training as well as in combat. A special section of the *Improvement Era* was reserved for these letters.[32]

Program Progress

Organizing religious services was the main responsibility of Brown's program. However, interviews with servicemen more than 70 years after the war indicated that memories of past services were vague. Robert Hedelius remembers attending services whenever he could, but he has special memories of only one meeting at the Naval Training Camp

---

29. Maher, "For God and Country: Mormon Chaplains During WWII," 95.

30. Hugh B. Brown, "Thoughts for the Service Man's Quiet Hour," *Improvement Era* 47, no. 6 (June 1944): 377. Additional articles in the series appeared in April 1944, p. 207 and May 1944, p. 278.

31. "The Church Moves On: LDS Service Men Receive Budget Tickets," *Improvement Era* 46, no, 4 (April 1943): 221.

32. The first of these monthly letters appear in "News from the Camps," *Improvement Era* 46, no. 7 (July 1943): 423. Letters continued to be published even after the end of the war.

in Farragut, Idaho, when Elder George Albert Smith was the speaker.[33] While memories of meetings are few, there are extensive records of WWII servicemen meetings because those in charge, probably the group leader, submitted reports. The Church History Library has thousands of these reports from meetings held during 1942–1945 and later. Reports and records of meetings at each of 65 camps are grouped together chronologically and are mostly single-page handwritten, but some are typed. Handwritten reports also occur in ledgers or in a large variety of notebooks. Any style to no style formats for reporting the meetings were used until sometime in 1944, when the Servicemen's Committee begin providing a standard reporting form. Most reports are a brief summary of meeting activity, with presiding and conducting personnel listed, songs sung, and speakers or teachers noted. Most also include an attendance record, and some include lists signed by all who were in attendance. Many of the thousands of reports indicate that the meetings were held irregularly, while others are of weekly or bi-weekly reports covering the entire war years.[34]

A review of hundreds of these reports provides a description of Latter-day Saint camp meetings, some similar to what most Church members experience and would be comfortable attending today. Most of the reports in the Church Library are specific as to what kind of Latter-day Saint meeting was held, but others are simply called "meeting" and contain only a brief outline. Other reports, which could more accurately be called *files*, include communications, including descriptions of activities other than meetings for the service group. For example, one file documents actions by serviceman Arves Christensen who wrote a letter to Church offices in Salt Lake from Camp Beale, California, and reported that 12 men belonging to the Church in his barracks wanted to organize. Hugh B. Brown went to Camp Beale, organized the group, and supplied the men with all of the necessary books and instructions.[35]

Meeting attendance ranged from a few to hundreds. For example, 550 attended a meeting at the Naval Training Station in Farragut, Idaho,

33. Interviewed in May 2019.

34. All reports are listed under the call number CR 596, in the Church History Library.

35. Meeting Minutes and Attendance Records, Servicemen's Group Camp, Beale, CA, 1944–1947, Church History Library, CR 596 48.

in September 1944, while only 6 were present at a meeting at Army Post Office 944, Alaska, in July 1942.[36]

Group leaders conducted most meetings; the turnover in military personnel was frequent, so those called as group leaders commonly functioned for only a brief period before leaving for additional training or for overseas duty. This meant that the assistant coordinator was constantly calling new group leaders. One estimate is that at least 1,000 group leaders were called during the war years.[37] However, this estimate may be too low, because by the end of the war, one assistant coordinator (W. Aird MacDonald) had set apart 332 group leaders. Other assistants most likely had similar experiences.[38]

Group leaders were given a certificate and commonly had two assistants.[39] In addition, group leaders had support from volunteers such as Barbara Bradeson of Venice, California, who served a mission and then served as the secretary of the Latter-day Saint servicemen's group meeting at Hammer Field in Fresno, California. Her fulltime job was as a sheet metal worker at Douglas Aircraft at Hammer Field.[40]

Involvement of then-current as well as future General Authorities in camp activities included the organization of a group in a Menlo Park, California, hospital by Elder Harold B. Lee,[41] and at a 1944 Marine training base in Hawaii, where serviceman A. Theodore Tuttle was group leader and Elder Alma Sonne presided. Tuttle was still group leader in July 1945, when Elder Lee was the speaker at services at the same camp.[42]

---

36. Meeting Minutes and Attendance Records, Servicemen's Group, US Naval Training Station, Farragut, Idaho, 1944, Church History Library, CR 596 177; Meeting Minutes, Servicemen's Group, Army Post Office 944, AK, July 19, 1942, Church History Library, CR 596 349.

37. "Chapter Forty: The Saints during World War II," 530.

38. Servicemen's Committee Record of Servicemen Activities, 1943–1948, Church History Library, CR 33 16. This source contains a letter from Wallace Aird MacDonald to the First Presidency, December 12, 1945.

39. Maher, "For God and Country: Mormon Chaplains During WWII," 94. In combat areas where there were a number of member servicemen, group leaders were called by Church chaplains and their "congregations" were called MIA Groups.

40. Military Relations Committee, LDS Servicemen Photographs, circa 1942–1980s, Church History Library, CR 33 20.

41. Meeting Minutes and Attendance Records, Servicemen's Group, Dibble General Hospital: Menlo Park, CA, 1944–46, Church History Library, CR 596 78.

42. Meeting minutes and Attendance Records, Servicemen's Group, US Marine Corps,1: Island Y, HI, 1943–1946, Church History Library, CR 596 127. Tuttle became a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy a few years following the war and is remembered as the Marine who was present and provided the flag raised in

A photograph of an Oak Knoll Hospital meeting in Oakland, California shows nine patients, and members included patient Rex Pinegar and group leader Fred Adams.[43]

Change and New Assignments

Brown's assistant coordinators made significant progress in their enthusiastic response to their callings, and less than a year following their appointments, there was a major change for Brown and his coordinator program. In 1944, Allied victory in Europe looked certain. Brown was released from his duties with the Church Servicemen's Committee on March 4, and in May he was again called as the British Mission president and accepted a second assignment as principal servicemen's coordinator for Europe and was to continue to help with the U.S. program, as well.[44] He then returned to London.[45]

After this change, a full complement of 13 assistant coordinators was in place to continue Brown's program for the remainder of 1944 and the final year of the war.[46] Without further direction from Brown, assistants had authority to organize groups, authorize baptisms, and ordain men to the priesthood. While working without a principal coordinator, they reported to Elder Lee, chairman of the Servicemen's Committee.

the famous event by Marines on Iwo Jima and memorialized in an often-shown statue.

43. Military Relations Committee, LDS Servicemen Photographs, circa 1942–1980s, Church History Library, CR 33 20. Photo in Box 2.

44. Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 162.

45. Returning to England in 1944 was not easy. Brown obtained passage on a Greek freighter, the *Hellas*, an appropriate name for a ship that was part of a 62-vessel convoy taking supplies to England. He remembered that climbing the swaying Jacob's Ladder on the side of the ship in order to board was the easiest part of the cruise, because he had strong hands conditioned from milking cows when he was young. On board, Brown and the only other passenger, a cigar-smoking Dutch officer, shared a small closet-sized room with bunk beds. The voyage included encounters with heavy seas, which kept Brown sick most of the time. Between unappetizing food and the rocking ship, he made frequent use of what he politely called a bathroom. It was obviously a harrowing (and memorable) trip when he gratefully disembarked in Wales 17 days later. Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 165–66. For other details of the return to England. Also see Brown, *An Abundant Life*, 101.

46. The 13 assistant coordinators who did most of the work are identified in the appendix.

Evaluation of Coordinator Activities

Did Brown's WWII coordinator program fulfill the objectives visualized by the First Presidency in 1941? A non-member chaplain who observed the behavior of Latter-day Saint servicemen during training commented:

> The Mormon boys on duty at this post [Fort Ord, California] have what it takes! There's something about a Mormon soldier! He loves the United States. He is loyal to Almighty God. Apparently, no Mormon lad leaves his religion at home when he accompanies the colors to the battlefield. Undoubtedly, that is the chief reason why it is comparatively easy for them to carry on without shamming, without shirking, without sniveling. Anyway, neither worldliness on the one hand nor the roaring of guns on the other affect their faith in or loyalty to God and country. Naturally, therefore, as an American, I am proud of them.[47]

Obviously, his comments reflected on the men's pre-service spiritual background as well as behavior in camp.

Another interesting commentary on member servicemen is a handwritten note dated May 7, 1944, by Major Hailes, whose Latter-day Saint affiliation or lack of it was not noted. He reported that among member servicemen scattered over the Aleutian Islands, "every LDS (serviceman) is his own Chaplain — other Churches need Chaplains, but every Mormon boy — can do more than all the Chaplains to influence the men in the army."[48]

Activities of brother servicemen resulted in some convert baptisms. Assistant Coordinator Nielsen reported a convert baptism as a result of one of his group's efforts and eventually the coordinators were given authority for baptisms for converts made in training camps.[49]

In interviews with Latter-day Saint veterans concerning their involvement with Brown's WWII program 75 to 80 years ago, most had limited memory of religious services and activities at the various training

---

47. "The Church Moves On: Chaplain Pays Tribute," *Improvement Era* 47, no. 12 (December 1944): 767.

48. Military Relations Committee, LDS Servicemen Photographs, circa 1942–1980s, Church History Library, CR 33 20.

49. C. L. Neilsen, "Coordinator Gives Report," Military Relations Committee, LDS Servicemen Photographs, circa 1942–1980s, Church History Library, CR 33 20. Assistants had authority to supervise all steps to baptisms by 1948, and most likely during the war years, as well. Instructions to Assistant Coordinators, ref. 22, p. 21.

camps. Most remembered only that they attended services and activities when they could, but that regular attendance was difficult because of various training assignments. However, with only a couple of exceptions, all of those interviewed reported that the pocket-size scriptures were the most valuable resource they would credit to Brown's program. Infantryman Zane Taylor, who lost frozen toes during the Battle of the Bulge, fashioned a small steel plate the same size of his battlefield scriptures, which he placed in front of the scriptures in his shirt pocket. Air-Force veteran Robert Monson, shot down over Germany and a POW until liberated by General George Patton, fondly remembered reading his small books.[50] Most of those interviewed said that they still possessed their copies, including paratrooper Clyde Swenson who remembered Church services at training camps as well as reading constantly from his Book of Mormon.[51]

Freeman and Wright reported this same positive evaluation of the battlefield copies of the scriptures and wrote that "the servicemen's edition of the Book of Mormon in particular provided a great source of strength for servicemen" and that "testimonies of more than a few servicemen were greatly bolstered."[52] This included Air Force pilot Lieutenant Boyd K. Packer, who "received his pocket-size servicemen's copy of the Book of Mormon [and] began a consistent search at every standing, waiting moment. His bold, colored markings show his study. He wore out its bent, water-soaked cover, then fitted and sewed another from the back of someone's discarded leather flight jacket."[53] Packer recounted that "the Book of Mormon became a part of my very soul."[54] John Weenig summarized the feelings of many when he wrote that the small-sized volumes "have been the richest gifts that could be given to the men in the service,"[55] further supporting the idea that these books were the most significant accomplishment of Brown's program.

The *Improvement Era* letters ("News from the Camps") are another permanent and accessible record of Latter-day Saint servicemen's

50. Interviewed in April 2019.

51. Interviewed in May 2019.

52. Robert C. Freeman and Des A. Wright, *Saints at War: Experiences of Latter-day Saints in World War II* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2001), 16–17, and references throughout, e. g. 153–54, 184, 187, 189, 252–54, 296–97, 336–37, 410–11.

53. Lucile C. Tate, *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 49.

54. Ibid., 59. Packer's battlefield copy of the Book of Mormon is on display in the BYU Bean Museum.

55. "News from the Camps," *Improvement Era* 46, no. 10 (October 1943): 615.

training-camp experiences.[56] Many letters suggest that the work performed by the coordinator program helped them maintain high standards, both during training and later. In one letter, Kenneth Morrison, stationed at Paine Field, Washington, explained that he "attended meetings as often as conditions will permit" and when possible did missionary work and held cottage meetings in towns near their base.[57] Lieutenant Douglas Christensen reminded *Improvement Era* readers from his camp in Camp Hann, California, that living in the dust of war, we "lose sight of who we are" and "without spirituality [enhanced in training camps] we lose hope."[58] Gordon Stettler compared and praised his training camp experiences against the non-member lifestyle of colleagues.[59]

Summary

Twenty-five years after the war, Brown recalled, "[M]y mission at the time was to try to bring hope, encouragement, and faith to the men, most of whom were very young. This, I am glad to say, was accomplished to some extent."[60] Brown and his assistant coordinators successfully set apart at least a thousand servicemen group leaders, and together they organized thousands of spiritual meetings and other activities for Church serviceman at 65 U.S. training camps. Brown established USO style facilities for fellow servicemen in California and Utah and secured free ward and stake budget cards for servicemen. He wrote articles intended to inspire and comfort the servicemen, some of whom wrote letters to the *Improvement Era* describing their spiritual growth. With others of the Servicemen's Committee, he produced and distributed "battlefield" editions of the Book of Mormon and *Principles of the Gospel*, which the servicemen could easily take wherever they went. The servicemen's edition of the Book of Mormon, in particular, provided a great source of strength for servicemen far from home. Servicemen reported turning to their "battlefield" scriptures whenever a free moment allowed them to

---

56. All volumes are available online: "Improvement Era Archives," https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Online_document_index/Improvement_Era.

57. Kenneth B. Morrison, "News from the Camps," *Improvement Era* 46, no. 9 (September 1943): 551.

58. Douglas Christensen, "News from the Camps," *Improvement Era* 47, no. 1 (January 1945): 39.

59. Gordon Stettler, "News from the Camps," *Improvement Era* 47, no. 2 (February 1944): 103.

60. Brown, *An Abundant Life*, 97.

do so, and testimonies of servicemen must have been bolstered through experiences instituted by Brown.[61]

As WWII ended, Brown, writing from London, composed his final letter to the servicemen he had followed and inspired during the war years:

> And now, brother, let us join hands across the years, and finish what we haltingly began. Between the time we came home [referring to his personal action in WWI] and you went out, many things were done, and left undone, which we wish we could forget. But for the sake of our comrades, yours and mine, and for the sake of those to whom you must pass the torch, the young men of 1964–2000 — let us undertake to make a peacetime world which will say in more than words: "Yes! we do remember, and with God's help we'll not forget."[62]

David L. Clark *completed studies at BYU, Columbia, and the University of Iowa. He taught at SMU and BYU but spent most of his professional career at the University of Wisconsin — Madison, where he served as chairman of the Department of Geology and Geophysics and associate dean responsible for the Natural Sciences at Wisconsin. His research focused on the geology of the Arctic Ocean, and from 1995–1999, he served as chairman of the Polar Research Board of the National Academy of Science. He received the R.C. Moore Award for Excellence in Paleontology and the Pander Society Medal for micropaleontology research. He published two books related to theology and history of the restored Church of Jesus Christ and also has published in the* Journal of Mormon History *and* BYU Studies.

---

61. Brown's success with the WWII program for Latter-day Saiant servicemen, his exemplary Church service in other areas, including two appointments as British mission president, and his extraordinary qualities as a caring and dedicated leader, was recognized 12 years following the war when in April 1958 he was called to the Quorum of the Twelve. From 1961 to 1970, he served in the First Presidency as counselor to President David O. McKay.

62. Hugh B. Brown, "To a Service Man of World War II," *Improvement Era* 47, no. 12 (December 1944): 755, 795.

Appendix

The final 13 assistant coordinators who continued Brown's program to the war's conclusion lived in different parts of the country and had different backgrounds.

James R. Boone was a Jacksonville, Florida, businessman who had an automobile dealership but was president of the Florida District Presidency. His Church service included serving a mission in the southern states, which became his area of coordinator responsibility. Later he served as stake patriarch. He spent at least three days each week with his assistant's duties.

Leigh W. Clark was raised in Arizona, attended Brigham Young University, and, shortly following WWI, served a mission in England. Most of his employment was with the Standard Oil Company of Texas as assistant secretary and treasurer of the company. Church service included callings as branch president, bishop, district president, and first patriarch of the Houston Stake. He was assigned to visit military bases in south-central and north Texas.

Harry Clarke was born and converted to the Church in England, where he also served as a missionary. He was a member of radio station KSL's staff, was a singer, and had his own program "Homespun Hour" with Peter Spraynozzle. His assignment was for military camps in the Salt Lake City area, as well as in Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, and western Iowa.

J. Oral Ellsworth studied at Utah State and Columbia and received his PhD at Cornell in 1926. In addition to earlier work as Agriculture Agent in Idaho, he taught at Oklahoma State University and at the time of his calling was Dean of the College of Business Administration at Texas Tech University in Lubbock. After the war, he served as Central States Mission president. His initial coordinator assignment was to work with 16 Army bases in west Texas and eastern New Mexico.

Riley A. Gwynn grew up in Charleston, Utah, and served as a missionary in the Central States Mission from 1924 to 1926. Gwynn was an attorney in Washington, DC, during WWII. He was a bishop at the time of his call to be an assistant coordinator. Frequently his teenage daughter, Elaine, accompanied him on visits to the different military training camps in the New England states, Virginia, and the Washington, DC, area.

Willard L. Kimball was raised in Logan, Utah, and was a grandson of Heber C. Kimball. He spent his early days in Salt Lake City, where he worked for Intermountain Electrical Supply and owned and operated a bookstore plus worked as an insurance agent. He later moved to San Diego and at the time of his calling was a building contractor and also

counselor in the San Diego stake presidency. His service assignment was for approximately 70 camps in southern California and Arizona.

John Longden was born in Oldham, Lancashire, England, and moved with his parents to Utah, where he attended school and graduated from the University of Utah. He was in various business ventures, including management with Westinghouse Electric. He served as bishop of a Salt Lake ward and, following his call as an assistant coordinator in 1943, was called as Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve in 1951. His assignment was the Utah area.

W. Wallace McBride graduated from Utah State and served as water master in Declo, Idaho, and then acquired a Law Degree from George Washington University. He served in the WWI Air Force and later held a variety of positions in Salt Lake City, including prohibition administrator for Utah, and worked with the Veterans Administration. He also served as stake president of a South Carolina stake and bishop of the 18th Ward in Salt Lake City. He was a good friend of Hugh Brown and Harold B. Lee. He was assigned North and South Carolina.

W. Aird MacDonald began his career as a newspaperman and cartoonist. Born in Arizona, most of his life was spent in northern California, where he worked for the Newspaper Enterprise Association, Equitable Life, and State Board of Equalization. He was the first president of the Berkeley and Oakland branches, later president of the Oakland Stake, and was president of the California Mission. At the time of his call, he was Liquor Control commissioner for central California. His assistant coordinator assignment was for 50 camps between Tulare, California, and Medford, Oregon.

Leo J. Muir was raised on a family farm in Woods Cross, Utah, graduated from the University of Utah, and became a Bountiful elementary school teacher. He was principal of the high school in Bountiful and served two terms as mayor of the city beging in 1920. He was honored in Bountiful when Muir Elementary School was built. He was chairman of the County Democratic Party for 14 years and delivered the benediction at the 1960 Democrat National Convention following John F. Kennedy's acceptance speech. He later moved to California and also was president of the Northern States Mission. His assistant duties included the Los Angeles area.

Castle H. Murphy began his Hawaiian contact in 1909 as a missionary. Trained as a mason, he worked in the Ogden area in a variety of jobs but also served a term as deputy county clerk and Ogden City treasurer. He was called as Hawaii Mission and temple president in 1930 and served

as temple president a second time in 1936. He was called to be Hawaiian Mission president again in 1944, at the same time as his call as assistant coordinator. He later served as Ben Lomand Stake Patriarch. His WWII assignment was the Hawaiian Islands and Pacific area.

Clifford L. Neilson was raised in Mt. Pleasant, Utah, and later moved to Portland, Oregon, where he worked for a mortuary. He later moved to southern California, where he worked in the Los Angeles area for the Beneficial Life Insurance Company. He held a variety of Church callings, and his assignment as an assistant was 20 bases in the Los Angeles — Long Beach area. He was successful in keeping servicemen in touch with the Church and bringing many of them into activity. His assignment also was the Pacific Northwest.

C. Clarence Neslen was the Utah National Guard chaplain appointed to provide counsel with Brown when the servicemen's coordinator position was announced in 1941. In 1944, he received a formal assignment as an assistant coordinator. He served as mayor of Salt Lake City from 1920 to 1928, and also served as a Utah State senator and as bishop of the Salt Lake 20th Ward for 26 years. Later during the war, he was the base chaplain at Fort Lewis, Washington. His coordinator assignment was the Los Angeles area.

CONCLUSIONS IN SEARCH OF EVIDENCE

_____

John Gee

Review of Jana Riess, *The Next Mormons: How Millennials Are Changing the LDS Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). 312 pages. $29.95.

Abstract: *Riess's book surveying the beliefs and behaviors of younger members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was supposed to compare the attitudes of younger generations with those of older generations. Unfortunately, flaws in the design, execution, and analysis of the survey prevent it from being what it was supposed to be. Instead the book is Riess's musings on how she would like the Church to change, supported by cherry-picked interviews and an occasional result from the survey. The book demonstrates confusion about basic sampling methods, a failure to understand the relevant literature pertaining to the sociology of religion, and potential breaches of professional ethics. Neither the survey results nor the interpretations can be used uncritically.*

Oxford University Press has a number of excellent titles in sociology and the sociology of religion that I can recommend.[1] Unfortunately,

_____

1. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Mark Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Donna Freitas, *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Lisa D. Pearce and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America's Adolescents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Christian Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog, *Lost in Transition: The Darker Side of*

the volume under review is not one of those. On the bright side, this book did not come out of the division of Oxford University Press that deals with sociology but out of the division that deals with religious studies. The unfortunate flip side is that this book did not benefit from peer review by someone who actually does social science.

The author of the book, Jana Riess, is a journalist with a PhD in American religious history from Columbia University, where she studied under Richard Bushman. She has no training in social science or statistical analysis and outsourced the statistical work on her book to others. Her book is based on a survey she calls "The Next Mormons Survey." She put more effort into this book than typically expected from a journalist, and it shows, but the result does not attain the level of top-quality social science work. Riess's book is not horrible, but it is plagued with problems. As David Frankfurter, professor of religion at Boston University, once noted, "[M]any scholars in Religious Studies have had a certain aversion to the positivistic use of evidence, borne of post-modern critiques of scientific verifiability and a general relativism toward truth-claims."[2] They thus tend not to be well situated to evaluate or use evidence, which shows in the book under consideration. On a certain level, the book deserves to be taken seriously, seriously enough to go to the effort to dissect certain aspects and analyze them carefully. I will discuss the problems with the book in order of the steps taken to put the book together.

Emerging Adulthood (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Christian Smith, *The Sacred Project of American Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, *The Paradox of Generosity: Giving We Receive, Grasping We Lose* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Christian Smith, Kyle Longest, Jonathan Hill, and Kari Christoffersen, *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Donna Freitas, *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Mark Regnerus, *Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage, and Monogamy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

2. David Frankfurter, "The Satanic Ritual Abuse Panic as Religious-Studies Data," *Numen* 50, no. 1 (2003): 111.

Funding

We begin our examination of the problems with the funding of the Next Mormons Survey. Rather than get funding through an established academic funder who might question whether the author had the academic skills necessary to conduct the research, or might ask for better quality control on the survey, or required the raw data to be posted, Riess opted to use crowd sourcing. She obtained $19,665 from 245 donors with an additional $6,000 coming in later (p. 237). To provide incentives to donate, Riess provided rewards for different levels of contributions.[3] For at least $15, one could get one's name listed in the acknowledgements. For at least $60, one could also get a signed copy of the book. For at least $100, one could additionally get an executive summary of the research. For at least $500, the author would also make an appearance in the donor's city.

At the end of the book (pp. 251–52) is a list of the individuals who funded the project at various levels.[4] This is not uncommon with crowd funded books; it allows us to do a cursory analysis of the donor base. Fourteen individuals donated at least $500. Another 68 individuals donated at least $100. Donating at least $60 were 74 individuals, while another 60 donated at least $15 dollars. This means that 29 individuals donated less than $15. Not considering this last group and assuming only minimum donations, $19,140 are accounted for. Those in the under-$15 group cannot account for most of the difference, which would average $18 per person — enough to move them into a higher-donor category. This means that some individuals donated more than the threshold minimums, but most of them seem to have donated the minimum.

The list of donors raises some questions about conflict of interest and "pay to play." At least four of the donors at the highest level are noted for being publicly critical of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its stance on homosexuality, which features prominently in Riess's survey and book. Are they funding Riess's work because they agree with her, or are they influencing her? The participation of other funders also raises concerns. Armand Mauss helped fund the study at the highest level (p. 251) and also contributed to it (p. 249), helped write the questions (p. 249), and provided feedback on drafts of chapters (p. 250); his work is highly praised in the conclusions (pp. 234–35). David Campbell also funded the study at the highest level (p. 251), assisted with the study

---

3. "The Next Mormons," Kickstarter, last updated February 11, 2019, https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/863062971/the-next-mormons.

4. "Methods," The Next Mormons Survey, accessed November 2, 2019, https://thenextmormons.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/tnm-kickstarter-donors.pdf.

(p. 249), commented on drafts of chapters (p. 250), and wrote a blurb for the book's dust jacket, calling it a "tour de force." Bill and David Turnbull helped fund the study at the highest level through their Faith Matters Foundation (pp. 250, 251) — where Riess sits on the board of directors (p. 251)[5] — and helped write the survey (p. 249). Though Joanna Brooks is not listed as contributing money, she helped write the survey (p. 249), commented on drafts of chapters (p. 250), and wrote a blurb for the dust jacket praising its "top-notch social science research methods" and lauding it as "among the most important books ever produced in the field of American religious studies."

It is fair to note that any or all of these individuals might be completely ethical and appropriate in their contributions, but the fact is that more than one had both financial and intellectual influence on the book, and in some cases, the book advocates for their political positions. Since the funding came in before the survey was done, it gives the appearance that those who funded the survey influenced the content and analysis of the survey. Or perhaps they had reason to be confident that Riess's as-yet-ungathered results would be supportive of their political and ideological goals. It may be innocent, but the optics look bad.

Sampling Issues

Once funding was secure, the next step was to assemble the data. In total, "1,156 self-identified Mormons were included in the final sample, as well as 540 former Mormons, for a total of 1,696 completed surveys" (p. 238). The online survey was conducted between 8 September 2016 and 1 November 2017 (p. 238). Given the nature of the internet survey, the question remains open whether it was possible for individuals to take the survey multiple times, thus over-representing their opinions in the survey. Unfortunately, even if we disregard the possibility that individuals may have taken the survey more than once, the sample itself was not representative. The sample was assembled by chain referral sampling, which is not representative. Chain referral sampling (also called snowball

---

5. According to the organization's website, the foundation's advisors and contributors are Philip Barlow, Tom Christofferson, Darius Gray, Fiona Givens, Terryl Givens, Jay Griffith, Jacob Hess, Patrick Mason, Thomas McConkie, Charles Randall Paul, Rosalynde Welch, and Melissa Inouye. The foundation's founders and executive team are Susan and Bill Turnbull, Kristin and David Turnbull, Kristyn and Greg Trimble, and Aubrey and Tim Chaves. Jana Riess is not listed. "About," Faith Matters Foundation, accessed November 2, 2019. https://faithmatters.org/about/.

sampling or network sampling) is a method of trying to learn about an uncommon group of people by getting those involved in the survey to refer others to take the survey. Although it "is generally regarded as a highly effective sampling technique that enables the study of populations who are difficult to reach or 'hidden,'"[6] it can fail in a number of ways, and the results are not representative. In the Next Mormons Survey, the object was to try to turn the sample into quota sampling by selecting surveys that fit various criteria, but Riess was unable to meet the quotas and so both altered the quotas during the survey and weighted the samples she had (p. 240–42). Quota sampling is frequently used in political science. The idea behind quota sampling is that the population sampled is divided into various demographic factors and that a certain quota of each demographic group is surveyed. Even if she had met her quotas, quota sampling is not representative sampling, and comparative studies consistently show that quota sampling generates poorer quality data.[7]

Riess herself is confused about various sampling methods. She discounts one survey because "it was obtained from a convenience sample (also called a 'snowball sample')" (p. 260 n. 36). Convenience samples are not the same thing as snowball samples. The classic example of a convenience sample is the psychology professor who does a study of the students enrolled in his psychology class.

Another potential for distortion in a chain referral sample is the influence of peer effects. By their nature, peer effects spread along the same networks that the referral process would use. Ironically, Riess unknowingly critiqued her own sampling method. As she says, "[I]t has some disadvantages that don't pertain to a nationally representative sample, such as the reinforcement of the socioeconomic, religious, and/or educational biases that may exist in a person's social networks" (p. 260 n. 36). We can say amen to that and at the same time wonder why she did not observe her own caution.

---

6. Jaime Waters, "Snowball Sampling: A Cautionary Tale Involving a Study of Older Drug Users," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 18, no. 4 (2015): 367.

7. Agata Górny, and Joanna Napierała, "Comparing the Effectiveness of Respondent-Driven Sampling and Quota Sampling in Migration Research," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 19, no. 6 (2016): 645–61; Romain Guignard, Jean-Louis Wilquin, Jean-Baptiste Richard, and François Beck, "Tobacco Smoking Surveillance: Is Quota Sampling an Efficient Tool for Monitoring National Trends? A Comparison with a Random Cross-Sectional Survey," *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 10 (October 2013): 1–8.

To understand why this is so, consider the following scenario: A researcher wants to find out general opinions and starts her sample with her friends. How many friends does she have? Although the basis for the Dunbar numbers is flawed,[8] they are convenient numbers that seem to have some validity.[9] Accordingly, people have on average 15 close friends of whom five are very close friends.[10] Let's say that the researcher sends out surveys to her 15 close friends and asks them to do the same. It was shown long ago that friends tend to have similarity of opinion, especially with regard to religion.[11] Let's assume that, on average, very close friends share 90% of their religious opinions and that close friends hold 80% of opinions in common. If all one's close friends share the survey with 14 close friends, and then they share it with 14 friends, then 3,375 people will have taken the survey, and 57% of the opinions will still be shared with the original researcher. Even if very close friends share 85% of opinions and close friends share only 75% of opinions, almost half of the opinions in the final survey will reflect the opinions of the researcher.

While Riess claims to have "excellent reason to be confident that the NMS data is comprehensive and reliable" (p. 8), she actually gives reasons why her data are not reliable. (Some of these will be discussed below under social desirability bias.) An example of distortion in her sample shows up when she discusses the sexual practices of current and former members of the Church before their marriage. Out of her sample of 1,156 self-identified current members of the Church, 639 (55%) are married to their first spouse, and 211 (18%) have never been married (p. 84). This leaves 306 (26%) individuals who are (given the survey questions asked): cohabiting (5% ≈ 58), widowed (3% ≈ 35), separated or divorced (8% ≈ 92), or remarried (10% ≈ 116) (p. 75). A comparison with other surveys that are actually representative (p. 75) shows that she has about twice as many cohabiting Latter-day Saints as expected, half as many widows, and more than the average number of singles. This should have alerted her that her sample was obviously *not* representative.

---

8. Barry Wellman, "Is Dunbar's Number Up?" *British Journal of Psychology* 103 (2012): 174–76.

9. Bruno Gonçalves, Nicola Perra, and Alessandro Vespignani, "Modeling Users' Activity on Twitter Networks: Validation of Dunbar's Number," *PLoS ONE* 6, no. 8 (August 2011), 1–5.

10. Maria Konnikova, "The Limits of Friendship," *New Yorker* (October 7, 2019), https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/social-media-affect-math-dunbar-number-friendships.

11. Irena Nowak, "Need for Similarity with Friends as a Personality Trait," *The Polish Sociological Bulletin* 7 (1963): 69–77.

Since Riess's sample was not representative, her statistics may or may not be indicative of reality. We may never know. We can only determine that by carefully comparing them with more representative samples. What a shame that she wasted her opportunity to do things right.

The Qualitative Aspects

If the quantitative survey sample has problems, the qualitative aspects of the survey also have problems. The individuals sampled for the interviews do not come from the same population as those who provided the answers to the survey questions. Instead, these 63 interviewees were friends of friends (pp. 246–47). Unusual for this sort of book, "the majority of interviewees quoted in the book are identified by their actual first names" (p. 248), and one of the interviewees is cited by actual full name (p. 274n1). Riess also gives a number of identifying features about these individuals, although the details are sometimes inconsistent: one interviewee was variously listed as being 24 (p. 268 n. 18) and 25 (p. 280 n. 37) at the time of the interview. In the ethics of sociological research, researchers are supposed to do their utmost to keep the identities of participants confidential, so Riess at least gives the appearance of a violation of the ethics of the discipline.[12] Such ethical rules do not exist just to protect the privacy of individuals, which they might well waive. Confidentiality also prevents virtue signaling and social desirability bias on the part of the research participants, and thus avoids an over-representation of those with a political axe to grind.

Riess uses material from all 63 interviews.[13] These included 39 women and 24 men, about a three to two ratio. (Ironically, she complains that in her survey "more women were responding than men" [p. 241]). The bulk of the book is actually Riess's commentary interspersed with these interviews, with the statistics brought in when they support Riess's thesis. Riess has selected material from the interviews to tell the story she wants to tell.

Since Riess spends more of her time on her qualitative survey rather than her quantitative survey, it is worthwhile to look at the basic statistics for this survey. The age range of the women is 19 to 47 with a mean of 32 (σ = 5.94). The age range of the men is 21 to 44 with a mean of 31 (σ = 6.49). What is really interesting is the mode, which is 25 for the men and 37 for the women. All of the interviewees were from what Riess considers

---

12. American Sociological Association, *Code of Ethics* (June 2018), 10.

13. The interview subjects' first names, ages, and interview dates and formats are listed in the endnotes of Riess, *The Next Mormons*, 253–92.

Generation-X (m=4, f=9) or Millennials (m=18, f=29). This is somewhat odd for a survey supposed to compare the views of various generations.

We can divide the interviews into five periods: long before the survey (2012–2014) (four interviews), before the survey (22 June–7 September 2016) (seven interviews), during the survey (2 November 2016–12 November 2017) (17 interviews), after the survey (7 February 2017–5 May 2017) (three interviews), more than six months after the survey (2 June 2017–4 November 2017) (29 interviews), and unreported (three interviews); see the following chart. The bulk of the interviews came after the survey during the writing of the book and appear to have been solicited to make the points that Riess wanted to make.
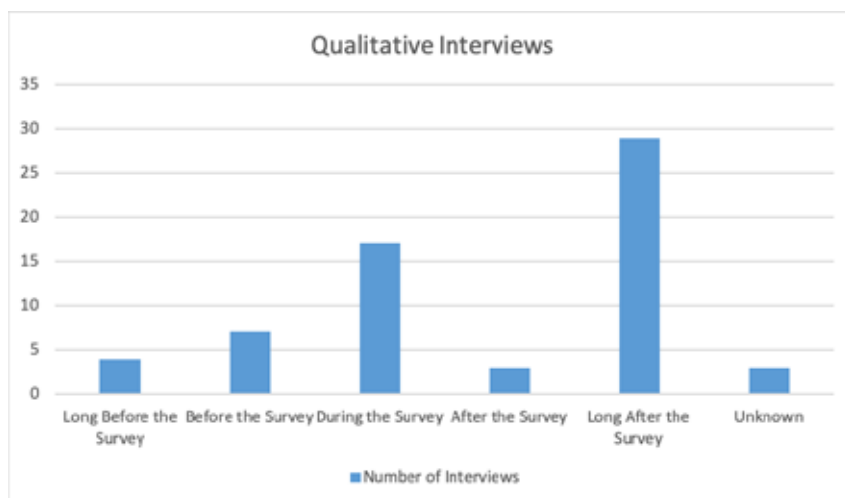
Since excerpts from all the interviews were inserted into the story but come from multiple periods, the question arises whether Riess was simply conscientious in inserting something from all the interviews into the book, or if Riess is only counting those interviews she did use. The timing of the interviews suggests the latter. Almost half the interviews were done more than six months after the study and mostly after the study results were analyzed. This suggests that the results of data did not sufficiently tell the story Riess desired and that the interviews were carefully selected to provide the requisite narrative. What are the chances that a representative sample of 63 Latter-day Saints would contain not just one but two Latter-day Saints who claimed to be transsexual? It

cannot be coincidence that Riess's interviews with those claiming to be transsexual both occurred on the same day.

Our hypothesis in this analysis is that the interviews long before the survey come from interviews Riess happened to record and insert into the study. The interviews that come before the survey will be reflected in the wording of the survey. The interviews that come during the survey will reflect more normal points of view of Church members and tend to be more orthodox. The interviews after the survey will tend to reflect Riess's point of view. The clearest example of Riess's soliciting interviews to support a preconceived thesis is in her chapter on race (pp. 109–28). The interview conducted during the time when Riess was conducting her survey depict race relations in the Church in a positive light. The individual claimed that "being a racial minority has been more of a problem with non-Mormons than it has been within the church" (p. 113). Riess, however, gives the appearance of having wanted to depict the Church as racist and slow to change and so uses interviews from after the survey (and one from before) to depict the Church in a negative light. This looks both intentional and like evidence of bad faith.

Biased Questions

The questions themselves are available[14] and provide some interesting insight into what those compiling the survey were interested in but also rather revealingly into some of their blind spots.

For an example of the biases in the survey questions, consider the issue of authority. To members of the Church of Jesus Christ, the priesthood represents the power, authority, and responsibility to act in the name of God, to say and do the things that Jesus would say and do if he were here, and have those acts ratified by heaven. To those who composed the survey, the priesthood comprises the following things: "Sunday priesthood meetings, Home teaching, Priesthood social activities, Priesthood service opportunities, Priesthood curriculum and church lessons," that certain males were not given it before 1978, and that women are not given it (the last two appeared four times each in the survey). In Latter-day Saint thought, priesthood is intimately connected with covenants and ordinances. To make a covenant with God that God will actually recognize, God or his duly designated representative has to be a participant. Thus, Latter-day Saints believe that someone

---

14. "Methodology," The Next Mormons Survey, accessed November 2, 2019, https://thenextmormons.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/tnm-online-interview-script-final.pdf.

"must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof" (Articles of Faith 1:5). If one thinks that God has a role in authorizing and appointing those who represent him, then if one has a problem with that, one takes it up with God. If one thinks that the priesthood is merely a social club that dictates who gets to attend which parties and meetings, then who is allowed into the mortal social club becomes a political issue, which is the way that Riess portrays it. In baptismal interviews and temple recommend interviews, questions about the priesthood all center on whether the individual believes and accepts that the priesthood is the authority of God and that it is properly held and transmitted. The survey contains no questions about that. Now I can understand researchers being interested in what they are interested in and asking questions accordingly, but if one's thesis is that younger members of the Church do not accept the basic doctrines, shouldn't one at least ask about the basic doctrines?

The survey contains nothing about faith in Jesus Christ, covenants, or repentance. Ordinances are only mentioned once. The only blessings mentioned in the survey are the blessing of infants. The sacrament is mentioned only in the context of changes to sacrament meeting. The proposed list of changes is an interesting study into what the authors of the Next Mormons Survey (which included more than just Riess) think would make sacrament meeting better: shorter, with more music played on different instruments, without children, but with guest speakers from the local community and PowerPoint presentations. Interestingly, almost none of these ideas were actually popular (p. 157), which shows that the authors of the survey do not exactly have their fingers on the pulse of their objects of study.

Interestingly, Riess repeatedly notes important issues she forgot to ask about as she was preparing her survey (pp. 44, 59, 84, 154, 199, 206). Thus, she admits her survey questions were not thought through very well in spite of all the advice she got on them.

Social Desirability Bias

Social desirability bias is the phenomenon in which individuals give the answers on surveys they think are socially desirable rather than accurate. How do we know the answers given in the survey conform to what individuals thought those administering the survey wanted to hear, or projected an image of participants who matched what they wished were the case rather than what was actually the case?

There is already a literature on social desirability bias among Latter-day Saints. Researchers have found an "inverse association between Mormons and socially desirable response bias."[15] So Latter-day Saints are more likely to be honest on surveys than other religious groups. My concern is not so much about Latter-day Saints being honest, but whether those on the margins of the faith or who have left the faith are being honest, because other studies dealing with social desirability bias have shown that "less religious people" are more likely to report their behavior inaccurately.[16]

This is not an abstract problem. Riess herself reports on an interview with a woman "who is not a believer but holds a temple recommend" (p. 31) and "has stopped wearing garments" (p. 67). Though the interviewee admits to violating at least two of the conditions for a temple recommend, she still has one. She is quoted as claiming, "I will go in and just say whatever I need to say" even though that "can seem dishonest" (p. 67). Seem? This woman who participated in Riess's project wore (and perhaps still wears) a mask of social desirability at least to her Church leaders if not to her congregation and perhaps even to her family. This is not the only example of this that Riess reports. Riess tells about another individual who renewed a temple recommend despite not sustaining Church leaders even though she "felt very disingenuous" (p. 222). Riess reports approvingly on a member of a group of students at BYU who would lie for each other to the "draconian" Honor Code Office at BYU about their sexual activities because it was "empowering" and a reason to be "proud" (p. 141) and of another group that conspires to keep their violations of the Word of Wisdom secret (p. 162). This actually documented behavior puts the validity of the responses of those who are on the margins of the Church or have left the Church into question. Are they just saying what they feel they need to say in order to project a particular image while considering themselves faithful "in my own way" (p. 157)? Does the fact that they are being identified by their true name(s) mean that they have an image among the disaffected to protect or enhance?

How bad is the problem in this survey? Riess has a whole section documenting the extensive social desirable bias in her survey (pp. 155–56),

---

15. Mark D. Regnerus and Jeremy E. Uecker, "Religious Influences on Sensitive Self-Reported Behaviors: The Product of Social Desirability, Deceit, or Embarrassment?" *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2007): 158n.

16. As one narrow example, see Kyler R. Rasmussen, Joshua B. Grubbs, Kenneth I. Pargament, and Julie J. Exline, "Social Desirability Bias in Pornography-Related Self-Reports: The Role of Religion," *The Journal of Sex Research* 55, no. 3 (2017): 389.

including that "43 percent of the 'very active' Millennials [in her survey] had not been to church" within the last month (p. 156). Should we assume that almost half of the respondents are providing incorrect information? Alternatively, we could say that 44% of the survey respondents were Millennials (p. 243); 79% of those said they were very active (p. 155), and 43% of those were dishonest about that (p. 156). That means at least 15% of Riess's total sample gave socially desirable rather than honest answers. Either way, this information reveals a statistically significant problem with the data and completely undercuts Riess's assertions about the reliability of the data. While Riess claims "the results we report in this book are representative of the wider Mormon and former Mormon populations in the United States within the standard margins of error (±3 percent and ±4 percent, respectively)" (p. 244), this should be revised to a minimum of ±15% — and this without even considering the issue of biased sampling from the outset.

Interpretation

Riess says she began her survey because other national representative samples showed that "Mormon youth were more likely to hold religious beliefs similar to their parents', share their faith with others, pray regularly, and discuss religion in their families" (p. 3). Riess, however, believes "the number of young adults who are leaving Mormonism appears to be rising sharply" (p. 4). She believes "the church's conservatism on social issues has become an obstacle" (p. 4), and she would like to change that. Riess began with her conclusions and then searched for evidence to support those conclusions. Riess's starting conclusions are that the Church is losing young people in droves because of the Church's stance on homosexual relations and gender issues. The best she can do, however, is note that 23% of those who left the Church did so for those reasons (p. 224). The number one reason those individuals gave was that they could no longer reconcile their lifestyle with the teachings of the Church.

Fortunately, Riess's study came out at the same time as two other studies on the same subject. One, by the Gallup organization, using longitudinal information, pointed out that while membership in religious organizations has in general been declining, "membership in a place of worship has been stable among Mormons (near 90% in both time periods) and Jews (in the mid- to low 50% range in both time periods) over the past two decades."[17] So according to Gallup, membership in the Church

17. Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades," accessed November 2, 2019, https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/

of Jesus Christ in the United States has been holding steady for the past two decades. The Church, at least in the United States, is not losing people in droves, notwithstanding Riess's anecdotal conclusion. The other study — using data from the same Pew Religious Landscape Survey that Riess claimed showed "a quietly rising tide of disaffiliation from the LDS Church in the United States" (p. 4) but this time analyzed by someone with training in using data — concluded that "the most warranted conclusion is that the Church is in a state of stasis in terms of religious switching."[18]

The conclusions of others with more training and experience working with statistical data provides a useful check on some of Riess's interpretations. For example, Riess goes to great lengths to emphasize that the Church's treatment of women is "a relic from another age" (p. 58). Yet, we need to consider that in the Pew Religious Landscapes survey, "men are overrepresented among those who have left; these results comport with prior findings in the large American Religious Identification Survey that men tend to disproportionately leave the Church."[19] It is difficult to argue that gender issues are driving an exodus from the Church, since it is predominantly men rather than women who leave.

Also, if the Church is not politically liberal enough in Riess's view, and that were causing members to leave, one would expect that those leaving would be joining liberal Christian churches, but relatively few do.[20] This would indicate that leaving for political reasons is less likely than other factors.

Riess claims the younger generation of members of the Church are declining in faith. It apparently never occurred to her that it might be a stage-of-life issue rather than a generational issue (p. 255 n. 9); a dip in religious observance among some portion of unmarried individuals in their late teens and early twenties is a well-known phenomenon that has been occurring for at least the last half a century and has been discussed in the literature.[21] The longitudinal National Studies of Youth and

---

church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx.

18. Stephen Cranney, "Who Is Leaving the Church? Demographic Predictors of Ex–Latter-day Saint Status in the Pew Religious Landscape Survey," *BYU Studies* 58, no. 1 (2019): 101.

19. Cranney, "Who Is Leaving the Church?" 105.

20. Cranney, "Who Is Leaving the Church?" 104.

21. Carolyn McNamara Barry and Larry J. Nelson, "The Role of Religion in the Transition to Adulthood for Young Emerging Adults," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 34, no. 3 (June 2005): 247; Phil Davignon, "The Effects of R-Rated Movies on Adolescent and Young Adult Religiosity: Media as Self-Socialization," *Review of Religious Research* 55, vol. 4 (December 2013): 616; The Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture, *Relationships In America Survey* (Austin, Texas: The

Religion found that Latter-day Saint Millennials became more faithful over time, not less. Thus, weekly Church attendance went from 84% of Latter-day Saint teenagers to 93% as young adults. As teenagers, 63% of Latter-day Saint Millennials prayed daily, but as young adults, 89% did. As teenagers, 26% of Latter-day Saint Millennials read their scriptures daily, but as young adults, 44% did.[22]

Riess finds the fact that "former Mormons are about twice as likely to have engaged in forbidden practices like sexual intercourse outside of marriage" to be "startling" (pp. 83–84). Considering that a loss of faith correlating with increased sexual activity outside of marriage — not just in Latter-day Saints but in other religions as well — is well documented,[23] there is no reason for it to be startling. Riess does not give enough statistical information to answer the question if we ask it this way: If one engages in forbidden practices outside of marriage, is one more likely to remain a member or leave the Church? Since her sampling method was flawed, could we trust the answer even if she had provided the data? A better designed and executed survey could probably have provided answers.

If Riess had actually read more of the relevant literature, she might have avoided these sorts of mistakes in her interpretation of the data.

Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture, 2014), 10; Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Faith* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2015); Vern L. Bengtson, Merril Silverstein, Norella M. Putney, and Susan C. Harris, "Does Religiousness Increase with Age? Age Changes and Generational Differences Over 35 Years," *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 2 (2015): 364; Jeremy E. Uecker, Damon Mayrl, and Samuel Stroope, "Family Formation and Returning to Institutional Religion in Young Adulthood," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 55, no. 2 (2016): 385; Michele F. Margolis, *From Politics to the Pews: How Partisanship and the Political Environment Shape Religious Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 67–71.

22. Based on National Studies of Youth and Religion data, comparison of wave 1 and wave 3 data. Data available at the Association of Religion Data Archives.

23. McNamara Barry and Nelson, "Religion in the Transition to Adulthood," 247; Mark D. Regnerus and Jeremy E. Uecker, "Finding Faith, Losing Faith: The Prevalence and Context of Religious Transformations during Adolescence," *Review of Religious Research* 47, no. 3 (March 2006): 229; Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, 53–54, 123–25; Jeremy E. Uecker, "Religion, Pledging, and the Premarital Sexual Behavior of Married Young Adults," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70 (August 2008): 741; Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, 26; Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 83–84, 240; Regnerus and Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America*, 19.

Riess and the Prophets

Riess has chosen not to use the full name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or follow the Church's style guide in referring to the Church or its members. Her explanation of this is revealing: "the terms 'Mormon' and 'Mormonism' are legitimate scholarly labels to refer to the religious branches that stem from Joseph Smith's Latter-day Saint movement, including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members."[24] Apparently for Riess, scholars trump prophets.

Riess's treatment of the leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would appear to give a good idea of her opinion of them. She cites them primarily to criticize them. Thus two members of the First Presidency, Russell M. Nelson and Dallin H. Oaks, are said to put members of the Church who disagree with the Church's moral stances in "an uncomfortable situation" (p. 184), though one could argue that the individuals put themselves in that situation. Boyd K. Packer is criticized for his emphasis on families (p. 88), his teachings against certain pro-homosexual arguments (p. 135), and his statements about how the Church generally works (p. 202). Praise of prudence or foresight on the part of Latter-day Saint leaders is relegated to the footnotes (p. 281 n. 52; 285 n. 3). If a Church leader is acknowledged for being aware of a problem, the problem is "far more serious than he seemed to indicate" (p. 228). Such statements betray an arrogance on Riess's part, since apostles are far more aware of what is going on among Latter-day Saints than she is. They have access to more, better, and more competently analyzed statistical data than Riess does. They routinely talk to far more Latter-day Saints than she does. As expressed by Elder Quentin L. Cook, "over a four-year period, every single stake and ward, district and branch, in the Church has a member of the Twelve [Apostles] coming and meeting with its leaders — and training them on prophetic priorities."[25] As Elder Gerrit W. Gong put it: "As we go different places, we feel the goodness of the members. … We hear the experiences and we learn things that help us to understand as we counsel together as a quorum about what is happening in the different parts of the world and in different groups within the Church."[26]

---

24. "FAQ," The Next Mormons Survey, accessed November 4, 2019, https://thenextmormons.org/faq/.

25. Sarah Jane Weaver and Jason Swensen, "We Are Witnesses: The Twelve Apostles Today," *Ensign* 49, no. 7 (July 2019), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2019/07/we-are-witnesses-the-twelve-apostles-today?lang=eng.

26. Ibid.

An admission by Dieter F. Uchtdorf that sometimes leaders make mistakes is, for Riess, an illustration of "just how taboo it is to criticize or publicly disagree with an LDS prophet or apostle" (p. 191). If Riess actually believed that, she would not be doing it. This is merely a public posture that lets Riess feign some sort of intellectual courage when she knows it is not actually the case.

Some Small Details

A number of years ago, I made the observation that those involved in Mormon Studies could not necessarily be counted on to get details and even basics right.[27] Riess provides a number of examples of that. For example, Seminary is not required to serve a mission (p. 25); the missionary application does not even ask about it. Riess claims that "Even the notion that Mormons would call the president of their church 'the prophet' is a mid-twentieth-century innovation; the practice can be dated to 1955, during the presidency of the exceptionally popular David O. McKay. Before 1955 the term 'prophet' was used in LDS periodicals to refer to founding leaders Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, or else prophets from scripture" (p. 191). This is an intriguing theory, but it does not work. The popular hymn "We Thank Thee O God for a Prophet" entered the hymnal in 1863.[28] In 1883, Franklin D. Richards, an apostle, called John Taylor "our Prophet, who had been illegally imprisoned."[29] Evan Stephens wrote a hymn whose opening line is "We ever pray for thee, our prophet dear" for Wilford Woodruff's 90th birthday in 1897.[30] On 6 October 1899, Seymour Young referred to "our Prophet, Seer and Revelator, Lorenzo Snow."[31] The children's song "Stand for the Right" was written by Joseph Ballantyne who died in 1944, before President McKay was the prophet. The line "Our prophet has some words for you, And these are the words: 'Be true, be true.'" would seem to refer to Joseph F. Smith. These are just a few examples that show that Riess is wrong on this point.

---

27. John Gee, "Whither Mormon Studies?" *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 105, 109–10.

28. Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 48.

29. Franklin D Richards, "Independence," *Journal of Discourses* 24:279.

30. Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns*, 51.

31. Seymour B. Young, in Conference Report, October 1899, 55.

Positive Signs

One of the positive things that can be said about Riess's book is that even if it does not meet the standards one might have come to expect from high-quality social science, it is much better than we have come to expect from journalists.

One of the sad things about Riess's missteps is that they undercut some interesting observations she does put forward. I will highlight only a few, but note that, unfortunately, the significant errors make it difficult to tell whether some of the observations are accurate or mirages.

Riess claims that "a majority of former Mormons, especially older ones, already had significant cracks in their testimony during adolescence" (p. 218). If true, this is an important observation.

Riess noted that the only proposal for changes in sacrament meeting that she put forward which had much popularity was shortening sacrament meeting (pp. 156–57). As her book was at press, sacrament meetings were shortened, though only by ten minutes. What this shows, however, is that in large measure Latter-day Saints do not feel the need to change the Church or the way it worships. For the most part, it meets their spiritual needs. Riess certainly could have made more of this observation had she reflected on it more and been less interested in pushing her own agenda.

When Riess asked former Latter-day Saints why they left the Church, "the only specific historical or doctrinal issue to rank among the top ten was concern about the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham" (p. 233). Based on my own experience, this sounds correct. The historicity of ancient scriptural texts is probably the biggest intellectual reason that members of the Church leave the faith. The response, if one is interested in increasing faith, is to support the historicity of the scriptures, not capitulate on the issue. Capitulation on this issue simply causes more people to lose faith.

It is a shame that Riess's methodological and interpretive failures as well as her ax-grinding will bring into question some of her more salient insights.

Conclusions

Riess ends every section of her book on a negative note. The introduction ends claiming that "young adult Mormons … struggle with whether they will be able to live all the commandments of a strict Mormon lifestyle" (p. 9). The first chapter ends telling about a woman who "sometimes felt overwhelmed by serious doubts" (p. 32). The second chapter tells the story of a young man leaving the Church after his mission (pp. 47–48).

The third chapter claims that members who will not wear their temple garments are "the proverbial canaries in the coal mine, portending trouble for the future" (p. 68). The fourth chapter ends with "the case against singles wards" (pp. 87–89). The fifth chapter ends questioning whether the Church should stick with its traditional understanding of gender (p. 108). The sixth chapter ends with charges of "racism and sexism in the church" (p. 128). The seventh chapter claims that "tensions over LGBT issues have reached a new level of intensity," and as a result people are "leaving the Church" (p. 146). The eighth chapter ends claiming that "Millennials are not tying their identities as 'active' Mormons as strictly to practices like attending church meetings or keeping the Word of Wisdom" (p. 168). The ninth chapter would have ended claiming that Latter-day Saints play "bishop roulette" (pp. 205–6), but Riess found that patriarchal blessings complicated her thesis. She ends the book with a chapter on those who leave the Church, claiming that "most young adults who leave Mormonism are unlikely to come back" (p. 231).

I have looked at quite a few statistical studies dealing with the loss of faith in general and the state of teenagers and adults in the Church in particular, and I think they paint a much brighter picture of the Church and its members than the one Jana Riess paints. True, it is not a picture of blue skies and endless sunshine as far as the eye can see. The breathtaking vista has its share of threatening storm clouds boding serious challenges, but the picture that emerges shows the majority of the Saints are striving to do what is right and succeeding in doing so. Even the statistics in Riess's book show that we Saints are generally doing better on many fronts than we have in the past. Nevertheless, if the Church were to follow Riess's recommendations, the Church probably would see a mass exodus.[32]

Because Riess's sample was unrepresentative and because she often, by her own admission, did not ask the right questions and because her interpretation is negative, one should be careful about using her statistics or following her conclusions. There are better reasons for hope for the Church of Jesus Christ than what is presented in her book.

John Gee *is the William (Bill) Gay Research Professor in the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages at Brigham Young University.*

32. See, for example, David Millard Haskell, Kevin N. Flatt, and Stephanie Burgoyne, "Theology Matters: Comparing the Traits of Growing and Declining Mainline Protestant Church Attendees and Clergy," *Review of Religious Research* 58, no. 4 (May 2016): 515–41.

Musings on the Birth of the Savior Jesus Christ

_____

Kristine Wardle Frederickson

Abstract: *In this essay, Kristine Wardle Frederickson muses about "the babe born in Bethlehem," and who he was — and is — in consideration of those who nurtured, loved, and welcomed the infant Jehovah to Earth. Certain women played critical roles in preparing him for his infinite and eternal Atonement, and that preparation began long before Jesus came to Earth. Four women stand out as devoted mentors, disciples, and witnesses of Jesus Christ's mission, and of his sublime perfection even on that first Christmas day: Heavenly Mother, Mary, Elisabeth, and Anna. At Christmastime, their witnesses are worthy of deep contemplation as they reinforce the majesty and glory of Jesus Christ, who condescended to enter mortality as an innocent baby, under humble circumstances. Carefully nurtured and loved, he lived a perfect life, pointed the way to salvation, and sacrificed his life that all might live.*

As I grow older, I find myself looking forward to Christmas with greater delight, anticipation, and appreciation. Over the years, it has taken on greater and greater meaning although my focus remains the same:

- **Jesus Christ,** his humble beginnings, his being "[brought] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), his masterful ministry, and his infinite Atonement.

- **Home.** Not just a house, but a place where family gathers, where individuals are nurtured and loved, and where memories are made.

- **Family.** The basic unit in society, traditionally a husband and wife, or a single parent or caregiver(s); families

> nurturing and rearing children, including generational and extended family, and a family and treasured friends united in love.

While working on a manuscript this past year on Jesus and women, I have gained a heightened appreciation of the Savior, of his unparalleled ministry, of how carefully he was prepared and nurtured to his task. As Christmas approaches, to better understand and appreciate who "the babe born in Bethlehem" was — and is — it is profitable to consider those who nurtured him in his pre-mortal life and in his infancy. It is also important to consider who nurtured his mother Mary for her enormous responsibility, as doing so helps us understand the divinity of the baby born on the first Christmas day. Four women stand out as devoted disciples and witnesses of his mission and his sublime perfection: Heavenly Mother, Mary, Elisabeth, and Anna. At Christmastime their witnesses serve to remind us of the majesty and glory of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

First-Hand Accounts of Christmas

As iconic as Christmas is, there are few primary source documents on the birth and life of Jesus Christ.[1] While millions of pages have been written about Jesus, actual written accounts by those who walked, talked, or observed the Savior during his lifetime are in short supply. We have the New Testament gospels, a scant 178 pages.[2] The paucity of information dramatically increases

---

1. Primary source documents "provide firsthand testimony or direct evidence concerning an historical topic [or individual]. … [They] are original documents created or experienced contemporaneously with the [person] being researched … [and] enable researchers to get as close as possible to what actually happened." ("What Are Primary Sources?" UCI Libraries, https://www.lib.uci.edu/what-are-primary-sources) Primary source documents affirm that Jesus existed. We know the geography he traversed. We have access to myriad primary source documents on the Jewish and Roman worlds in which he lived. See Christopher Klein, "The Bible Says Jesus Was Real. What Other Proof Exists?" *History* (website), https://www.history.com/news/was-jesus-real-historical-evidence. Archaeological evidence, however, does not exist. (The earliest known image of Christ dates to the mid-200s AD, long after Jesus died. The provenance of artifacts purportedly associated with Jesus cannot be verified.) Jewish historian Josephus mentions Jesus twice. Roman historian Tacitus mentions Jesus's death at the hands of Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. A letter from Roman governor Pliny to the Emperor Trajan mentions "Chrestus."

2. The New Testament gospels include Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The 178 pages refers to the Authorized LDS King James Version. The Bible is what historians call a primary source document. If Jesus's time in the Americas in

when the focus is the Christmas story — the annunciation through the proverbial visit by "the wise men."[3] It totals a mere 88 verses, some five pages of text.[4] Only one verse describes Jesus's childhood.[5] Another ten are dedicated to a single incident during his twelfth year.[6] His adult life and ministry through his ascension fill the remaining pages.

However, as readers connect the dots on events surrounding Jesus's birth to his teachings and doctrine, there is much more that we can learn. A deeper dive into Jesus's life and the times in which he lived can lead us to a greater appreciation for that first Christmas, for loving, caring Heavenly Parents; for extraordinary women; and to a more profound veneration for the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Some musings with these things in mind, follow.

Our Heavenly Parents and Heavenly Home

I trust Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother carefully discussed and likely consulted Jesus as to who should be his earthly parents — maybe they even held a heavenly "family council" on this matter. In pre-mortal life it stands to reason his Heavenly Parents, in preparing for Jesus's advent into mortality, carefully placed individuals into his life who would witness to his divinity; who would tutor his young, innocent mother; and who would continue loving and nurturing their beloved son as they — his Heavenly Parents — had done. As Bruce R. McConkie affirmed, "We cannot but think that the Father would choose the greatest female spirit to be the mother of his Son."[7]

The family into which Jesus was born that first Christmas morning and the values of that home were critically important to Jesus's development. *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* is timeless in its eternal sweep and scope and teaches about our eternal home. It says, "All human beings

---

3 Nephi is counted — although Jesus was then a resurrected being — we have an additional contemporaneous 37 pages, give or take a few.

3. See Luke 1:26-56; 2:1-39, and Matthew 1:18-25; 2:1-12. Although by the time the wise men visited, Jesus could have been up to 2 years old.

4. Only two of the four gospels, Matthew and Luke, treat events surrounding Jesus's birth. In John 1:14, it does state, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

5. See Luke 2:40; passing reference in Matthew 2:21.

6. Luke 2:42-52.

7. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah, Book 1: From Bethlehem to Calvary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 327; see also Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol. 1: The Gospels,* (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1973), 85.

— male and female — are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of Heavenly Parents, and as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. … In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their eternal Father and accepted His plan."[8]

We can assume our Heavenly Parents chose Mary and Joseph because they would spiritually and physically nourish Jesus's development, encourage him, care for him, and educate and instruct him in the ways of God. They chose a man and woman who were of equal stature and unimpeachable integrity, spiritually intuitive, faithful, dedicated to nurturing their children in eternal verities, and above all, loving — because to do what he had to do, the Messiah had to learn and become the very embodiment of love.

Our Heavenly Parents would have chosen earthly parents who strove to follow godly practices. *The Family, A Proclamation to the World* provides a suitable working model for these godly practices. It stipulates that "marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and … the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."[9] It explains God's first commandment to Adam and Eve "to multiply and replenish the Earth remains in force." Further, "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity," and with gender come certain gender-specific roles for each parent.[10] Both are "to love and care for each other and for their children" and are "obligated to help one another as equal partners," but the father is to "preside … in love and righteousness and … provide the necessities of life and protection for [his family]. Mothers are primarily responsible for the **nurture** of their children."[11]

Not just Mary but Heavenly Mother nurtured Jesus. Muse about Heavenly Mother's feelings when her beloved son prepared to leave his heavenly home — the joy, the aching, the confidence, the concern, and knowing that with his departure there would be a longing, a palpable emptiness in that Heavenly Mother's heart. Imagine the heightened

---

8. Everyone would benefit by closely studying and prayerfully pondering the entire text of the *Proclamation*. See The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," (proclamation, General Relief Society Meeting, Salt Lake City, September 23, 1995), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., emphasis added.

difficulty of Heavenly Mother's task, sending her son off to suffer "pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and … he will take upon him the … sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities … [and he will] take upon him the sins of his people" (Alma 7:11–13).

Jesus was loved, revered, and worshipped by many throughout his life. He knew joy and happiness. Yet, his mortal experience would be grueling. We know little about his youth, but his necessary mortal experiences suggest trials and challenges in his childhood and teen years. We know when he entered into his public ministry he was mocked, tortured, and endured an agonizing, humiliating death. When it was time for his departure, did Heavenly Mother cling longer before letting her son go? How could she let him go? Tears clouding her eyes, did she thank him for his goodness, for the reverence and respect he had shown her, for his courage and determination to love and serve others, and to do his Father's will? What last, tender words did Heavenly Mother share with her beloved son before he descended to Earth?

Besides the angel Gabriel,[12] sent to minister to Mary, did Heavenly Mother commission other angels — perhaps female angels — to watch over and minister to Mary and Jesus at his birth and throughout Mary and Jesus's lives? Did she whisper through the Spirit to her precious daughter as Mary formatively nurtured Jesus? In the heavenly choir of angels convened that glorious first Christmas, how many female angels sang praises to the long-awaited Messiah — because no choir is complete without a full complement of virtuoso sopranos.

So it was that first still Christmas day — Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father sent their beloved son to Earth for the benefit of all mankind. Jesus condescended to come, out of his boundless love for each of us, and it was the love of our Heavenly Parents and their selfless son combined, that are the essence of the Christmas story.

Musings About Mary and Joseph

Certainly, Joseph nurtured Mary and Jesus. He loved Mary. We see this when finding she was pregnant, he chose to put her away quietly rather than shame her. Then, when an angel directed him to marry Mary and care for her and her son as his own, he readily obeyed. As

---

12. Luke 1:26. In Latter-day Saint theology the angel Gabriel is identified as Noah. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Gabriel," https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bd/gabriel?lang=eng.

household head, it would have been Joseph who instigated the family's annual religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Because of Joseph's careful attention to Jesus's religious education, at age twelve and thereafter, "the feast of the Passover marked significant milestones during the mortal ministry of Christ."[13] Joseph nurtured and protected his wife and son and was a witness of Jesus's divinity.

Mary, however, is mentioned in scripture far more often than Joseph.[14] Mary was Jesus's hands-on, primary caregiver, his first teacher and exemplar. In so many ways it was her task to nurture and point the way as Jesus, "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52, NIV).

Even as a young teen, Mary displayed a spiritual maturity far beyond her years. The angel Gabriel told Mary she was "highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women," and that she had been chosen to give birth to, "JESUS … the Son of the Highest … and of his kingdom there shall be no end."[15] As astounded as she must have been, Mary at least partly comprehended his words. Her first question indicated her commitment to the law of chastity: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34)

The angel's response demanded unbelievable faith and trust: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee … [and] born of thee shall be … the Son of God. … For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:35, 37). Mary's heartfelt response: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). The young Mary had at least some inkling of the monumental task before her and of the social stigma that would forever plague her. Still, her single-minded desire was to do God's will, accept the derision of others, and embrace her daunting charge to nurture, teach, and love God's son.

Musings About Mary's Time with Elisabeth

Shortly thereafter, Mary traveled to stay with her cousin for three months before the birth of Elisabeth's son, John the Baptist. How carefully our

13. Howard W. Hunter, "Christ, Our Passover," *Ensign* (May 1985), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1985/04/christ-our-passover?lang=eng.

14. Tradition holds Joseph was somewhat, if not significantly, older than Mary and died well before Jesus's public ministry, which would be one reason he is mentioned far less than his earthly wife. However, if such was the case, it additionally highlights the critical importance of Mary's role as the only parent in Jesus's life for a long period of time.

15. See Luke 1:28-33.

Heavenly Parents oversaw Mary's preparation for Jesus's birth on what became the first Christmas by sending her to be tutored by an inestimably wise and righteous woman.

When Mary arrived at Elisabeth's home, upon seeing Mary, "the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed *art* thou among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb. And whence *is* this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"[16] Elisabeth was the third earthly individual to bear witness to Jesus's divinity.

At the time, she was well past her childbearing years. Nevertheless, while Zacharias, her husband, was officiating in the temple an angel appeared to him and announced Elisabeth would give birth to their son, who would "be great in the sight of the Lord and … filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God." [17]

When the baby leaped in Elisabeth's womb and when she spoke to Mary under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, both Mary and Elisabeth were enlightened and empowered by her prophetic words. As well, both could later nurture their sons, using this meeting to help them to a greater understanding of who and what they were to become.

Mary responded to Elisabeth's prophetic words by sharing the stirring words of the Magnificat.[18] In her moving canticle, Mary expresses joy, faith, humility, and her willingness to subsume her will to Heavenly Father's will and to embrace the holy commission given her — although incapable of fully understanding all that lay before her, least of all comprehending the grief and pain that would be required of her. Gratefully she praised God:

> My soul doth magnify the Lord,
> And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
> For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for,

---

16. See Luke 1:41-45.

17. See Luke 1:15. Zacharias, or Zechariah, was of the tribe of Levi, a descendant of Aaron and thereby commissioned as a holder of the Aaronic priesthood to officiate in the temple. On this occasion, the lot for performing the incense offering had fallen to Zacharias. To be so honored was a once-in-a-lifetime, if at all, experience for any Levitical priest.

18. Mary's response to Elisabeth's pronouncement, as recorded in Luke 1:46-55 has come to be known as the Magnificat. It is a canticle, also known as the Song of Mary, the Canticle of Mary and, in the Byzantine tradition, the Ode of the Theotokos. It is traditionally incorporated into the liturgical services of the Catholic church and of the Eastern Orthodox churches.

behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy
is his name.
And his mercy *is* on them that fear him from generation to
generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath
scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted
them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he
hath sent empty away.
He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his*
mercy;
As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed
forever." (Luke 1:46–55)

Set to music, the Magnifcat is one of Christianity's most enduring
hymns. As the renowned pastor and German theologian Dietrich
Bonhoeffer noted:

> The *Magnificat* is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the
> most passionate, the wildest, and one might even say, the
> most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. … This song
> has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of
> some of our Christmas carols. It is, instead, a hard, strong,
> inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords
> of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness
> of mankind. There are the tones of the women prophets of the
> Old Testament that now come to life in Mary's mouth.[19]

Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father wisely placed Mary and
Elisabeth in one another's paths prior to Jesus's birth on that first,
glorious Christmas day, that Mary might gain a deeper understanding
of her situation and who her son truly was from Elisabeth and Zacharias.

Both of them were from the priestly family of Aaron and "righteous
before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord
blameless" (Luke 1:6–7). Elisabeth was holy, scrupulously honored her
covenants, and walked in *all* the commandments of God. Zacharias's duties
in the Levitical priesthood and in the temple in Jerusalem, combined with
Elisabeth's Aaronic lineage, purposed both to a higher spiritual plane. Their

---

19.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Mystery of Holy Night* (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad, November 25, 1996). See also Michael Austin, "Magnificat," By Common Consent (blog), December 29, 2018, https://bycommonconsent.com/2018/12/29/magnificat-2/.

understanding of temple rituals, performances, and symbols — all pointing to the Messiah — were well developed and spiritually mature. Imagine the wealth of instruction they provided their sweet, young protégé about her son — the great Jehovah — with his birth quickly approaching.[20]

Musings About Jesus's Birth, that First Christmas Day

The New Testament is silent, save one verse, on the birth of Jesus.[21] It does mention the extraordinary events on that first, glorious Christmas, and showcases those who were witnesses of the Savior's birth and of Jesus's divinity with a new star in the heavens, a heavenly choir of angels singing praises to the Messiah, and the pilgrimage of nearby shepherds to where the virgin Mary lay.

In humble circumstances, free from pomp or ceremony, the King of Kings entered mortality. His earthly mother would have been exhausted and joyful. It is easy to imagine exultant tears slipping down her cheeks onto Jesus's little, trembling frame as Mary nestled him against her warm breast. Overcome by love, her protective maternal instincts would have permeated her soul as she cradled Jesus's tiny, defenseless body protectively in her arms, wholly focused on his welfare.

That Jesus was loved by Mary and Joseph was of the utmost importance. Tragically, some individuals go through life never feeling love or being loved. A person cannot love another or love God until he or she experiences love. Jesus was deeply loved before and from the moment he was born that pristine Christmas day.

The record states that as that wonderful day drew to a close, "Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Thank heaven for women and men who pray and ponder upon the things of eternity! Imagine Mary's thoughts and prayers on that miraculous first Christmas. All these things, when appropriate, would be shared with Jesus — reinforcing his purpose-driven life as God's son, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

---

20. Though Zechariah was struck dumb while officiating in the temple and therefore mute during the time Mary resided in his and Elisabeth's home, this does not mean he was incapable of teaching and instructing her, as the scriptures state he was able to write. Also, there has been speculation as to whether Mary was still with Elisabeth when she gave birth to John the Baptist. That too would have blessed Mary's understanding of events ahead. However, the record says only that she returned home after three months.

21. See: Luke 2:7, "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." There is also a passing reference to his birth in Matthew 2:1, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem …"

Sometime later, wise men from the East came to worship Jesus as the Christ. All these glorious otherworldly manifestations, each a witness to Jesus's destiny, solemnly reminded Mary of her duty to nurture, teach, and love her fragile, innocent, magnificent child. Certainly, as he grew, Jesus's godly identity rapidly inclined him to extraordinary spiritual acuity, to understand he was God's very Son, chosen to be Savior and Redeemer of mankind. Yet parental love and care was essential to his early years and his spiritual development.

Consider Jesus's birthplace that resplendent Christmas day. The Bible describes no room for them "in the inn" in Bethlehem,[22] and after his birth Jesus's being "swaddled" and "laid in a manger" (Luke 2:7). These few details have led many to surmise Jesus was born with only his parents attending his birth, surrounded by animals in a lowly stable.

However, in Joseph and Mary's day, with Bethlehem their ancestral home, they likely had family there, and "the customs of first-century Palestine required [Joseph] to stay with relatives and not with strangers."[23] Interestingly, what little the record shares accords with the design of Palestinian homes: "Most families lived in a single-room house, with a lower compartment for animals to be brought in at night and either a room at the back for visitors, or space on the roof. The family living area would usually have hollows in the ground, filled with straw, in the living area, where the animals would feed."[24]

Some scholars and theologians have suggested Joseph and Mary were staying with relatives, likely in crowded circumstances, when Jesus was born.[25] The Reverend Ian Paul surmised, "In the Christmas story, Jesus is not sad and lonely, some distance away in the manger, needing our sympathy. He is in the midst of the family, and all the visiting

---

22. According to the Reverend Ian Paul, the Greek word *kataluma*, usually translated as "inn," was in fact used for a reception room in a private house — the same term is used to describe the "upper room" where Jesus and his disciples ate the last supper. An entirely different word, *pandocheion*, is used to describe an "inn" or any other place where strangers are welcomed." See Andrew Brown, "Jesus was not born in a stable, says theologian," *The Guardian* (website), December 23, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/23/jesus-christ-not-born-in-stable-theologian-new-testament.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. The idea was first posited and recorded by Spaniard Francisco Sanchez de las Brozas in 1584, and has been periodically reasserted by various other New Testament scholars. See Brown, "Jesus was not born in a stable, says theologian."

relations."[26] In this possible scenario, Jesus's birth would have included people coming and going and animals wandering about. With the onset of labor, Mary likely found a more private place in the compartment of her relative's home, and capable women — female relatives or midwives — would have attended her delivery. She would have been nurtured, cared for, and loved by family.[27] After Jesus's birth on that celebrated Christmas day, though physically exhausted and emotionally drained, Mary would have swaddled her son and laid him in a manger.

While still risky in our day, in Mary's day childbirth was extremely dangerous, aptly described by one woman as "exquisite torment," survived by mother and child only because of "the infinite providence of God, in great mercy."[28] As did Mary, every mother risks her life to bring a child into the world. As it is feasible that Mary was with family when she gave birth, is this perhaps a tender mercy of her Mother in Heaven? Mary was so young. She was away from her home and family. She had to be worn out and frightened when she went into labor. She had walked or ridden on the back of a donkey while large with child. Every step and every clip-clop of the donkey's hooves had to be jarring as she traveled the long, dusty roads — in utter misery. With her Heavenly Mother and angels looking out for sweet Mary — who had willingly sacrificed so much, so young, for God — perhaps she gave birth not in luxury but at least surrounded by caring, helping, nurturing women relatives.

---

26. Brown, "Jesus was not born in a stable, says theologian."

27. In one uncanonized, apocryphal gospel, omitted from the New Testament, the *Protoevangelium of James,* the text describes two midwives being present at Jesus's birth, with one standing as a witness to Mary's virginity. Whether factual or not, it was unlikely Mary delivered her child without the aid a midwife — midwives being mentioned as far back as the Book of Exodus in the Bible. First-time labor, any labor, was difficult and dangerous, and a first labor usually lasts between 12 and 36 hours, meaning there would have been ample time for Joseph to secure assistance for his wife. See Patricia Harman, "Was There a Midwife at the Manger? Here's What the History of Childbirth Says About the First Christmas," *Time* (website), 12:31, https://time.com/5481431/birth-of-jesus-midwife-history-christmas/.

28. Infant mortality rates in the first century Roman Empire were about 30%. Maternal mortality figures are available only through comparison to later societies with more records, with maternal mortality about 25 per 1000 births. See Todd Brisbane, "Childbirth in ancient Rome: from traditional folklore to obstetrics," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 47, no. 2 (Mar 8, 2007): 82-85, *doi:10.1111/j.1479828X.2007.00691.x.* The woman's first-hand account from 1657 describing her "exquisite torment," etc., see Louis Schwartz, "17th-century childbirth: 'exquisite torment and infinite grace'," *Perspectives* 377, no. 9776 (April 30, 2011): 1486-87.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus would have remained for some time in Bethlehem. Eventually, after being directed to do so by an angel, they fled to Egypt. Upon their return, they settled in a humble home in Nazareth,[29] where Jesus, cherished by his parents, learned to work, love, and serve others. In their home, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

Musings About Anna's Prophecies

Eight days after Jesus's birth, in obedience to Mosaic law, Jesus was circumcised, another indication of Joseph and Mary's resolute religiosity (see Luke 2:21). Forty days after that little-noticed, world-changing first Christmas, Joseph and Mary then ceremonially presented their son — he who was the very giver of the Mosaic Law — at the great temple in Jerusalem.[30] Two noble souls were in the temple that day, the "just and devout" Simeon and Anna, a woman at least 84 years old.[31] Since her husband's death some 50–60 years earlier, and likely longer, Anna had devoted herself to God's holy house. She "departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37).

When Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the temple, both Simeon and Anna thanked God for the privilege of seeing the Son of God in the flesh. Both prophesied that Jesus was the chosen Messiah. Anna's words

---

29.   Joseph faithfully obeyed the command of an angel and, the very morning after being so directed, took his wife and Jesus and left for Egypt. When directed by an angel to return, still cautious for Jesus's safety, the family settled in a humble home in Nazareth. Joseph was directed to Egypt after Herod the Great ordered the Massacre of the Innocents, the killing of all the children under age two in Bethlehem and the regions round about (Matthew 2:16). When an angel told Joseph of Herod's death, he returned to his homeland, but upon learning that Herod Archelaus (son of Herod the Great) ruled over Samaria, Judea, and Idumea, he took his family to live in Nazareth.

30.   See Leviticus 12:2-8 on the requirements for Mary's purification. Joseph and Mary went to the temple and presented a pair of turtledoves or pigeons to the temple priest for a burnt offering. Their offering indicated their humble circumstances. It also signified the ceremonial ransoming or redeeming of their Jewish firstborn son. See McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary,* Vol. I, 99.

31.   "The Greek text states καὶ αὐτὴ χήρα ὡς ἐτῶν ὀγδοηκοντατεσσάρων, generally translated as "she was a widow of eighty four years." The passage is ambiguous: it could mean that she was 84 years old or that she had been a widow for 84 years. Some scholars consider the latter to be the more likely option. On this option, she could not have married younger than about age 14, and so she would have been at least 14 + 7 + 84 = 105 years old." See Wikipedia, s.v. "Anna the Prophetess," 15:37, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_the_Prophetess#cite_ref-7.

were not fully recorded but mirrored Simeon's, who "lifted [Jesus] up in his arms and praised God, saying: 'Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word, because I have seen with my eyes your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel'" (Luke 2:28-32, Wayment). Anna added her witness, speaking of Jesus "to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."[32]

It is not hard to imagine that the grandmotherly Anna sat and cuddled that sweet infant, recently with God, in her arms, unfastened his wrap, cooed, laughed, and delighted at his little flailing arms and legs. As she gazed lovingly at his face and lively eyes, perhaps she shared more thoughts and prophesies with the astounded Mary and Joseph.

This encounter, often less noted at Christmastime, is critical to the Christmas narrative. Consider that Mary, Elisabeth, and Anna were all temple-going women.[33] They attended the temple to show their love and devotion to God, to do their duty before him, to feel of his presence, and to deepen their understanding of godliness and of eternity. This occasion had to be especially poignant. Within the confines of the great temple at Jerusalem, the holiest sanctuary in Israel's long and storied history, Anna and Simeon prophesied and witnessed that the tiny infant, Jesus, was God's son, the chosen Messiah, destined to redeem mankind — marvelous prophecies for Mary to ponder and later share, when appropriate, with her son.

Final Musings

Three mortal women — Mary, Elisabeth, and Anna — loom large in the Christmas story.[34] The myriad majestic miracles and these women's

---

32. See Luke 2:38. Thomas Wayment points out that "Anna is a prophetess. [She] speaks of the *redemption* or *ransom* of Jerusalem, whereas Simeon speaks of *consolation*. The word that Anna used refers more specifically to forgiveness of sin." See Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints: A Study Bible* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2019), 113, footnotes to Luke 2:35, 37.

33. As a temple worker, I cannot begin to calculate the imprint the temple has had on my life and the lives of others who work or regularly attend the temple, as a place to be educated with eternity in view, a place of comfort, peace, joy and revelation.

34. We can also never forget the myriad stalwart, faithful women, particularly his female Galilean disciples, who played central roles in nurturing Jesus during his public ministry. As dedicated disciples, these women acted as key players organizing and managing Jesus's ministry, financially supporting him, and providing him lodging, treasured friendships, and homes away from home. These women believed

witnesses remind us of the grandeur and glory of this being whose birth we celebrate each Christmas season. Long before this life, Jesus was nurtured in the realms of glory by his Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father. After descending to Earth, memories of his Heavenly Parents and his heavenly home certainly imbued Jesus's infancy and early years. William Wordsworth poignantly described each infant's and child's capacity to retain at least fleeting memories of pre-Earth life:

> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
>
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home:
>
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy![35]

On Earth, Jesus's first and principal nurturer and teacher was his mother Mary. She held him in her arms and swaddled, nursed, cooed, and sang to him. She kept him from the fire when he began to crawl, encouraged his first wobbly steps, picked him up and soothed him after his tumbles. She spoke to him of God, listened to his first babblings, and helped him say his first prayers. Other women in Jesus's pre-mortal and early life — Heavenly Mother, Elisabeth, and Anna — mothered and nurtured Mary and Jesus. Because of their love for him, Jesus learned about love, how to love, and the power of love to transform lives. This is the essence of Christmas.

At this Christmas season, I am grateful for the love of the Savior, for home and family — all holistically united under God's grand design. I am grateful for the concern and care shown our glorious Savior long before his birth, at his birth, and during his life on Earth. I am mindful of the compelling witnesses of his divinity. Above all else, I am grateful for Jesus Christ, as Son of God, Savior, and Redeemer of the world, who condescended to come to Earth that first magnificent Christmas day, who lived a perfect life, who pointed the way to salvation, and who gave his life that all might live.

Jesus to be — as Mary, the sister of Martha, triumphantly proclaimed — "the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11:27).

35. William Wordsworth, "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," Poets.org, https://poets.org/poem/ode-intimations-immortality-recollections-early-childhood.

Kristine Wardle Frederickson *is an adjunct at Brigham Young University and Utah Valley University, where she teaches religion and world, European and American history. She received her PhD in history from the University of Utah. Her dissertation explored the religious underpinnings in the activist efforts of 19th-century British Christian feminist Josephine Butler. She writes and presents on a wide range of doctrinal and historical topics, individuals, and events in Latter-day Saint, American, and European history. She is the author of* Extraordinary Courage: Women Empowered by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *She also writes and speaks on human trafficking—women and children in sexual servitude—and is currently readying a book on trafficking for publication. She writes a bi-weekly column for* Deseret News, *"Mormon Times," focused on the international church and Latter-day Saint church practice and doctrine.*

He Knows My Affliction: The Hill Onidah as Narrative Counterpart to the Rameumptom

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: *The toponym* Onidah, *attested as the name of a hill in Alma 32:4, most plausibly derives from Hebrew ʿŏnî /ʾōnî/ʾônî (ʿonyî, "my affliction") + yādaʿ/yēdaʿ ("he knew," "he knows") — i.e., "he has acknowledged my affliction" or "he knows my affliction." This etymology finds support in the context of the Zoramite narrative in which it occurs. In view of the pejorative lexical associations of the Rameumptom, the "high" and "holy stand," with Hebrew* rām *(< rwm, "high") and haughtiness, arrogance, and pride, we see Mormon using the Rameumptom, the "high" platform for Zoramite self-exalting worship, with Onidah, the hill from which Alma and Amulek taught the Zoramite poor and humble. The latter name and Alma's teaching from that location constituted a sign that the Lord "knew" their "affliction." Alma devotes a significant part of his message not only extolling the spiritual value of their state of "affliction" and humiliation or compelled "humility" (ʿŏnî Exodus 3:7, 17), but teaching them how to "plant" the "word" (even Jesus Christ himself) in their hearts through prayer — the word that would grow up into a "perfect knowledge" of God — experientially "knowing" God (Alma 32:16–36) and being known by him (cf. Alma 7:12).*

"Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off." (Psalms 138:6)

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." (Psalms 119:71-72)

"And the afflicted people thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down." (2 Samuel 22:28)

In his account of the mission of Alma, Amulek, Zeezrom, Alma's sons, and the sons of Mosiah[1] among the Zoramites (Alma 31–35), Mormon mentions "Onidah" as the name of a hill where Alma and Amulek taught the "poorer class"[2] of Zoramites in Alma 32:4. This single mention of a single, nondescript hill in the land of Antionum seems superfluous unless it serves some sort of intentional function within the narrative. In the study that follows, I propose that Mormon's mention of Onidah constitutes more than a mere literary ornament or textual artifact. Its literary and rhetorical significance begins to emerge as we unpack its most likely meaning within the narrative context in which it occurs. I will attempt to show that the name *Onidah* is most plausibly explained as a derivation from ʿ*onyî* (="my affliction,"[3] or alternatively rendered, "my humiliation," "my humbled state") + *yāda*ʿ (perfect "he knew," but can also have the present sense "he knows"[4]). In other words, Onidah suggests the meaning "he [the Lord] knows my affliction" (literally, "he has known my affliction") or "he has acknowledged my humiliation." If such is the case, the origins of this name may lie within — or have reference to — acts of divine deliverance within the salvation history of Israel and that of the Nephites.

I further propose that, just as Mormon uses the names *Zoramites* and *Rameumptom* pejoratively in terms of Semitic/Hebrew *rām* ("high") to inveigh against the Zoramites' unrighteous pride, he also uses the name Onidah in opposite fashion. Mormon uses the name Onidah and its meaning to affirm the value of the afflictions and humility of the poor Zoramites who responded to Alma's teaching.

Their ʿ*ŏnî*/ʿ*ōnî*/ʿ*ônî* ("affliction," "poverty"[5]) and ʿ*ănāwâ* ("humility"[6]) — albeit compelled humility at first — prepared them to receive his

---

    1. See Alma 31:6–7, 32.

    2. Royal Skousen, *The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, part 4: *Alma 21–55* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2014), 231 (hereafter cited as *ATV*). Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 393, 768.

    3. See, e.g., Genesis 31:42; 2 Samuel 16:12 (Ketiv); Job 10:15.

    4. Cf., e.g., Exodus 3:7; Leviticus 5:3–4; Deuteronomy 2:7; Deuteronomy 34:7 [Masoretic Text 6]; other examples could be multiplied. Hereafter the versification of the Masoretic Text will be cited as *MT*.

    5. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 777 (hereafter cited as *BDB*).

    6. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NLD: Brill, 2001), 855 (hereafter cited as *HALOT*).

word. In this context, the name Onidah — if Mormon understood it as "the Lord knows my affliction" or "the Lord has taken knowledge of my affliction" — constitutes the perfect symbol of the divine providence evident in Alma, Amulek, Zeezrom, et al.'s teaching of the poor and humble class of the Zoramites as well as the perfect literary counterpart or antitype of the Rameumptom and the self-exalting worship carried out thereon.

The Etymology of Onidah

The *Onidah* mentioned as the name of the hill from which Alma preached in Alma 32:4 probably represents a different location than *Onidah/Oneidah*, "the place of arms" mentioned in Alma 47:5.[7] In the Book of Mormon Onomasticon entry for *Onidah*, Paul Hoskisson has adumbrated some of the more or less plausible etymologies for Onidah.[8] The first element makes best sense as either ʾôn, "generative power," "physical power," "wealth,"[9] ʾônî, "mourning,"[10] or even more likely, ʿŏnî/ʿōnî/ʿônî "affliction," "humiliation," "humbled state."

The second element, *-idah*, is more opaque. Here Hoskisson himself proposes the most likely and plausible way forward. He cites the attested

---

BDB, 776. Cf. Zephaniah 2:3: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye *meek* [humble, ʿanwê] of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek *meekness* [humility, ʿănāwâ]: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger."

7. On *Onidah* in Alma 32:4 and *Onidah/Oneidah* 47:5 as distinct places, see, e.g., George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 5, *The Book of Alma: Chapters 45 through 63* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1960), 48; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4, *Alma* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 447. Skousen distinguishes the two locations and recommends *Onidah* as the correct spelling for Alma 32:4. See also Robert F. Smith, ed., *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, 2nd ed. 3 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986–1987), 2:722. Both the original manuscript and printer's manuscript have *Oneidah* at Alma 47:5, which is changed to *Onidah* in the 1830 edition. Skousen thus accepts *Oneidah* as original and distinct from *Onidah* in Alma 47:5. See *ATV*, 4:2575 and Smith, *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, 2nd ed., 2:809. Other Latter-day Saint scholars — e.g., Jenny Webb and Robert F. Smith — think they likely represent the same place. See, e.g., Jenny Webb, "It is Well That Ye Are Cast Out: Alma 32 and Eden," in *An Experiment on the Word: Reading Alma 32*, ed. Adam Miller (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2011), 45n2.

8. *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. "Onidah," by Paul Y. Hoskisson, last modified April 26, 2019. https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ONIDAH.

9. *HALOT*, 22.

10. *HALOT*, 23.

Semitic names *Abida* (ʾăbîdāʿ, "he [God] has known my father," "he knows my father" or "my father knows") from Genesis 25:4 (1 Chronicles 1:33) and *Shemida* (šĕmîdāʿ, "he [God] knows my name" or "my name he has known") from Numbers 26:32; Joshua 17:2; and 1 Chronicles 7:19. Unlike other suggestions for the second element in Onidah, the third person masculine singular perfect verb *yādaʿ* is actually attested as a part of Semitic names and comfortably corresponds to grammatical rules of Semitic naming. Thus, as noted above, the most likely Hebrew etymology of this name is "He [the Lord] knows my affliction" or "he knows my humiliation."

The likelihood of ʿonyî ("my affliction") as the first onomastic element in Onidah is strengthened by the fact that forms of this element occur early in biblical narrative in connection with etiological naming reports. For example, the Genesis narrator reports Ishmael's naming thus: "Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name *Ishmael*; because *the Lord hath heard* [šāmaʿ yhwh] *thy affliction* [ʿonyēk]" (Genesis 16:11). The Genesis narrator creatively explains the name Reuben loosely in terms of the verb *rāʾâ* and *bĕʿonyî* (rather than its transparent etymological meaning, *rĕʾû + bēn* = "Look! A son"): "And Leah conceived, and bare *a son*, and she called his name *Reuben*: for she said, Surely the Lord *hath looked* [rāʾâ] upon *my affliction* [bĕʿonyî]; now therefore my husband will love me" (Genesis 29:32). The expression ʿonyî and the verb *ʿānâ* (tĕʿanneh) whence it derives constitute an important part of the etiology for the naming of *Jegar-sahadutha/Galeed* (Gilead) and *Mizpah* ("God hath seen [rāʾâ] *mine affliction* [onyî, i.e., Jacob's hard labor in Laban's household]"; "If thou shalt afflict [tĕʿanneh] my daughters" Genesis 31:42, 50). Subsequently, in the Joseph cycle, the narrator explains the naming of Ephraim, again against the backdrop of ʿonyî: "And the name of the second called he *Ephraim*: For God hath *caused me to be fruitful* [hipranî] in the land of *my affliction* [ʿonyî]" (Genesis 41:52) — i.e., in Egypt. This latter etiology has within its horizons the affliction or humble condition (ʿŏnî) in which the children of Israel, including the Ephraimites, found themselves in Egypt generations later. In all of these examples, God "hears" or "sees" — i.e., knows or acknowledges someone's affliction or humiliation.

In fact, the idea of Yahweh "looking upon," knowing or acknowledging affliction, occurs with particular frequency in connection with Israel's exodus from Egypt. The exodus narrative attributes one of the most important of these statements to Yahweh himself: "And the Lord said, I have surely seen [rāʾô rāʾîtî] *the affliction* [ʿŏnî] of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for *I know* [yādaʿtî, literally "I have known"] their sorrow" (Exodus 3:7; cf. "thou hast

considered [*rāʾîtā*, thou hast seen] *my trouble* [ʿ*onyî*]; *thou hast known* [*yādaʿtā*] my soul in adversities," Psalms 31:7 [MT 8]). He further promises, "I will bring you up *out of the affliction* [*mēʿŏnî*] of Egypt" (Exodus 3:17). Later on, the narrator reports the response of Israel to Moses as prophet: "And the people believed: and when they heard that *the Lord had visited the children of Israel*, and that *he had looked upon* [*rāʾâ*] *their affliction* [ʿ*onyām*], then they bowed their heads and worshipped" (Exodus 4:31). In the Pentateuch thereafter, forms of ʿ*ŏnî* refer back to Israel's experience in Egypt, as emblemized by the unleavened Passover bread, "the bread of affliction [*leḥem ʿōnî*]," Deuteronomy 16:3). Israel's experience in Egypt is also characterized as ʿ*ŏnî*/ʿ*ōnî*/ʿ*ônî*: "And when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, *and looked on our affliction* [ʿ*onyēnû*], and our labour, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 26:7–8; see further Nehemiah 9:9). The descriptions of Israel's collective ʿ*ŏnî* in Egypt upon which Yahweh "looked" became mirrored in the experience of individual Israelites upon whose "affliction" the Lord also "looked" and thus took knowledge of (see, e.g., 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalms 31:7 [MT 8]; 119:153; see also Psalms 9:12–13 [MT 13–14]; 44:24 [MT 25]; 107:10; 119:50, 92).[11] All of this, too, has potential implications for *Onidah* as a Lehite toponym.

Exodus motifs occur throughout the Book of Mormon. One of the most important of these occurs in Mosiah 24, which describes the bondage of Alma the Elder's people and their deliverance in terms that distinctly echo Exodus 3:7 and 4:31:

> And it came to pass that *so great was their afflictions* [cf. Hebrew ʿ*onyām*, Exodus 4:31] that they began to cry mightily to God. And it came to pass that[12] Amulon commanded them that they should stop their cries and he put guards over them to watch them, that whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death. And it came to pass that Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God but did pour out their hearts to him; and *he did know* [cf. Hebrew *wayyēdaʿ*] *the thoughts of their hearts*. And it came to pass that *the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions*, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for *I know of the covenant* which ye have made unto me. And

---

11. On the term ʿ*ŏnî*/ ʿ*ōnî*/ʿ*onyî* as a description of Israel/Judah's experience in exile, see Lamentations 1:3, 7, 9; 3:1, 19.

12. Book of Mormon citations will generally follow Skousen, *Earliest Text*. On the reading "And it came to pass," see Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 258.

> I will covenant with this my people and deliver them out of bondage. And I will also ease the burdens which is put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage. And this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and *that ye may know of a surety that I the Lord God do visit my people in their afflictions.* (Mosiah 24:10-14)

The text here repeats for emphasis a noun translated "affliction[s]" and a verb translated "know." In addition to other lexical connections in this pericope (burdens, taskmasters, etc.), the language of affliction and divine knowledge of that affliction connects this passage to the exodus narrative, Exodus 3:7, 17 and 4:31, in particular. These linked concepts resurface again in Alma 31–35. Whether ultimately related to the experiences of Alma the Elder and his people or not, the toponym *Onidah* appears to express a similar sentiment: the Lord "knows" of the "affliction" (or "humiliation") of his people. Even if not directly related to the deliverance of Alma the Elder's people, the name appears to express what ancient Israel had experienced throughout its salvation history whenever the Lord had "known" their affliction and intervened on their behalf.

"Hearts … Lifted Up" Versus the "Poor in Heart": The Rameumptom Versus Onidah, *rām* Versus ʿŏnî

In Alma 31, Mormon describes the apostate Zoramites and the nature of their heretical practices. In order to create a concrete verbal picture of the pride that characterized the Zoramites, Mormon describes their use of a "stand" or "a place of standing" that was "built up in the center of their synagogue."[13] Mormon describes this "stand" as being "*high*

---

13. Alma 31:13. Robert F. Smith notes: "It is remarkable that the set prayer delivered at the Rameumptom appears to be an early form of the very important Jewish ʿ*Amida* prayer (Eighteen Benedictions), which is done 'standing.'" Moreover, as pointed out by Eisenman & Wise, one finds "word-for-word correspondences" between that ʿ*Amida* prayer and a messianic text from Qumran cave 4, 4Q521 frag 1, column 1." (Robert F. Smith, personal communication, October 2019). See Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered: The First Complete Translation and Interpretation of 50 Key Documents withheld for Over 35 Years* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 20–21. Smith further notes, "This may extend to the ʿ*Amida* as part of the Paragraph of the King read at Israelite covenant renewal time." Compare Deuteronomy 17:14–20, 2 Chronicles 20:3–5, 1 Esdras 9:37–55, 1QS (Manual of Discipline) 1:16–2:19, and Babylonian Talmud *Soṭa* 7:6, 8 (38a, 41a). For the ʿ*Amida* as part of the 'Portion of the King" at Covenant Renewal time, see John Tvedtnes, "The Nephite Feast of Tabernacles" in *Tinkling*

[*rām*] above the head" (Alma 31:13‒14), as a wordplay on Zoram and Rameumptom in terms of *rām*.[14] Moreover, the term *Zoramite*s came to have a pejorative meaning, "those who are exalted/high/lifted up,"[15] or "the lifted up persons" (*zû/zô*, "the one who"[16] + *rām*, "[is] exalted," cf. *Zeram* = "he [this one] is exalted," attested in Alma 2:22),[17] and that Mormon exploits this meaning in his account of the Zoramites.[18]

Mormon emphasizes the condition of the Zoramites' hearts in Alma 31[19]: "their hearts were set upon gold and upon silver and upon all manner of fine goods, … and … *their hearts* were *lifted up* unto great boasting *in their pride*" (Alma 31:24‒25). Mormon records that Alma, in his prayer, laments "*their hearts* are swallowed up *in their pride*" and calls attention to "their costly apparel and their ringlets and their bracelets and their ornaments of gold and all their precious things which they are ornamented with," averring, "and behold, *their hearts are set upon them*" (Alma 31:27‒28). In other words, a reflection of the Zoramites' "lifted up" hearts could be seen in the "high" Rameumptom from which they prayed and in the costly apparel in which they prayed and upon which "their hearts" were "set" (Alma 31:38).

Brant Gardner insightfully describes the social semiotics that inevitably would have been in play in the Zoramites' worship atop the Rameumptom:

Cymbals: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley, ed. John W. Welch (Los Angeles: privately printed, 1978), 159–60; Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 2:224–26; "Did the Nephites Have a 'Holiday Season' Like We Do Today?" KnoWhy #394, Book of Mormon Central, Dec 28, 2017. https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/did-the-nephites-have-a-%E2%80%9Choliday-season%E2%80%9D-like-we-do-today.

14. Matthew L. Bowen, "'See That Ye Are Not Lifted Up': The Name Zoram and Its Paronomastic Pejoration," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 109–43.

15. Ibid.

16. Bruce M. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 337.

17. Bowen, "The Name Zoram," 114.

18. Bowen, 109–43.

19. Alma 31:1, 24–25, 27–28. The word *heart* (Hebrew *lēb/lēbāb*, Egyptian ʾ*ib*) constitutes a lead-word (*Leitwort*) in Alma 31–32 (see Alma 31:1–2, 17, 22, 24–25, 27–28, 31; 32:3–4, 8, 12, 16, 28) and arguably in 31–35 as a whole (see further Alma 33:1, 20–21, 23; 34:4, 27, 31, 36; 35:15). Notably, the whole pericope is framed as an *inclusio* by Mormon's comments on the effect of the Zoramites' apostasy on Alma's heart (see Alma 31:1–2; 35:15). The planting of the "word" in the "heart" frames Alma's teaching on prayer in Alma 33 (see Alma 33:1, 23).

> Zoramite worship required the worshipper to come forward, stand in an elevated location in the sight of everyone, and utter a prayer declaring the superiority of his beliefs. His visible "costly apparel" would reinforce his superiority. Now imagine the effect of a poor farmer who chose to also mount the Rameumptom and offer the prayer. Almost certainly, in contrast to the others who prayed, this farmer would have little political influence or social standing. His inadequate clothing would reinforce his social inferiority. Uttering the prayer proclaiming his cultural superiority would be a further incongruity. Thus, he would not only be exposed in public (traditionally a forum the poor avoid) but also recited a prayer that highlighted differences in a way that did not favor him. The humiliation of being in such a position was the only mechanism of exclusion that was necessary.[20]

The pejorative connotations of Semitic/Hebrew *rām* (*rwm) in terms of "high," "haughty," "arrogant,"[21] "proud" not only find expression in the "height" of the Rameumptom (described as "high above the head," Alma 31:13) and their "lifted up" hearts,[22] but also in the ostentatious display of one's clothing demanded by the worshipper's "standing on the top [of the Rameumptom] and stretch[ing] forth [one's] hands towards heaven and cry[ing] with a loud voice" in such a public way. The "costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things" would have become, in effect, the garb expected of the worshipper, functioning as quasi-sacred or religious clothing.

Alma's message to the poor Zoramites would constitute a very different one regarding their inherent worth than the semiotics and praxis of the Zoramites' "worship." Since we can very plausibly link the name *Onidah* with Hebrew ʿŏnî "(state of) affliction, humility" and its parent verbal root ʿny/ʿnh — by historical etymology or by way of homonymy (paronomasia) — the Onidah provides the perfect onomastic and thus symbolic counterbalance to the Rameumptom, as I will endeavor to show.

20. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:446.
21. See, e.g., *HALOT*, 1203.
22. See Deuteronomy 8:14; 17:20; Ezekiel 31:10; Hosea 13:6; Daniel 11:12.

Alma's Afflictions

Alma's immediate response to seeing that the Zoramites' hearts "were lifted up … in their pride" (Alma 31:25) was that he "lifted up his voice to heaven" in prayer (Alma 31:26). Alma's prayer expresses distress at "afflictions" that he knows his interactions with the Zoramites will bring upon him:

> O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? O Lord, wilt thou give me strength that I may bear with mine infirmities! For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul. O Lord, my heart is exceeding sorrowful. Wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ! *O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength that I may suffer with patience these afflictions* [cf. Hebrew ʿunnôt/ʿŏnî] *which shall come upon me* because of the iniquity of this people! O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul and give unto me success! And also my fellow laborers which are with me — yea, Ammon and Aaron and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom, and also my two sons — yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord! Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ! *Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions* [cf. Heb. ʿunnôtām, ʿonyām] *which shall come upon them* because of *the iniquities* [Hebrew ʿăwōnōt][23] of this people! O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ! (Alma 31:30–34)

Alma's prayer evidences several terminological parallels with Isaiah's poem of the suffering Servant and his own earlier christological interpretation of that poem (e.g., "bearing with … infirmities,"[24]

23. It is very tempting to posit a wordplay (paronomasia) involving the similar-sounding ʿunnôt (or ʿŏnî) and ʿăwōnōt. The Hebrew normal idiom nśʾ ʿăwōn ("bear iniquity") may reflect a clever substitution of a form of ʿny, "affliction." In this case Alma, et al., do not "bear iniquity" but "bear affliction" because of iniquity. Cf. Isaiah 53:11.

24. Cf. Alma's christological interpretation of the Suffering Servant poem (Isaiah 53) in Alma 7:11–13. See, e.g., Thomas A. Wayment, "The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 98–103, 130. Alma had previously taught the people in the city Gideon, "he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12).

wickedness that "pains"[25] his soul; "exceedingly sorrowful," "these afflictions which shall come upon me"). It thus helps us to see Alma, like Jesus Christ himself, as someone fully able to empathize with the Zoramites in their "affliction" or compelled "humility" (ʿŏnî). Alma's prayer exemplifies the type of prayer he and Amulek will teach the Zoramites, prayer being essential to planting "the word."

Mormon concludes the first part of the Zoramite narrative with the statement that the Lord, in response to Alma's prayer, "gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith" (Alma 31:18). Ultimately, Mormon's quotation of Alma's prayer seems to include the following purposes: (1) to establish a stark contrast between the Zoramites' arrogant, self-exalting, rote "prayer" with Alma's own prayer in humility and faith; (2) to provide a narratological transition from the haughty, ostentatious "worship" of the wealthy, prosperous Zoramites to the religious plight — i.e., the ʿŏnî/ʿōnî — of the poor Zoramites as ʿănāwîm; and (3) to demonstrate the type of "pray[ing] in faith" capable of growing "the word" into a full-fledged "tree of life" (Alma 33:3–23; cf. Alma 32:37–43), including a "perfect knowledge" of God (cf. Alma 32:21, 26, 29).

The "Poor in Heart" Taught at Onidah

In addition to the exodus ʿŏnî-texts cited previously, numerous additional biblical text offered the poor and the humble hope in Yahweh for relief from their temporal and spiritual "poverty." For example, the Psalmist declared: "Yet setteth he the poor [ʾebyôn] on high *from affliction* [ʿōnî], and maketh him families like a flock" (Psalms 107:41). One Isaianic prophecy promised, "but to this man will I look, even to *him that is poor* [ʿānî] and of a contrite spirit [ûněkē-rûaḥ], and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:2). Alma, Amulek, et al., discovered quickly that the Zoramite poor provided a far more receptive audience for "preach[ing] good tidings to the poor" (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18) than the Zoramite upper-crust. Alma's teaching, including his dramatic shift in address, all

---

25. *The Complete Jewish Bible* renders ʾîš makʾōbôt in Isaiah 53:3 as "man of pains" (KJV "man of sorrows") and ûmakʾōbênû sěbālām in Isaiah 53:4 as "our pains from which he suffered." Similarly, Donald W. Parry renders ûmakʾōbênû sěbālām as "and [he] carried our pains" in Isaiah 53:4 ("Surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains"). Donald W. Parry, *Harmonizing Isaiah: Combining Ancient Sources* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2001), 211.

transpire on the hill Onidah. The meaning "he has taken knowledge of my affliction/poverty/humble state" would certainly be relevant in this context:

> And it came to pass that they did go forth and began to preach the word of God unto the people, entering into their synagogues, and into their houses; yea, and even they did preach the word in their streets. And it came to pass that after much labor among them, they began to have success among the *poorer*[26] *class* [cf. Hebrew ʿanwê/ʿǎniyyê] of the people; for behold, they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel. Therefore they were not permitted to enter into their synagogues to worship God, being esteemed as filthiness. *Therefore they were poor* [cf. Hebrew ʿǎniyyîm]; yea, *they were esteemed by their brethren as dross.* Therefore *they were poor* [cf. Hebrew ʿǎniyyîm] *as to things of the world; and also they were poor in heart* [cf. ʿǎniyyê hallēbāb/lēb]. Now, as Alma was teaching and speaking unto the people upon *the hill Onidah* [ʿonyî + yāda or yēdaʿ] there came a great multitude unto him, which were those of which we have been speaking, which were *poor in heart* [Hebrew ʿǎniyyê hallēbāb] because of their poverty [cf. Hebrew ʿonyām] *as to things of the world;* and they came unto Alma. And the one which was the foremost among them said unto him: Behold, what shall these my brethren do? For they are despised of all men *because of their poverty* [ʿonyām], yea, and more especially by our priests. For they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands. And they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty [ʿonyēnû[27]], that we have no place to worship our God. And now behold, what shall we do? And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him. And he beheld with great joy, for he beheld that *their afflictions* [cf. Hebrew *ʿunnôtām*[28] or ʿonyām] *had truly*

---

26. Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 768.

27. Cf. Psalms 44:24 [MT 25].

28. See, e.g., Psalm 132:1: "Lord, remember David, and all *his afflictions* [ʿunnôtô]:" KJV reads — or at least renders — the plural infinitive ("being afflicted") as a plural noun ("afflictions").

> humbled [cf. Hebrew ʿannôt ʿinnâ/û][29] *them and that they were*
> *in a preparation* to hear the word. (Alma 32:1–6)

The Hebrew Bible widely uses the somewhat synonymous terms ʿ*ănîyyîm/*ʿ*ănāwîm* (the poor, literally the "crouching," "bowing" or "bowed" — i.e., the "humble," "pious"),[30] the *dallîm* (literally, the "weak" and thus the "low, poor"; "helpless"; "powerless"; "insignificant"),[31] and the ʾ*ebyônîm* (the "needy, poor")[32] descriptions of poor or poorer classes of people. All three of these terms have relevance for the "poor" and "humbled" Zoramites described by Mormon in Alma 32. The mention of *Onidah* occurs amid a profusion of repeated terms that derive from — or relate semantically to — the verbal root ʿ*ny/*ʿ*nh*: "(the) poor," "poorer class" (ʿ*ănîyyîm/*ʿ*ănāwîm* [ʿ*anwê/*ʿ*ănîyyê*]), "their poverty"/"their afflictions" (ʿ*onyām,* *ʿ*unnôtām*) and the verb "humble." This evident polyptoton, a wordplay on cognates from the same root,[33] creates a verbal picture: poverty and humility surround Alma on Onidah, in contrast to the scenes of self-exaltation transpiring atop the Rameumptom.

Brant Gardner offers the following explanation as to why a hill would have been an appropriate place for Alma, et al. to preach the gospel to the poor: "On such mountains, communication could occur between the heavens, the earth's surface, and the underworld. … For Alma, using a hill from which to preach the gospel would employ these connotations of preaching about sacred things in a naturally sacred location."[34] He further notes that "by using the hill — a natural feature — Alma was unconsciously underscoring the difference between the city's artificiality (including its artificial elite) and the natural world of the country, where the farmer-poor were in their element, no longer subservient."[35] Given the pejorative meanings of *rām-* brought into the name Rameumptom (and "Zoramites") and all that the worship atop the Rameumptom conveyed in terms of semiotics and symbolism, Alma could not have

---

29. Exodus 1:11–12: "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters *to afflict them* [ʿ*annōtô*] with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more *they afflicted them* [*yĕ*ʿ*annû*], the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel."

30. *HALOT*, 855.

31. *HALOT*, 221–22.

32. *HALOT*, 5.

33. Richard A. Lanham describes *polyptoton* as a wordplay involving a "repetition of words from the same root but with different endings." Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 117.

34. Gardner, *Second Witness,* 4:447.

35. Ibid.

done better than picking a "naturally sacred" hill — particularly one named Onidah — to teach the "poorer class" of Zoramites. The Lord and Alma "knew" their affliction, poverty, and humility.

In one biblical psalm or temple hymn, the Psalmist pleads, "Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble [Ketiv: ʿnyym; Qere: ʿănāwîm]" (Psalms 10:12). We can see Alma's teaching the Zoramites as another scriptural example of the Lord's not forgetting the humble. Moreover, as the Psalmist stated in the same Psalm, "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of *the humble* [ʿănāwîm]: *thou wilt prepare their heart*, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear" (Psalms 10:17). The Lord had heard the desire of "the humble" gathered to Alma at the hill Onidah who were now "in a preparation to hear the word" (Alma 32:6).

"Because Ye Are Compelled to Be Humbled Blessed Are Ye" (Alma 32:12–13)

Deuteronomy extolled the value of compelled humility for ancient Israel collectively. They had endured the "affliction" or "humbling" of bondage in Egypt (see above). Regarding Israel's forty-year wilderness journey, Keith Meservy has noted, Yahweh needed to do more than just get Israel out of Egypt: "If God had wanted merely to get Israel from Egypt to Canaan, he would have chosen a more direct route. But the Lord needed more to get Egypt out of Israel. This was something that took much longer."[36] In order to "get Egypt out of Israel," the Lord "humbled" Israel spiritually during the wilderness period.

Deuteronomy stipulated to ancient Israel: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to *humble thee* [ʿannōtĕkā], and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (Deuteronomy 8:2). They were to always remember that Yahweh "fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might *humble thee* [ʿannōtĕkā], and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end" (Deuteronomy 8:16). In the very same Deuteronomic legislation, Moses warned Israel against the time "when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, *and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied*, and all that thou hast is multiplied; *then thine heart be lifted up* [wĕrām], and thou forget the Lord thy God, which

---

36. Keith H. Meservy, "The Good News of Moses," in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Three: Genesis to Samuel*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 220.

brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deuteronomy 8:12–14). Like the Israelites in the wilderness, the poor class of Zoramites had been "humbled" by their circumstances, and this humbling enabled them to avoid having their "heart be lifted up" like their wealthier Zoramite counterparts whose "hearts were *lifted up* [cf. Hebrew *rāmîm*] unto great boasting, in their pride." The contrast between *rām* and ʿny/ʿnh established in Deuteronomy 8 helps us appreciate the elaborative wordplay involving Rameumptom (+Zoramites) vs. Onidah/ʿŏnî (+ʿănāwîm) and the sociological juxtaposition that Mormon is working toward in Alma 31–35.

In the light of Israel's "humbling" and "affliction" in the wilderness (on top of their ʿŏnî in Egypt), we note that Alma specifically detailed how compelled humility could prove valuable for the poor and humble Zoramites as well:

> I say unto you: It is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, *that ye may be humble* [cf. Hebrew *tĕʿunnû], and that ye may learn wisdom;[37] for it is necessary that ye should learn wisdom. For it is because that ye are cast out that *ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty* [cf. Hebrew *ʿonyĕkem], that ye are brought to a *lowliness of heart*; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble. And now because ye are compelled to be humble [cf. Hebrew *lēʿānōt*], blessed are ye; for *a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble* [cf. Hebrew *lēʿānōt*], seeketh repentance. And now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy. And he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. (Alma 32:12-13)

Whether Alma himself — as Mormon does — connected the ʿŏnî of the Zoramite ʿănāwîm with the hill Onidah is uncertain, since Mormon does not quote Alma making any mention of it.[38] Nevertheless, Mormon's inclusion of Alma's speech with its repetition of the verb *humble* (Hebrew ʿānâ) adds considerably to the ongoing polyptoton and wordplay on Onidah in terms of ʿŏnî, ʿănāwîm/ʿăniyyîm, ʿănāwâ, and ʿānâ.

Alma uses the Zoramites' "humbling" and being "in a preparation to hear the word" (v. 6) as an opening to teach them the doctrine of Christ, which from the foundation of the society of the Nephites had been the

---

37. Cf. Psalms 119:71: "*It is* good for me that I have been afflicted [humbled, ʿunnêtî]; that I might learn thy statutes."

38. It is equally possible that Mormon himself makes the association based on additional knowledge of the land of Antionum and other sources or that Mormon has merely abridged Alma's mention of it.

bedrock of their religion.[39] In fact, Alma substitutes the phrase "compelled to be humble" where we would normally expect a mention of "faith" — especially faith in Jesus Christ. Clearly, compelled humility does not equal faith in Jesus Christ. Alma's point seems to be that compelled humility can "sometimes" put someone in a position to have faith in Jesus Christ and thus fully repent, receive baptism by water and the Holy Ghost, then "endure to the end" in faith hope and charity, until receiving the promise of the Father: "Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20).

"Blessed Are They Who Humble Themselves Without Being Compelled to Be Humble" (Alma 32:14–16)

Alma continues teaching the doctrine of Christ and repetition of *ʿŏnî*-terms and in doing so emphasizes that humbling oneself has value even above compelled humility. The biblical exodus narrative holds up the Pharaoh of the exodus as one who refused to "humble [him]self," even under the most compelling circumstances. The Lord, through Moses, asked Pharaoh: "Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse *to humble thyself* [*lēʿānōt*] before me? let my people go, that they may serve me" (Exodus 10:3). Because he does not "humble [him]self" he becomes the poster child for "hardening" one's heart,[40] a course which the wealthy Zoramites also pursue. Alma praises those Zoramites who elected to "truly humble themselves":

> And now as I said unto you that *because ye were compelled to be humble* [cf. Hebrew *lēʿānōt*] ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are *more blessed who truly humble themselves* [cf. the practice of "humbling oneself" (infinitive *lĕhitʿannôt*) mentioned in Ezra 8:12 and Daniel 10:12] *because of the word*? Yea, he that *truly humbleth himself* and repenteth of his sins and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed — yea, *much more blessed than they who art compelled to be*

---

39. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies* 31 (Summer 1991): 31–50; Noel B. Reynolds, "How to 'Come unto Christ,'" *Ensign*, Sept. 1992, 7–13; Noel B. Reynolds, "The True Points of My Doctrine," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–56; Noel B. Reynolds, "This Is the Way," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 79–91; Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31," *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51–75.

40. Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:34; 1 Samuel 6:6 clarify that Pharaoh hardened his own heart in seeming contradiction to numerous passages in which Yhwh appears to harden Pharaoh's heart.

> *humble because of their exceeding poverty.* Therefore *blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble.* Or rather, in other words, *blessed is he that believeth in the word of God and is baptized without stubbornness of heart*, yea, without being brought to *know* the word — or even compelled *to know* — before they will believe. (Alma 32:14-16)

Alma uses a form of *argumentum a minore ad maius* (called *qal wāḥômer* by later rabbinic sages, also sometimes known as *argumentum a fortiori*), which argues from a lesser premise to a greater one. In other words, if those who are compelled to be humble become "blessed" for their humility, those who "truly humble themselves because of the word" can only be "more blessed" — "yea, much more blessed" — for doing so of their own free will and choice. Ultimately, Alma's rhetorical aim is to persuade his audience of the value of his message — "the word," whose power Mormon thus characterized at the outset of the Zoramite narrative: "And now, as the preaching of the word had had[41] a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just — yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword or anything else which had happened unto them — therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue [Latin *virtus* = power] of the word of God" (Alma 31:5). Since the transition from being "humbled" because of poverty (or for another reason) to one who chooses humility for pious reasons would be relatively easy, Alma subtly inserts his "word" or "the word of God" as the higher, nobler cause for humility — the "word" that they will need to plant like a seed.

Here again, Alma directs them to the doctrine of Christ, five of the six points of that doctrine being mentioned in these verses.[42] He again emphasizes repentance and enduring to the end as a meristic[43] invocation of the entire doctrine of Christ; and he again substitutes "humbling [oneself]" for faith before making the equation between humility and

---

41. On the double use of "had" in the original manuscript and printer's manuscript, see Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 767.

42. Noel Reynolds notes that four of the six points of the doctrine of Christ occur in Alma 32:13 as a merismus. However, given the correspondence that Alma draws between humility and faith, it is possible to see faith also as included in this list, as confirmed by v. 16. Noel B. Reynolds, "Biblical *Merismus* in Book of Mormon Gospel References," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017), 120.

43. For his discussion on *merismus* and its use as a device in adumbrating and teaching the doctrine of Christ, see Reynolds, "Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References," 109–13.

faith directly ("believe") in Alma 32:16. Moreover, Alma equates the state of "blessed[ness]" with salvation in the kingdom of God or eternal life ("the same shall be blessed" = "the same shall be saved," Alma 32:13, 15).[44] This constitutes the ultimate value of their *ʿŏnî*.

This equation reflects the vision of a kind of "realized eschatology" laid out by King Benjamin years earlier in his epic sermon at the temple in Zarahemla: "And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it" (Mosiah 2:41). The "blessed and happy state" of the faithful here and hereafter finds its symbol in the "tree, whose fruit [is] desirable to make one happy [cf. Hebrew *ʾašrê*]" (1 Nephi 8:10)[45] that we partake of here in mortality; and the eschatological "tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7), that we may partake of hereafter. The "tree of life" (Christ) that Alma describes growing up in the poorer Zoramites (and us) conceptually bridges — or embodies — those two trees.

"What Ye Should Do Because Ye Are Afflicted And Cast Out": Humbling Oneself in All Circumstances (Alma 32:24–27)

Alma further uses the circumstances of the poor Zoramites' compelled humility and the polyptotonic repetition of *ʿŏnî*-cognates as a springboard to teach the importance of humbling oneself in all circumstances:

> And now my beloved brethren, as ye have[46] desired to know of me what ye shall do because *ye are afflicted* [cf. Hebrew *ʿăniyyîm/ʿănāwîm*] *and cast out* — now I do not desire that ye should *suppose* that I mean to judge you, only according to that which is true — for *I do not mean that ye, all of you have been compelled to humble yourselves* [*lēʿānōt/lěhitʿannôt*]. For I verily believe that there are some among you which would humble themselves, let him be in whatsoever circumstances

---

44. See also 2 Nephi 31:15; 3 Nephi 11:33; 27:6; Mark 13:13; Matthew 24:13; cf. also Mosiah 23:22.

45. On the wordplay involving *ʾašrê* and the asherah in 1 Nephi 8:10, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 24.

46. See Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 395.

> he[47] *might*. Now as I said concerning faith, that it was not
> a perfect *knowledge* [cf. *dāʿat/dāʿat*; cf. Genesis 2:9, 17],[48] — even
> so it is with my words. Ye cannot *know* of their surety at first
> unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect *knowledge*. But
> behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an
> experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith —
> yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe — let this
> desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can
> give place for a portion of my words. (Alma 32:24–27)

Notably, Alma emphasizes the concept of voluntary humility in
connection with faith as the first principle of the doctrine of Christ in
order to introduce his "comparing" (i.e., likening, cf. Hebrew *māšāl*)
"the word" to "a seed" (Alma 32:28) and the "planting" of "the word"
(Alma 32:28, 33, 36). In ancient times, even more than now, planting
seeds required one to bend low to the earth to put the seed in the ground
— in this case the "ground" of the heart (cf. Alma 32:28, 39). Thus the
image of planting a seed in soil suggests the posture of humility (ʿŏnî as
a derivation from verb ʿānâ, literally means "bent over") and perhaps
even the posture of worship.

The Hebrew verb for "worship," *hištaḥăwâ*, would inevitably have
been part of the Nephite lexicon. This verb's shape suggests the possible
meaning "to cause oneself to live" (from the root, *ḥyy/ḥwy* = "to live").[49]
That idea might be particularly relevant in the present context in which
Alma describes humbling oneself to plant "the word" that becomes
"a tree springing up unto everlasting life" (Alma 32:41; cf. *wāḥay lĕʿōlām*,
"and live forever," Genesis 3:22). We recall that Nephi taught, "wherefore
ye must bow down before him, and worship him [*wĕhištaḥăwîtem*[50] *lô*]
with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul. And if ye
do this ye shall in nowise be cast out" (2 Nephi 25:29) — a promise that
these "cast out" Zoramites would have particularly appreciated. In any
case, the ancient Israelite conception that humankind (*hāʾādām*, Adam)
was "taken" from "the ground" (*hāʾădāmâ*, Genesis 3:19, 23; Alma 42:2)
here reinforces the notion, as articulated by Hugh Nibley, "get down

---

47. Ibid.

48. Cf. Genesis 3:5, 22.

49. For a short but useful discussion of the Hebrew verb *hištaḥăwâ*, see Waltke
and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 360–61. They conclude that "the unusual
shape of this word hints at its extraordinary cultural significance" (i.e., in ancient
Israel).

50. For the verb form of *worship*, see Exodus 24:1.

there [in the dust] and realize what you are."[51] In so doing, men and women who plant the "the word" — or Christ — will grow up into a man or woman re-created in likeness of Christ: "For every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness" (Alma 32:31).[52]

If the proposed etymology of Onidah, "he knows my affliction," is correct, Alma's dramatic emphasis on the seed that, by faith, grows into "a perfect knowledge," i.e., divine "knowledge," takes on even greater importance. Words or expressions translated as "know," "knowledge," and "perfect knowledge" occur twenty-two times in Alma 32:16–36. The poor Zoramites' humiliation and humility was key to the experiential knowledge that they were already acquiring. In christological terms, the "perfect knowledge" gained by the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:4, 11 ("*acquainted with* [*wîdûaʿ*, knowing] grief," "*by his knowledge* [*bědaʿtô*] shall my righteous servant justify many") included being oppressed (as noted earlier). Alma himself had earlier interpreted the atoning suffering of the suffering Servant as described by Isaiah thus: "And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, *that he may know* according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12). Alma's preaching to poor, humbled Zoramites evidenced that Servant's knowledge of them. Alma held forth that the poor Zoramites could

---

51. Hugh W. Nibley, "The Faith of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley," in *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2008), 167. Nibley specifically addressed the issue of the Allied invasion of Europe on D-day and how the Germans had been expecting the Allies the day before (on June 5th), but weather forced the invasion to happen on the sixth: "Everything went foul here: people being landed on the wrong beach, the wrong things being landed at the wrong time, and so forth; all sorts of confusion; not getting the things you wanted. So this idea that we can carefully plan it, that we have the intelligence to manage it, or the character to control events, is utterly absurd! 'Man is nothing,' as the Book of Mormon says — 'how great is the nothingness of man' (cf. Helaman 12:7), and Moses said, 'I hadn't supposed that before' (cf. Moses 1:10), but it is true. 'I am nothing!' And when King Benjamin says, 'We are less than the dust' (cf. Mosiah 2:25), he means get down there and realize what you are. But we don't. We are very proud and arrogant. We still are — we have the power, we have the might. We can tell people what to do and they'll do it. Especially certain people in Washington feel that very strongly, as you know" (166–67).

52. See, e.g., Webb, "Alma 32 and Eden," 51; David E. Bokovoy, "The Word and the Seed: The Theological Use of Biblical Creation in Alma 32" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studie*s 23, no. 1 (2014):1–21. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1555&context=jbms.

themselves one day know with a "perfect knowledge" (Alma 32:26-43) even as they were known — a divine knowledge obtained not simply by experience (cf. Genesis 3:5, 22), but by experiment and the continuous, diligent exercise of faith (cf. Ether 3:1-20; 12:19-20).

"Therefore, I Will Cry unto Thee in All Mine Afflictions" (Alma 33:10–11)

In light of the foregoing, we can see *why*, when the poor Zoramites ask Alma "how they should plant the seed, or the word of which he had spoken, which he said must be planted in their hearts; or in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith" (Alma 33:1), he responds by addressing the interrelated topics of prayer and worship. Prayer and worship constituted the means whereby they could plant the word and thus "obtain the fruit" of eternal life.

The Zoramites had particularly gone astray with respect to both prayer and worship,[53] self-exalting forms of which, according to Mormon, occurred only once a week atop the Rameumptom. But the Zoramites had acquired a third major deficiency: they prayed "thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ. … thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ" (Alma 31:16–17). They rejected scriptural testimony of Christ — the "word." In addressing this threefold problem, a prayer of the prophet Zenos, presumably preserved on the plates of brass, furnished Alma with the perfect text wherewith to address the humbled Zoramite poor:

> Yea, and thou hast also heard me when *I have been cast out* and have been *despised* by mine enemies. Yea, thou didst hear my cries and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction. And *thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions* and my sincerity. And it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me. Therefore *I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions*, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me because of thy Son. (Alma 33:10-11)

Alma's use of Zenos's prayer is nothing less than masterful. Zenos lays it before the Lord that he was "cast out," "despised," and afflicted ("mine afflictions"), which spoke to the poor Zoramites' own experience: "they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of

---

53. Alma 31:12–23; 32:9–11; 33:2–3.

their apparel" (Alma 32:2); "they are despised of all men because of their poverty" (Alma 32:5); "we are cast out of our synagogues, that we cannot worship our God" (Alma 32:9); "it is because ye are cast out that ye *are despised* of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty" (Alma 32:12) "ye have desired to know of me what ye shall do because *ye are afflicted* and cast out" (Alma 32:24). But being "despised" and "afflicted" was not only Zenos's experience and that of the poor Zoramites, it would also be Christ's experience.

Isaiah had prophesied of the Servant that would be "*despised* [*nizbeh*] and rejected of men" (Isaiah 53:3), whom they would "esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and *afflicted* [*ûmĕʿunneh < ʿny*]" (Isaiah 53:4); and would be "oppressed [*niggaś*] and be *afflicted* [*naʿăneh*; or, he was oppressed, but he humbled himself]" (Isaiah 53:7). Appropriately, then, Alma uses Zenos's prayer to bring it all back to Christ. Alma had previously said to the poor Zoramites, "for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved" (Alma 32:13). Like Alma himself,[54] Zenos found mercy in his afflictions and acknowledged, "*it is because of thy Son* that thou hast been thus merciful unto me." The Lord knew his affliction.

"If Ye Do Not Remember to Be Charitable, Ye Are as Dross, Which the Refiners Do Cast Out" (Alma 34:28–29)

After Amulek teaches the poor Zoramites about Christ and his atonement (see Alma 34:2-16), and exhorts them to prayer (Alma 34:17-27), he warns the poor Zoramites against becoming like those who have despised them and cast them out:

> And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you: Do not suppose that this is all. For after ye have done all these things*, if ye turn away the needy and the naked and visit not the sick and afflicted* [cf. *ʿăniyyîm*] and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need — I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith. Therefore *if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross which the refiners do cast out* — it being of no worth — and is trodden under foot of men. (Alma 34:28-29)

---

54. See, e.g., Mosiah 27:28; Alma 36:1–3, 27–30.

Mormon's earlier editorial statement that "they were esteemed by their brethren as dross" (Alma 32:3) seems to have been motivated, at least in part, by Amulek's statement here. Alma's warning to the poor Zoramites that a failure to be charitable going forward would mean that "ye are as *dross* which *the refiners*[55] do cast out" (Alma 34:29) alludes to a specific Isaianic and Nephite text with direct relevance to their ʿŏnî/ʿōnî condition. "Behold, *I have refined thee* [šĕraptîkā], but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of *affliction* [ʿōnî]" (Isaiah 48:10; 1 Nephi 20:10). Isaiah had characterized Jerusalem's apostasy thus: "Thy silver is become *dross* [sîgîm], thy wine mixed with water" (Isaiah 1:22). But the promise the Lord had made apostate Israelites and Judahites — "And I will turn my hand upon thee, *and* purely *purge away* [wěʾeṣrōp, refine] thy dross [sîgāyik], and take away all thy tin" (Isaiah 1:25) — equally applied to the apostate Zoramites.

Additionally, Amulek's use of the image "trodden under foot of men" (Alma 34:29) appears to reference a Zoramite method of dealing with undesirables. Mormon had mentioned Korihor's ignominious demise at the hands (or feet) of the Zoramites as the event linking his heresy with the Zoramite apostasy: "behold, he was run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead" (Alma 30:59). At least some of the Zoramites gathered to Alma at Onidah would have been aware of or even participated in that brutality.

Amulek's Final Exhortation: "Bear with All Manner of Afflictions … Do Not Revile Against Those Who Do Cast You Out Because of Your Exceeding Poverty" (Alma 34:40–41)

Amulek concludes the teaching at Onidah on the same themes that Alma established early on in his speech in Alma 32. Importantly, Amulek never promises the Zoramites that their afflictions or poverty would come to an immediate end by planting the word. In fact, he suggests that they would — like Alma, Amulek, et al. — need to bear with additional afflictions that would come upon them because of the wickedness of the wealthier Zoramites:

> And now my beloved brethren, I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye *bear with all manner of afflictions*; that ye do not revile against those who *do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty*, lest ye become sinners like unto them; but that

---

55. Cf. Malachi 3:2–3, which compares the Lord to a mĕṣārēp, "a refiner" (a substantive Piel participle of ṣārap).

ye have patience, and *bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions.* (Alma 34:40–41)

Amulek closes his speech by exhorting the poor Zoramites not to perpetuate the cycle of mistreating others, even those who so callously mistreated them. Here Amulek emphasizes the fifth point or principle in the doctrine of Christ: "hav[ing] patience" and "bear[ing] with … afflictions" with a "firm hope" until receiving divine rest amounts to enduring to the end in faith, hope, and charity (cf. "if ye do not remember to be charitable," cf. Alma 34:29) until receiving eternal life. This statement clearly echoes Nephi's great summation of the fifth principle in 2 Nephi 31:20: "Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ [= "firm"], having a perfect brightness of hope [= "with a firm hope"], and a love of God and of all men [= "do not revile against those who have cast you out"]. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure [= "have patience," "bear with … afflictions"] to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life [= "ye shall one day rest"]." Amulek's description of a future "day" of "rest" from "all … afflictions" is very arguably the most poignant and meaningful way that he could have ended a speech to people in state of ʿŏnî.

"They Did Receive All the Poor of the Zoramites" (Alma 35:8–9)

At the close of Amulek's speech, Mormon immediately shifts the scene of the narrative to the land of Jershon (see Alma 35:1). At the outset of the Zoramite narrative he had situated Jershon just north of Antionum (see Alma 31:3).[56] Moreover, Mormon had earlier in the book of Alma established the land of Jershon in paronomastic fashion as the place of "inheritance" for the Lamanite coverts of the sons of Mosiah (Hebrew *yrš*, "inheritance," + appellative –*ôn*).[57] If Mormon casts the hill Onidah

---

56. "Now the Zoramites had gathered themselves together in a land which they called Antionum, which was east of the land of Zarahemla, which lay nearly bordering upon the seashore, which was south of the land of Jershon, which also bordered upon the wilderness south, which wilderness was full of the Lamanites." In the next verse, Mormon explains the strategic value of the land of Antionum for the Nephites in the face of the perennial Lamanite threat: "Now the Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites, and that it would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites" (Alma 31:3–4).

57. *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. "Jershon," by Paul Y. Hoskisson, last modified November 20, 2015. https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/JERSHON.

in Alma 32:4 as a narrative ballast or counterpart to the Rameumptom in Alma 32:13–24, he also depicts the land of Jershon and the conduct the people of Ammon living there as the moral opposites of the wealthy Zoramites in Antionum:

> Now the people of the Zoramites were angry with the people of Ammon, which[58] were in *Jershon*. And the chief ruler of the Zoramites being a very wicked man sent over unto the people of Ammon, *desiring them that they should cast out* of their land all those which came over from them into their land [i.e., the poor and the humble]. And he breathed out many threatenings against them. And now the people of Ammon did not fear their words. Therefore *they did not cast them out, but they did receive all the poor* [cf. Hebrew ʿăniyyîm or ʿănāwîm] *of the Zoramites that came over unto them. And they did nourish them and did clothe them and did give unto them lands for their inheritance.* And they did administer unto them according to their wants. (Alma 35:8–9)

Regarding the name Antionum, it is difficult not to see a direct connection with the *antion* mentioned in Alma 11:19 as "the most valuable unit of Nephite money" and thus "a fitting name for the Zoramite city of pride and wealth."[59] Gordon C. Thomasson first noted that the connection between the *antion* and "the big-money town or pride-in-wealth city of Antionum"[60] (something like "Gold-town" or "Gold-land") suggested a similar narrative metonymic connection between the *ezrom/ezrum*[61] and Zeezrom (i.e., "he of the ezrom" — "Mr. Silver" or "Mr. Moneybags"; cf. also the "antion" of gold mentioned in Alma 11:19 and the ruler Antionah mentioned in Alma 12:20).[62] The people in Jershon — which transparently denotes "place of inheritance" in Hebrew — treat the Zoramite poor in a manner diametrically opposite that of the Zoramite wealthy elite. Where the Zoramite elites cast them out and

---

58. See Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 405.

59. *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. "Antionum," by Paul Y. Hoskisson, last modified November 21, 2015. https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ANTIONUM.

60. Gordon C. Thomasson, "What's in a Name? Book of Mormon Language, Names, and [Metonymic] Naming," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 15–16.

61. Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 316.

62. Thomasson, "What's in a Name?," 15–16. Thomasson cites Benjamin Urrutia's earlier correlation of Zeezrom and *ezrom/ezrum* as primary motivation for his own study.

even pressured the Ammonites to do the same, the Ammonites "received the poor of the Zoramites," "nourish[ed]," "clothe[d]" them and "g[a]ve them lands for their inheritance." In fact, Mormon's narrative emphasis on the Ammonites giving them "lands for their inheritance" deliberately plays on the meaning of Jershon as "place of inheritance"[63] and becomes particularly appropriate given biblical statements regarding the poor, such as "But the meek [or, *the humble*, *waʿănāwîm*] *shall inherit* [*yîršû*] the earth [land]" (Psalms 37:11). The people of Ammon, once outcast themselves, treated the poor Zoramite outcasts in the very manner that Alma had instructed the poor Zoramites to treat the poor in the future (see again Alma 34:28–29).

Conclusion

The most plausible etymological explanation for the toponym *Onidah* is that it derives from Hebrew ʿŏnî/ʿōnî/ʿônî (*ʿonyî*, "my affliction") + *yādaʿ*/*yēdaʿ* ("he knows"). This etymology finds remarkably strong support in the surrounding narrative. Thus, Mormon's single mention of Onidah constitutes something far more than a mere literary ornament or a casual narrative detail.

Given the pejorative associations of the Rameumptom, the "high" and "holy stand," with Hebrew *rām* (< *rwm*) and haughtiness, arrogance, and pride, we can see a clear editorial and narratological effort on the part of Mormon to contrast the Rameumptom upon which the wealthy Zoramites prayed with Onidah, the hill from which Alma and Amulek taught the Zoramite poor and humble. The latter name and Alma's teaching from that location constituted a sign that the Lord "knew" their "affliction." Alma devotes a significant part of his message not only by extolling the spiritual value of their state of "affliction" and compelled "humility" (ʿŏnî), but teaching them how to "plant" the "word" (even Jesus Christ himself),

---

63. The correlation between Jershon and its description in the text as an "inheritance" was first noted by Robert F. Smith. (Robert F. Smith, unpublished manuscript). Paul Hoskisson suggests that John W. (Jack) Welch arrived at the same conclusion separately and "came up with his ideas while learning Hebrew in [Los Angeles]" (Paul Hoskisson, personal communication, August 2015). The idea was later mentioned in print by Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Place Names," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 258–59. On the narratological interrelationship and wordplay on the names Zarahemla and Jershon in migration accounts in the book of Alma, see Matthew L. Bowen, "'They Were Moved with Compassion' (Alma 27:4; 53:13): Toponymic Wordplay on Zarahemla and Jershon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 233–53.

which would grow up into a "perfect knowledge" of God — experientially "knowing" God and being known by him (cf. Alma 7:12).[64]

At the end of the Zoramite narrative we can see Mormon's further efforts to draw stark contrasts between the Zoramite elite and the converted Lamanites who were willing to receive the Zoramite poor. Mormon does so with the additional juxtaposition of the land of Antionum (recalling the Nephite antion) vis-à-vis the land of Jershon ("place of inheritance") which the poor or meek "inherit" (cf. Psalms 37:11: "But the meek [*waʿănāwîm*, humble] shall inherit [*yîršû*] the earth"). The poor Zoramites had learned the truth of words attributed to David: "And *the afflicted people* [ʿ*am ʿānî*] thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon *the haughty* [*rāmîm*], that thou mayest bring them down" (2 Samuel 22:28; see also Psalms 18:27 [MT 28]).[65] They knew by experience.

Matthew L. Bowen *was raised in Orem, Utah, and graduated from Brigham Young University. He holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and is currently an assistant professor in religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. He is also the author of* Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture *(Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018). He and his wife (the former Suzanne Blattberg) are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.*

---

64. 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall *I know even as also I am known.*"

65. See also Isaiah 49:13 (1 Nephi 21:13).

The Prophets Who Wrote the Book of Omni

Clifford P. Jones

Abstract: *The brief accounts written by Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki, taken alone, don't always inspire confidence in their righteousness. Nevertheless, when the specific words used by these men and all relevant context are taken into consideration, it's reasonable to conclude that each of these authors of the book of Omni was a prophet of God.*

The brief small-plate accounts of Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki have caused some concern about their faithfulness.[1] Omni's words include his statement, "I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done" (Omni 1:2).[2] Omni's grandson Abinadom says, "I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy" (Omni 1:11). These words and

---

1. See Joseph F. McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 2:111–13; Eugene England, "Benjamin the Great King," *Ensign* (December 1976): 26–31, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1976/12/benjamin-the-great-king?lang=eng; A. Keith Thompson, "The Doctrine of Resurrection in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015):108–109, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-doctrine-of-resurrection-in-the-book-of-mormon/); and John S. Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants as Authors," Sorenson, John L, and Melvin J. Thorne. *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991, 55–58, https://bit.ly/2tKGBIC; Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008) 3: Enos — Mosiah, 26–27, 35–36, 38–44, and 66–67; and Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 274.

2. All Book of Mormon quotations are from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). This edition, while sometimes harder to read than the current Latter-Day Saint edition, corresponds more closely with the actual text revealed by the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

other words written by some of these men (or the fact that some wrote so few words) have raised questions about their spiritual condition.

This paper suggests that Mormon's description of the small plates is accurate. He says, "I found these plates which contained this small account of *the prophets from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin*, and also many of the words of Nephi" (Words of Mormon 1:3). He found these plates after he "had made an abridgment from the [large] plates of Nephi down to the reign of this king Benjamin" (Words of Mormon 1:3). Thus, Mormon found the small plates after studying the large-plate record that covered, presumably in much more detail, the times when the authors of the small-plate record lived. Informed with details unavailable to us today, Mormon identifies all these men as prophets.[3]

This paper begins by analyzing the words of Omni and Abinadom in light of Mormon's words. It proposes that the words written by these men can be harmonized with Mormon's confirmation that they were prophets. It then reviews other Book of Mormon context, beginning with Nephi's account of the creation of the small plates and continuing through the words of Nephi and other small-plate authors. It proposes that all related Book of Mormon context can be read to corroborate Mormon's words that Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki — the authors of the book of Omni — were prophets of God.

Omni's Words Are Appropriate for a Prophet

Omni's brief record includes the following: "But behold, I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done" (Omni 1:2). Some students of the Book of Mormon have suggested that Omni's words of confession would not be the words of a prophet.[4] Omni clearly states that he has sinned,

---

3. Reynolds and Sjodahl likewise identify all these men as prophets, probably based on Mormon's words. See George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1962), 1:506–507.

4. See Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 113, which suggests that Omni may not have been "guilty of any gross immorality," but he did not live "according to the Spirit;" Thompson, "The Doctrine," 108, which suggests that Omni "had lived a wicked life" during a time of apostasy; Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants," 56–58, suggesting that Omni was a "self-professed 'wicked man'," that Omni and the other authors of the book of Omni were not prophets, that they "fell from prominence, and perhaps from grace," but were not "completely reprobate," as they "manifested humility, honesty, reverence for the sacred, and a common commitment to duty"; and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 38–39, suggesting that Omni "is a Nephite because

but his words don't necessarily imply that he is unrepentant. On the contrary, he makes it clear that he ought to have kept the commandments. Those who choose to continue in wickedness don't tend to confess the wrongfulness of their sins. I have searched the scriptures in vain for any words from any unrepentant sinner who confesses that he should not have sinned.[5] The very fact that Omni confesses his sins in his first entry on the small plates (followed in later years by at least one additional entry)[6] suggests repentance relatively early in his life.

Omni's confession begins with the words "I of myself" (Omni 1:2). According to the Oxford English Dictionary,[7] the term *of oneself* often means "by one's own impetus or motion, spontaneously, without the instigation or aid of another."[8] The English term *of oneself* was probably more popular in the early modern period than in the late modern period.[9] It is used several times in the Book of Mormon, where it tends to

---

of his allegiance to his community, not because of his religion," who "obviously did not consider himself an expert on spiritual matters."

5. Korihor, for example, was an unrepentant person who acknowledged having done the things he was accused of, but the record doesn't indicate that he ever confessed that he ought not to have done so. He was unhappy about being cursed but showed no desire to change course. Without a recognition of wrongdoing, there is no true repentance. His lack of contrition suggests an appropriate reason for the Lord's choice not to remove the curse.

6. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 38.

7. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), not the 1828 Webster's dictionary, is the best tool available today for ascertaining the meaning of the language of the Book of Mormon. Stanford Carmack and others have shown that 1820s American English is not the source of the English in the Book of Mormon, which is "full of [Early Modern English] … [and] also contains touches of modern English and late Middle English" (Stanford Carmack, "Why the Oxford English Dictionary (and not Webster's 1828)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 65–77, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/why-the-oxford-english-dictionary-and-not-websters-1828/). In other words, as stated by Royal Skousen, "the text of the Book of Mormon is uniquely archaic and generally dates from Early Modern English. The vocabulary of the Book of Mormon turns out to be one to three centuries older than Joseph Smith's time" (Royal Skousen, The Nature of the Original Language [Provo, UT: FARMS and BYU Studies, 2018], 11). The OED shows the meanings of words during the applicable time periods.

8. OED Online, s.v. "of, prep.", at sense 11.b…, September 2019, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/130549?rskey=GNbqwB&result=3. This meaning is corroborated by dozens of instances of "I of myself" shared with the author by Stanford Carmack from a WordCruncher database prepared from 25,367 publicly available Early English Books Online texts (EEBO Phase 1).

9. See the explanation about the language of the Book of Mormon in footnote 7.

focus more specifically on one's own efforts without taking into account any aid received from the Lord.[10]

The words of Ammon the son of Mosiah exemplify this meaning of the term *of myself*. He says, "I know that I am nothing; as to my strength, I am weak. Therefore I will not boast *of myself*, but I will boast of my God; for in his strength I can do all things" (Alma 26:12). Here Ammon's words *I am nothing* and *I am weak* don't take aid from the Lord into account. With the Lord's help, Ammon "can do all things." A verse earlier, Ammon had explained, "I do not boast in my own strength or in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full. Yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God" (Alma 26:11). Ammon knows the Lord is the source of his strength, and this causes him to rejoice. He later uses the word *glory* to express his joy: "Therefore let us glory. Yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold who can glory too much in the Lord?" (Alma 26:16).

Ammon's brother Aaron teaches that "since man had fallen, he could not merit any thing *of himself*; but the sufferings and death of Christ atoneth for their sins" (Alma 22:14). Aaron is saying that fallen man can't be saved *of himself* — that is, by his own efforts unaided by God. With God's aid, however, fallen man can be saved from his sins.

Nephi the son of Helaman prophesied the destruction of wicked Nephites and then said, "I do not say that these things shall be, *of myself*, because it is not *of myself* that I know these things. But behold, I know that these things are true because the Lord God hath made them known unto me; therefore I testify that they shall be" (Helaman 7:29). Nephi couldn't prophesy these things *of himself* — that is, the prophecy came only through the aid of God.

King Benjamin uses this term twice in his speech from the tower as he emphasizes the limits of one's own efforts without the aid of the Lord. He begins by mentioning that he, on his own, is weak. He says, "I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I *of myself* am more than a mortal man" (Mosiah 2:10). He then attributes his successes as king to the aid of God, saying "[I] was

---

10. The term *of myself* appears to have basically this meaning in Alma 26:12, 29:9, 36:4–5 and 11; and 38:6; and 3Nephi 21:2 (see also John 7:17, 28; 8:28, 42; 10:18; 12:49; 14:10; and 2Corinthians 12:5). But it appears to be used in a few instances for different purposes. See, for example, 2 Nephi 25:6, where the term *I of myself* appears to mean *I myself*; 3Nephi 5:19, where *of myself* appears to mean *about myself*; and Alma 5:46 and 48; and 34:8 where *of myself* appears to mean *for myself*.

suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people and have been kept and preserved by *his matchless power*, to serve thee with all the might, mind, and strength *which the Lord has granted unto me*" (Mosiah 2:11).

King Benjamin soon explains that his people likewise rely on God, basically for everything. His explanation includes this question and answer: "And now I ask: Can ye say aught *of yourselves*? I answer you: Nay" (Mosiah 2:25). As King Benjamin explains, this need for God's aid is most relevant in our quest for redemption. He continues, "If ye have known of his [God's] goodness and have tasted of his love and have received a remission of your sins, … even so I would that ye should remember and always retain in remembrance the greatness of God and your own nothingness" (Mosiah 4:11). He then promises, "If ye do this, ye shall always rejoice and be filled with the love of God and always retain a remission of your sins" (Mosiah 4:12). Nephi uses the word *glory* to express this rejoicing: "I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell" (2 Nephi 33:6).

The angel who calls Alma to repentance tells him that without the Lord's aid, he is headed for destruction. In one account, the angel says, "Go thy way and seek to destroy the church no more … and this even if thou wilt *of thyself* be cast off" (Mosiah 27:16). In a second account, Alma tells his son Helaman, "And he [the angel] said unto me: If thou wilt *of thyself* be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God. … And … when I heard the words, if thou wilt be destroyed *of thyself*, I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps that I should be destroyed that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more" (Alma 36:9, 11). Each account emphasizes the fact that without God's aid, Alma will be destroyed.

The father of that Alma, also named Alma, shares his intent to always remember God's aid after he received a remission of his own sins. He confesses, "I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord, which caused me a sore repentance" (Mosiah 23:9). He then notes that, even after this sore repentance, "I am unworthy to glory *of myself*" (Mosiah 23:11). When Alma says this, he has repented and has been forgiven, so according to King Benjamin, he has great cause to rejoice. But, like Nephi and Ammon, he glories (rejoices) in God's power, recognizing that he is unworthy to glory based only on what he, himself, has done. A repentant Alma who has been saved from his sins through the Atonement can speak of being "unworthy to glory" only because the term *of myself*

modifies the meaning of his words. The term *of myself* requires us to view his worthiness *without taking the Atonement into account*. Despite his redemption and the joy it has brought him, he remembers that on his own merits alone, he has no cause to rejoice.

Similarly, Omni, who speaks of being wicked *of himself*, may also have already received a remission of his sins. His term *of myself* modifies the meaning of his words about wickedness. Omni's statement that he is a wicked man may be true only because the term *of myself* requires us to view his wickedness *without taking the Atonement into account*. If so, Omni's words are true, not only for himself but also for each of us who has sinned and repented. Like Omni, we can say (and should always remember): "I *of myself* am wicked and unworthy" because on our own merits alone — without considering the grace of God — we are all unclean and unworthy.

It seems unlikely that Omni's brief entry on the sacred plates was intended to brand himself as an unrepentant sinner. It needn't be read with that meaning. It seems more likely that the specific words he selected indirectly reflect repentance and a humble gratitude for God's redeeming power. If so, his words align well not only with the words of Ammon, both Almas, and King Benjamin, but also with Nephi's commandments about keeping the small-plate record and with Mormon's statement that Omni was a prophet (see Words of Mormon 1:3).

The Book of Mormon contains confessions of other prophets that are similar to those of Omni and Alma. Omni could have read two of these other confessions in Nephi's small-plate record. Shortly after the death of Lehi, Nephi laments his iniquities: "O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh. My soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about because of the temptations and the sins which doth so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins" (2 Nephi 4:17–19). Similarly, Isaiah responds to a heavenly vision by acknowledging his sinful condition saying, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (2 Nephi 16:5). Omni's few words may allude to very similar sentiments.

Other similar confessions are found in other scriptures. At the time of Peter's calling to the ministry, after his nets are miraculously filled with fish, he falls down at the Savior's feet and says, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Similarly, Joseph Smith, as he describes his vision in the sacred grove, mentions crying for mercy and receiving

forgiveness.[11] Later, Joseph Smith confesses to having been led "into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God" (Joseph Smith — History 1:28).

Each of these men, whose words and feelings appear somewhat similar to those expressed by Omni, either was or soon became a prophet of God. Indeed, each of these men expresses these feelings near the beginning of an important ministry. It's plausible that Omni's words, which appear to be part of his initial entry on the plates, evince similar penitent humility as he places his imperfect but important engravings onto these plates. Of course, these words of other prophets that acknowledge their sinful natures don't prove that Omni was also a prophet. They do, however, confirm that this passage could reflect the feelings of a humbly penitent prophet.

Omni's grandfather Enos also begins his record acknowledging a need for repentance. Enos, however, then adds his conversion story. If Omni also repented of his sins, it may seem odd that he doesn't share his redemptive story more clearly. We, his readers, would have appreciated the clarification, but Omni's brief account can leave us wondering. In this respect, his account is somewhat similar to that of Luke, who quotes Peter's self-description as "a sinful man" without following it with an obvious redemptive story. Luke merely tells us, "And Jesus said unto Simon [Peter], Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him" (Luke 5:10–11). We are left to infer Peter's repentance from his obedient actions.

Perhaps Omni's later words imply a similar story. After Omni has kept the small plates for about 40 years (compare Jarom 1:13–15 with Omni 1:3), he ends his brief record by telling us, "I had kept these plates according to the commandments of my fathers, and I conferred them upon my son Amaron. And I make an end" (Omni 1:3). These few words humbly testify of Omni's obedience to Nephi's commandments. This obedience may suggest that he not only confessed but also forsook his sins and served faithfully for decades as a prophet to his people while keeping the plates according to the commandments of his fathers. Omni's few words may be too ambiguous to affirm a prophetic calling, but they can be read to be in harmony with the words of Nephi (see 1 Nephi 19:4) and Mormon that suggest such a calling.[12]

---

11. See "History, circa Summer 1832," p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 26, 2019, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/1.

12. But see Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants," 56, suggesting that Omni had no religious calling.

A few of Omni's other words are also worth mentioning. Omni begins his record much like his father did, saying he was commanded by his father to "write somewhat upon these plates to preserve our genealogy" (Omni 1:1). It has been suggested that the word *genealogy* in this charge implies a misunderstanding of Nephi's commandments.[13] Omni's words, however, indicate that he, like his father Jarom, who also used this word, fully understood and kept Nephi's commandments. The word *genealogy* appears to fit quite well with Nephi's commandments. A genealogy is "an account of one's descent from an ancestor or ancestors, by enumeration of the intermediate persons."[14] A sacred record passed "from one generation to another or from one prophet to another" that includes at least a brief note designating the family relationship of each successor to his predecessor can certainly be called a genealogy. To keep Nephi's commandments, it was important to record this chain of custody. Doing so necessarily creates a genealogy. Omni's brief words, however, are not limited to such information.

After noting that he was commanded to make a small entry on the plates, Omni mentions that he helped preserve his people from falling into the hands of the Lamanites by fighting with the sword (see Omni 1:2). Although writings on the small plates were not to focus on war (see 1 Nephi 9:4), Nephi's commandments allow such historical matters to be mentioned (see 1 Nephi 9:2 and 19:4 and Jacob 1:2). Indeed, every writer on the small plates from Nephi through Amaleki (except only Chemish) mentions war (see 2 Nephi 5:34; Jacob 7:24–25; Enos 1:24; Jarom 1:13; and Omni 1:2–3, 5–7, 10, and 24). War was a recurring fact of life for these men. Only three of them, Nephi, Omni, and Abinadom, are described as personally fighting with the sword (see Jacob 1:10 and Omni 1:2 and 10), but it's possible, perhaps likely, that others also fought.

The Book of Mormon gives us little reason to infer hardness or wickedness from the fact that someone uses the sword to protect his people. While war can harden some men, it can cause others to "humble themselves before God, even in the depths of humility" (Alma 62:41). Indeed, some of the greatest men in the Book of Mormon protected their people with the sword, including Nephi the son of Lehi, King Benjamin, Alma the son of Alma, Captain Moroni, Helaman, Gidgiddoni, Mormon,

---

13. See Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants," 57, and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 26.

14. OED Online, s.v. "genealogy, n.", at sense 1.a., September 2019, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77484?redirectedFrom=genealogy.

and Moroni, (see Jacob 1:10; Words of Mormon 1:3; Alma 2:31, 43:16–17, and 53:22; 3 Nephi 6:6; and Mormon 2:1 and 6:12).

Finally, it's easy to imagine the destructive steps the adversary might have attempted if an unrepentant wicked man had gained decades-long access to these sacred plates (see 2 Nephi 26:17, Enos 1:14, and Mormon 6:6). Omni's words needn't be read to suggest such a scenario. If we acknowledge that Omni's confession signals repentance, his words are readily reconciled with those of Mormon, who assures us of a continuous chain of custody by men of God. Had Omni transgressed God's commandments while these plates were in his care, further Book of Mormon context suggests that God would have taken them from him (see Alma 37:14–16; see also Doctrine and Covenants 3:5–11).

Context Suggests that Abinadom's Words are Often Misunderstood

Abinadom, the grandson of Omni, inscribes only 96 words onto the small plates:

> Behold, I Abinadom am the son of Chemish. Behold, it came to pass that I saw much war and contention between my people the Nephites and the Lamanites. And I with mine own sword have taken the lives of many of the Lamanites in the defense of my brethren. And behold, the record of this people is engraven upon plates, which is had by the kings according to the generations. *And I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy.* Wherefore that which is sufficient is written. And I make an end. (Omni 1:10–11)

These words have left some students of the Book of Mormon wondering about Abinadom's experience with or even belief in ongoing prophecy and revelation.[15] Nevertheless, important contextual

---

15. See England, "Benjamin," suggesting that these words imply "a haunting commentary on his [Abinadom's] nation's spiritual decline;" Thompson, "The Doctrine," suggesting that they show "that the work of the Holy Spirit among the Nephites had fallen away;" Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants," 56–57, suggesting that Abinadom had no religious calling and was not a prophet; Gardner, *Second Witness*, 44, suggesting that Abinadom had no new revelations to record and did not focus on spiritual things; and Sperry, "Compendium," suggesting that Abinadom knew of no additional revelation or prophecy to be written. See also Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 111, 113, which leaves Abinadom's worthiness as an open question but assumes he either knows of no new revelation or considers new revelation to be unimportant.

information in Amaleki's account indicates that Abinadom was aware of and obeyed many prophecies and revelations.

Abinadom, like his ancestors before him, was charged with the task of recording on the small plates of Nephi the "heads" of any "preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying," touching upon them "as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake and for the sake of our people" (Jacob 1:4). However, every account on the small plates before that of Abinadom is shorter than the preceding one. Because the room on the small plates had diminished, Abinadom was faced with the dilemma of how to preserve the revelation and prophecy of his day without filling up the small plates. His words, though sometimes misunderstood, suggest how he resolved this dilemma. He complied with Nephi's commandment but did not specifically mention this commandment in his brief account. Before we return to his words, we will look ahead at how his son Amaleki solved a similar dilemma in his day. Amaleki's lengthier account provides much of the context needed to clarify Abinadom's words.

Amaleki, the last writer on the small plates, closed the small-plate record, so he knew he wasn't filling precious space that might be needed by a subsequent prophet. His record, while brief, is longer than the combined records of Omni, Amaron, Chemish, and Abinadom. Amaleki had no descendant to receive the small plates. He knew, however, that King Benjamin, who was charged with keeping the other, large plates, was "a just man before the Lord" (Omni 1:25), so he planned to deliver the small plates to King Benjamin, a worthy prophet.

Before turning the small plates over to King Benjamin, Amaleki filled the remaining space on the small plates with an account replete with revelations, prophesies, and sacred events. Providentially, Amaleki's relatively lengthy account describes how his father, Abinadom, was obedient to many important revelations.

Amaleki tells us he "was born in the days of Mosiah" (Omni 1:23). This means that Amaleki and Mosiah's son Benjamin (who became king) were contemporaries — both were born in the days of Mosiah. It also means their fathers, Abinadom and King Mosiah, were contemporaries.

Amaleki's account of the journey of Mosiah's people to the land of Zarahemla (and subsequent events) is written in the third person after a first-person introductory comment by Amaleki (see Omni 1:12–22). Amaleki mentions his own birth afterwards as he begins his first-person narrative that follows his third-person account of those events. The fact that Amaleki's third-person account doesn't include himself as

a participant in those events, together with the fact that Amaleki refers to his own birth and begins a first-person narrative only after his account of those events, likely suggests that Amaleki was born in the land of Zarahemla after those events had taken place.[16] At the very least, since Abinadom and King Mosiah were contemporaries, Amaleki's account describes many events that took place while Abinadom was an adult.

It therefore appears that Abinadom, like King Mosiah, was an adult when "as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord" (Omni 1:12) left the land of Nephi and went into the wilderness, where "they were led by many preachings and prophesyings, and they were admonished continually by the word of God, and they were led by the power of his arm through the wilderness, until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:13). So as we read Abinadom's brief account, we can read it with the realization that Abinadom hearkened to the voice of the Lord and was obedient to many prophecies and revelations received in his day.

Because Amaleki's account confirms that Abinadom knew of — and obeyed — many revelations and prophesies received in his day, Abinadom's reference to the record "engraven upon plates, which is had by the kings according to the generations" (Omni 1:11) takes on new importance. Just as Abinadom's son Amaleki would rely on King Benjamin to include the future spiritual history of the Nephites on those large plates, Abinadom apparently had personal knowledge that King Mosiah's large-plate record adequately accounted for all revelations and prophecies received in his day.[17]

The space on the small plates, however, was limited, so Abinadom's brief small-plate account doesn't repeat any of these revelations and prophesies. Instead, Abinadom's brief account testifies that all the many prophecies and revelations he has known are duly recorded on the large plates. He says, "The record of this people is engraven upon plates, which is had by the kings according to the generations. And I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy. Wherefore that which is sufficient is written" (Omni 1:11). We don't have direct access to the

---

16. Similar analysis suggests that Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, was with Paul at certain times (see Acts 16:10–18, 20:4–21:19, and 27:1–28:30) and that Alma the younger was born (or somehow became of age) shortly after his father's people escaped from the land of Helam (see Alma 5:5).

17. But see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 44, suggesting that Abinadom was isolated from political power and that his knowledge of the large-plate record would have been based only on the common knowledge at the time.

records engraved upon those plates, but Abinadom is certain that all of the many revelations and prophesies that affected his life are sufficiently recorded there. Like Nephi, Abinadom may have assumed his readers would also have access to the large-plate record (see 1 Nephi 6:1).

Both King Mosiah and Abinadom were record keepers. Abinadom kept the small plates of Nephi, while Mosiah kept the large plates. Their sons became sufficiently acquainted with each other for Amaleki to know that King Benjamin was "a just man before the Lord" (Omni 1:25) and for King Benjamin to accept the small plates from Amaleki. Although Mosiah was in charge of the large plates, it's not clear that he always wrote on them personally. Three generations earlier, Jarom had noted that the large plates contained "the writings of the kings, or that which they caused to be written" (Jarom 1:14). It may be that the practice of sometimes delegating to others the actual work of engraving on plates continued in Abinadom's day. If so, it's not out of the question that Abinadom, who had the requisite skills and apparently had access to the large plates, had some role in engraving a portion or all of the record kept by the kings about revelations received in his day.

With this possibility in mind, it's interesting to note that the portion of Amaleki's account preceding the account of his birth is not only written in the third person but also is an account about the reign of a king. Given these facts, one might speculate an interesting provenance for this portion of Amaleki's small-plate record. Amaleki might have chosen to include in his small-plate record an abridgment of the portion of the large-plate record (the record of the reigns of kings) that covered the days of his father Abinadom (which were similar to the days of King Mosiah). He may have done so specifically to verify the righteousness inherent in his father's brief account. This would suggest that Amaleki, like his father, had access to the large-plate record. The large-plate source for the record Amaleki added to the small plates could be the very record that Abinadom assures us can be found on the large plates. There is even a chance this large-plate record was engraved onto those plates by Abinadom. So this could plausibly be Amaleki's abridgment of the large-plate record made by his father.[18]

In any event, Amaleki's account of events that occurred while his father Abinadom was an adult helps to clarify that Abinadom was very much aware of and valued "many preachings and prophesyings."

---

18. For similar analysis identifying Nephi's abridgment of Lehi's record, see Clifford P. Jones, "The Record of My Father," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019):19–26.

Abinadom and other obedient subjects of Mosiah were "admonished continually by the word of God, and they were led by the power of his arm" (Omni 1:13). Indeed, Abinadom, a prophet of God, probably participated in the preaching, prophesying, and admonishing.

The Small Plates Contained a Brief, Selectively Written, Carefully Safeguarded Record

The greater context of the Book of Mormon harmonizes better with an understanding that Omni, Abinadom, and the other writers of the book of Omni were prophets than with the assumption that they were not devout disciples of Jesus Christ. The Lord knew from the beginning that the small-plate record, including their words, would become the first part of the Book of Mormon (see Doctrine and Covenants 10). It would appear the Lord's plan for these plates required a relatively small record with its few words focused on sacred things. This is basically how Mormon describes the completed small-plate record (see Words of Mormon 1:3–6). Nephi's record indicates that the Lord commanded him to make the small plates before telling him about the special, limited record they would contain. Nephi says:

> And after that I made these plates by way of commandment, I Nephi received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies — the more plain and precious parts of them — should be written upon these plates, and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, which should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord. (1 Nephi 19:3)

Presumably, the first commandment mentioned here, the commandment to make these plates, like the commandment to build a ship (see 1 Nephi 17:8), was as specific and detailed as necessary to accomplish the Lord's purposes. Nephi's own writings on these small plates and the words of those who later wrote on these plates were limited (by the second commandment mentioned here) to the "more plain and precious parts of" "the ministry and the prophecies."

Nephi included all his father's record in his other book, the large plates of Nephi, but included only an abridgment of that record on the small plates. Early in his small-plate record, as Nephi explains his choice to omit some of his father's words, he implies that this smaller set of plates had a finite, limited amount of room. He chooses not to include his father's words on these plates, "for *I desire the room* that I may write

the things of God" (1 Nephi 6:3). If these plates, like the large plates, were designed to grow to accommodate more writing over time, Nephi would not have needed to conserve "the room" on the plates.

Because Nephi's writings on the small plates are so much longer than those of his successors, we may think Nephi was unaffected by the smallness of the plates. However, near the end of his record, he acknowledges a need to limit his own record:

> And now I Nephi make an end of my prophesying unto you, my beloved brethren. And I cannot write but a few things which I know must surely come to pass, neither can I write but a few of the words of my brother Jacob. Wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me, save it be a few words which I must speak concerning the doctrine of Christ. (1 Nephi 31:1–2)

These words suggest that the smallness of these plates constrained even Nephi's relatively long entry. Nephi's commandments to his successors reflect both the continuing need to carefully consider the content of the plates and the importance of maintaining a prophetic chain of custody to safeguard the record. Nephi commanded his people to hand "these plates" (the special small-plate record on which he is writing)[19] down "from one generation to another or *from one prophet to another* until further commandments of the Lord" (1 Nephi 19:4). Some students of the Book of Mormon, perhaps believing the words of Omni

---

19. Noel Reynolds has suggested that, in 1 Nephi 19:4, the term *these plates* refers to the large plates of Nephi. (See Noel B. Reynolds, "On Doubting Nephi's Break Between 1 and 2 Nephi: A Critique of Joseph Spencer's An Other Testament: On Typology," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 92–93, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/on-doubting-nephis-break-between-1-and-2-nephi-a-critique-of-joseph-spencers-an-other-testament-on-typology/.) There appears to be better support in the context for the conclusion that this term, used six times across this passage (see 1 Nephi 19:1–5), refers consistently to the small plates — the plates on which Nephi is writing at the time — and that, in this passage, Nephi consistently uses other terms to refer to the large plates — including *the plates which I made*, *those first plates of which I have spoken*, *the first plates*, and *the other plates*. This same consistency is found in an earlier passage (1 Nephi 9:1 through 1 Nephi 10:1). Compare especially the use of the terms *the other plates* and *these plates* in 1 Nephi 9:4 and 1 Nephi 19:4. That earlier passage also refers to the large-plate record as "an account of the reign of the kings." This description of the large-plate record suggests that it is to be kept and passed down, not from prophet to prophet, but from king to king (while the Nephites are governed by kings). This idea finds support in Words of Mormon 1:10, Jarom 1:14, and Omni 1:11. Compare Words of Mormon 1:3.

and Abinadom indicate that the small plates were not handed down from one prophet to another, have construed this commandment as an either-or proposition that doesn't mandate prophetic succession.

It appears, however, that Nephi is commanding his people to pass these plates only from prophet to prophet. This reading harmonizes much better with the reason for the commandment. Both the Lord and Nephi commanded that this unique record focus on prophecies and related spiritual matters (see 1 Nephi 9:3, 19:3, and Jacob 1:1–4). A record always kept by prophets stands the best chance of being focused on such matters. Although the words of Omni and Abinadom are sometimes misconstrued, it appears, both from Mormon's words about these plates and from the words written thereon, that these plates were in fact always kept by prophets.

The intended meaning of this passage (1 Nephi 19:4) depends in part on the intended meaning of the word *or*. This word can be used "to coordinate two (or more) sentence elements between which there is an alternative."[20] It can also be used "connecting two [terms] denoting the same thing."[21] If Nephi's commandment presents alternatives, he is describing two different options, generational succession or prophetic succession, either of which would suffice. If his commandment connects two similar terms, he is using the two terms jointly to denote one thing — prophetic succession.

Nephi sometimes uses the word *or* to present two different options. For instance, he explains that people in Jerusalem "must repent *or* the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed" (1 Nephi 1:4). Similarly, he says that "the final state of the soul of man is to dwell in the kingdom of God *or* to be cast out" (1 Nephi 15:35). He explains that the house of Israel will be scattered among all nations "sooner *or* later" (1 Nephi 22:3). In each of these cases, the word *or* indicates alternate possibilities. (See other examples in 1 Nephi 11:15; 13:20; 14:4; 15:31, 35; and 2 Nephi 9:23; 10:23; and 28:19.)

Nephi also uses the word *or* to connect two similar terms that jointly denote only one thing. For instance, he ends the introduction to his first book by saying, "This is according to the account of Nephi, *or* in other words, I Nephi wrote this record." Later, he quotes Lehi, who says, "I have dreamed a dream, *or* in other words, I have seen a vision" (1 Nephi 8:2). In a similar passage, he refers again to Lehi's "dream *or* vision" (1 Nephi 8:36). "Similarly, Nephi refers to Jesus Christ as "a Messiah, *or* in other words, a Savior of the world" (1 Nephi 10:4), and later as "this

---

20. OED Online, s.v. "or, conj.1" at sense 1, September 2019, https://bit. ly/34EMckr.

21. Ibid, at sense 4a.

Messiah of which he [Lehi] hath spoken, *or* this Redeemer of the world" (1 Nephi 10:5). In each instance, the word *or* connects two similar terms to denote just one thing. In most instances, the second term provides additional information so that the joint meaning is more definitive than that of the first term alone. (See other examples in 1 Nephi 10:14; 14:23; 15:17, 20; 17:41; 19:4; and 2 Nephi 4:34; 5:12; 27:1; and 28:31.)

In some instances, the second term in a joint description provides essential clarification that avoids confusion that might have occurred had the first term been used alone. For example, Nephi says, "[The Lord] shall be rejected of the Jews *or* of the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 15:17). This pair of terms connected with the word *or* indicates that Nephi's term *the Jews* refers not just to the descendants of Judah or to the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah but to all the house of Israel, whose scattered remnants will reject the Savior. In a very similar passage, Nephi follows this pattern again with the same terms: "[Isaiah] spake concerning the restoration of the Jews *or* of the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 15:20). In each of these instances, the second term adds crucial meaning that would be missing with only the first term. The use of the second term clarifies the fact that the term *the Jews* is intended to describe the entire house of Israel. This broad meaning of the term *the Jews*, somewhat unusual in our day, isn't limited to these two passages. Nephi also uses the term *the Jews* to refer to the entire house of Israel in 1 Nephi 3:3; 13:23, 39–42; and 2 Nephi 9:2).

It appears that in 1 Nephi 19:4, the verse we are considering, Nephi again uses the word *or* to connect two similar terms that describe only one thing, and again the second term provides essential clarification that avoids confusion that might exist had the first term been used alone. In this verse, Nephi is saying in essence, "that these plates [the small plates] should be handed down from one generation to another or [in other words] from one prophet to another until further commandment from the Lord." The intended similarity between these two terms, like the similarity between the terms *the Jews* and *the house of Israel*, isn't apparent at first glance. It becomes clearer as we review other Book of Mormon passages. In several other passages, the context indicates that the terms *from one generation to another* and *from generation to generation* refer to prophetic succession rather than succession from father to son (see, for example, 2 Nephi 9:2; Mosiah 28:14, 20; Alma 37:4 and 63:13; and 4 Nephi 1:48). In 1 Nephi 19:4, the word *or* appears to provide similar context by connecting these two terms. This meaning is consistent with the content Mormon found on these plates.

Nephi's commandment to Jacob, set forth at the very beginning of Jacob's record, repeats both that the limited contents of this record should be focused on spiritual things and that the record is to be preserved across the generations by trustworthy men:

> Nephi gave me Jacob a commandment concerning *these small plates* upon which these things are engraven. And he gave me Jacob a commandment that I should write upon these plates *a few* of the things which I considered to be *most precious*, that I should not touch save it were lightly concerning the history of this people, which are called the people of Nephi. For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed from generation to generation. And if there were *preaching which were sacred*, or *revelation which was great*, or *prophesying*,[22] that I should engraven *the heads of them* upon these plates and *touch upon them as much as it were possible*, for Christ's sake and for the sake of our people. (Jacob 1:1–4)

Jacob's restatement of the commandment to preserve the plates from generation to generation doesn't repeat the more specific language about passing them from prophet to prophet. Perhaps Jacob doesn't feel the need to repeat this clarification, which already appears on these plates in Nephi's initial commandment. Perhaps, as in other passages cited above, Jacob considers the term *from generation to generation* to imply passage from prophet to prophet. In any event, Jacob and his descendants who kept these plates consistently refer to plural *commandments* of their fathers, suggesting that they viewed these commandments jointly. Mormon's words in Words of Mormon 1:1–3 indicate that the practice of Jacob and his descendants was to pass this prophecy-focused record from prophet to prophet.

This commandment also indicates that writings on these plates need to conform to the small size of the plates. These small plates weren't intended even for all preaching or revelation but only "preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying." And even then, only

---

22. It appears Nephi uses the word *or* here to list three different types of information, the heads (chief or principal points) of which are to be touched upon as much as may be possible (given the small size of the plates).

the "heads" of them (the chief or principal points)[23] should be engraved on these plates. Jacob adds that these most important points should be touched upon "as much as it were possible." These words, including their subjunctive mood, suggest full elaboration might not always be possible.

Jacob's small-plate record is substantially shorter than Nephi's. This doesn't necessarily mean Jacob was less of a prophet than Nephi, or that he had fewer important things to say. Jacob's primary ministry was to speak the word of God to his people (see Jacob 4:1), but he also labored to "write a few words upon plates" (Jacob 4:2) to benefit future generations. Nothing in the small-plate record suggests it is the sole plate-based record kept by Jacob or his successors. Multiple records were kept at other times (see, for example, 3 Nephi 5:9–10). The writing skills of these men may suggest they also kept other records. Jacob suggests that because of the small-plate size limitations, some of the proceedings of the people that might otherwise be appropriate for the small plates were written on the large plates. He says, "A hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, which now began to be numerous, cannot be written upon these plates; but many of their proceedings are written upon the larger plates" (Jacob 3:13). Jacob then continues with words about writing *upon plates* that aren't necessarily limited to *these plates* (the small plates). He says, "We can write a few words *upon plates*, which will give our children and also our beloved brethren a small degree of knowledge concerning us or concerning their fathers. Now in this thing we do rejoice, and we labor diligently to engraven these words *upon plates*, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them with thankful hearts" (Jacob 4:2–3).

In addition to any other records they may have kept, Jacob and his descendants were commanded to keep the small-plate record, but they were commanded to keep things brief and to write down only the extraordinary. They were obedient to Nephi's commandments and carefully selected the few words they added to this record. Shorter small-plate records don't devalue these men as instruments in the Lord's hands. We should resist the temptation to assume less zeal on the part of those with shorter small-plate records — especially shorter records that suggest obedience to Nephi's commandments. These commandments are a mandate not only to write but also to make difficult, inspired choices to limit each account in furtherance of the Lord's wise purposes. The limiting smallness of the plates is mentioned repeatedly by Jacob

23. OED Online, s.v. "head, n.1", at sense 30, September 2019, https://bit.ly/2EXmFHP.

(see Jacob 4:2 and 7:27) and by several of his successors (see Jarom 1:2, 14, and Omni 1:4, 9).[24]

Jacob, Enos, and Jarom were Prophets

Prophetic succession prior to the book of Omni provides additional context for the words of the writers of Omni. Jacob was the first prophet selected by Nephi to preserve the small-plate record. Jacob's spirituality and status as a prophet are clear even in Nephi's own record, five chapters of which are devoted to Jacob's teachings (see 2 Nephi chapters 6–10). In addition, Nephi confirms that Jacob, like Nephi, has seen the Lord (see 2 Nephi 11:3).

Near the end of Jacob's life, he handed the small-plate record down to his son Enos and charged him to keep it according to Nephi's commandments. Some of Jacob's final words corroborate his earlier words about the brevity of the record he kept in compliance with Nephi's commandment (see Jacob 7:27). The small-plate record of Enos is much smaller than that of Jacob. His record includes some but clearly not all of the revelations received by himself and other prophets in his days (see Enos 1:5–19, 21–23, and 26). The limitations caused by the small size of the plates became more acute as the plates filled up. An estimate based on the length of the English translation indicates that Nephi filled about 81% of the small plates with 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi. Jacob and Enos combined to fill another 16% of the plates, leaving only about 3% (about six pages of English text) to be shared among Jarom and all successors.

Limited space on the plates was an important consideration for Jarom. He begins his account saying, "I Jarom write a few words" and then continues with a reference to the commandment passed on to him by his father Enos, "according to the commandment of my father Enos, that our genealogy may be kept" (Jarom 1:1). It has been suggested that the use of the word *genealogy* in this charge implies a disappointing change in course.[25] As mentioned earlier, obedience to Nephi's commandments required each author to add at least a brief message to verify that the record had passed to the prophet of the next generation. The series of such messages was indeed a genealogy.

At the same time, Jarom's few words clarify that he understood Nephi's commandments entailed more than merely mentioning family

---

24. But see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 27, suggesting more plates might have been added but for a lack of resources.

25. See Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants," 57, and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 26.

relationships.[26] "And as these plates are small and as these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites, wherefore it must needs be that I write a little" (Jarom 1:2). Even though Jarom had prophesied and received revelations for his people, he shares only the fact that revelations continue in his day. He says, "I shall not write the things of my prophesying nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written, for have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you: Yea; and this sufficeth me" (Jarom 1:2). In this choice not to detail his own prophecies, Jarom is like his father Enos, who, after recording the revelatory experience by which he received a remission of his sins, repeatedly mentions his further preaching and prophesying (see Enos 1:23, 26) but doesn't fill the small plates with these prophecies.

The word *sufficeth* means "to be enough for; to meet the desires, needs, or requirements of (a person); to satisfy."[27] In light of Jarom's multiple references to the smallness of the plates and the few words he could add, his use of the word *sufficeth* appears to indicate that under the circumstances, he feels his short entry, together with the words of his predecessors, would be sufficient. As mentioned earlier, Nephi uses the same word with similar intent (see 1 Nephi 31:1–2). This word also applies when records are limited for other good reasons (see 1 Nephi 14:28 and Ether 3:17).

The choices of Enos and Jarom not to record all their prophecies onto these particular plates needn't suggest that the spirit of the Lord was waning among the Nephites.[28] Nephi's commandment limits writings on these plates to the judicious mention of "preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great" (Jacob 1:4). Jarom's writings appear tailored to meet that requirement.

Jarom approvingly refers his readers to the "other plates of Nephi," which were kept pursuant to Nephi's commandment (see 1 Nephi 19:4) and which were not required to remain small. Jarom tells us that on those plates "the records of our wars are engraven according to the writings of the kings, or those which they caused to be written" (Jarom 1:14). This reference to the other plates of Nephi may suggest that Jarom was aware of their contents. The righteous kings of his day invited others to write on those plates. We can't rule out the possibility that Jarom and his descendants, who clearly had the requisite skills, may have left records on those other plates.

---

26. But see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 26.

27. OED Online, s.v. "suffice, v.", at sense 5.a, September 2019, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/193537?redirectedFrom=suffice.

28. But see Thompson, "The Doctrine," 108.

It has been implied that Jarom's reference to writings about wars on the large plates suggests Jarom's lack of spirituality,[29] but it seems at least as likely that this reference points to a spiritual message on the large plates. Jarom has told us earlier that "our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord; wherefore, we withstood the Lamanites and swept them away out of our lands" (Jarom 1:7). The writings of these kings (or those who wrote for them) likely clarified how faith led to success in battle.

Indeed, the righteousness of Nephite kings during the small-plate period provides helpful context for the efforts of the small-plate authors. We no longer have the large-plate record of the Nephite kings during this period, but we can piece together some information about them from the limited small-plate record. We don't know how many kings served across the seven generations of Jacob's line during the small-plate period, but none of these kings are described in the small-plate record as unrighteous.[30] As noted earlier, Jarom says, "Our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord" (Jarom 1:7). His use of the plural word *kings* identifies at least two righteous kings, perhaps more. Two more righteous kings, the first King Mosiah and King Benjamin, are mentioned by Amaleki, the final writer on the small plates. Thus, while the record is silent about some kings, we know that at least four were righteous. The one consistent fact we have about all these kings is that the other record commissioned by Nephi, the large-plate record, was preserved across all their reigns.

At the end of Jarom's record, he passes the plates to his son Omni, still subject to Nephi's commandments: "I, Jarom, do not write more, for the plates are small. … And I deliver these plates into the hands of my son Omni, that they may be kept according to the commandments of my fathers" (Jarom 1:14–15). Jarom's reference to the commandments of

29. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 35.

30. During the reign of the king called Second Nephi, the people "began to grow hard in their hearts" (Jacob 1:15). Their hardness, however, doesn't require an unrighteous king any more than wickedness among the Nephites during the reigns of King Benjamin and King Mosiah (see Words of Mormon 1:15–18 and Mosiah chapters 26 and 27) suggests their unrighteousness. Jacob's limited record is almost silent and somewhat inconclusive about Second Nephi. Apparently, this king did nothing to prevent Jacob from preaching and prophesying, but Jacob doesn't mention any direct cooperation either. Near the end of Jacob's life, God helped the righteous Nephites conquer their enemies, perhaps under the leadership of a righteous king (see Jacob 7:25). Jacob's record says little about the king or kings of his day, but it doesn't clearly identify any king as unrighteous.

his fathers (plural) indicates that Jarom was well aware of and believed in honoring these commandments engraved onto the small-plate record (even if his own father's charge was somehow insufficient).

Jarom's small-plate record filled only about 1% of the small plates, but that left only 2% (fewer than four pages of English text) to be shared among all five subsequent writers. It appears that as a group, these five writers of the book of Omni kept the sacred plates for roughly 200 years. Each of the first four of these men (Omni, Amaron, Chemish, and Abinadom) adds a brief entry without knowing how many additional writers would need space on the plates. Their four combined records on these plates occupy just over one page of English text. We can assume the Lord was aware of and planned for the severe space restrictions on this particular set of plates, for which he had a specific long-term plan. His plan didn't require longer accounts from these men. Their main role was to preserve the record and pass it on, accounting for their links in a sacred chain of custody. Doing this honored Nephi's commandments.

The Accounts of Other Writers in the Book of Omni Also Honor Nephi's Commandments

We have already reviewed the words of Omni and Abinadom, two of the writers in the book of Omni. Amaron's brief small-plate message, which comes after that of Omni, recounts that the Lord visited the wicked among the Nephites in great judgment while delivering the righteous out of the hands of their enemies. Amaron states that this destruction and deliverance confirms prophecies made by his fathers. It appears that Amaron felt the available room on the plates allowed only this brief testimony of the Lord's justice and mercy. He records nothing about his own ministry to his people. His additional words tell us only that he "did deliver the plates unto my brother Chemish" (Omni 1:8). Amaron's brief message may be the ultimate example of keeping Nephi's commandment to touch as much as possible (given the limited space) on the most important points. Amaron appears to be keenly aware not only of Nephi's commandment to write but also his commandment to make difficult choices to keep the record small.

It should be added that the destruction of the wicked among the Nephites during the lifetime of Amaron doesn't tell us anything about the quality of the prophetic leadership at the time. Wicked Nephites were destroyed during the ministries of several great prophets, including Alma the son of Alma (see Alma chapter 16), Nephi the son of Helaman

(see Helaman chapter 4), Nephi the son of Nephi (see 3 Nephi chapter 8), and Mormon (see Mormon chapter 6).

Despite Amaron's apparent effort to write according to Nephi's commandments, Amaron is the first writer on the small plates who doesn't expressly acknowledge obedience to Nephi's commandments. It appears that Amaron's brother Chemish, realizing this omission, does his best to rectify it in his own brief small-plate entry. Chemish attests that he was a personal witness to what his brother wrote and asserts, in the first-person plural, that both he and his brother (we) kept the records in a manner that was "according to the commandments of our fathers" (Omni 1:9). This apparent brotherly assist is all Chemish inscribes onto the sacred plates.

Of course, our curiosity begs for more information about all the decades during which these men kept these plates. It appears, however, that each of these writers felt compelled, perhaps inspired, to write less than his predecessor on this set of plates to save space for future writers. Because the size of the small plates was fixed, more words from earlier writers would mean fewer words from Amaleki, whose brief but longer record provides us with essential information.[31] The brevity of earlier writers preserved precious space on which Amaleki shares his message. This brevity needn't suggest that Amaleki's predecessors were not interested in the spiritual theme of the small plates or that they disliked writing.[32] It's likely each exercised great restraint to comply with Nephi's commandments — leaving precious room on these plates to be well used generations later by an important "concluding speaker."

We have already discussed some of the words of Amaleki, the small-plate "concluding speaker." While his record covers many events, including events that happened before his birth, it shares very little about his own life. He doesn't mention his own revelations or prophecies, but he exhorts his readers to come unto Christ and be saved (see Omni 1:25–26). As mentioned earlier, Mormon's record suggests that all small-plate writers were prophets. In addition, Mormon's discussion about the reign of King Benjamin may allude to Amaleki's efforts as a prophet. Mormon

---

31. See Sperry, "Compendium," 273, 277; and England, "Benjamin."

32. But see Sperry, "Compendium," 273, 277, suggesting these men may not have enjoyed writing; and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 35, 44, suggesting that Jarom had plenty of space but that wars may have been more interesting to him and that the others before Amaleki had nothing to say. See also Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 111, which theorizes that the limited records may be due to a lack of spiritual preparation, a lack of effort, or perhaps a lack of space on the plates.

tells us multiple "prophets" and "holy men" helped King Benjamin overcome false prophets and teachers and establish peace in the land (see Words of Mormon 1:16–18). Because Mormon has already identified Amaleki as a prophet, it seems likely that Amaleki was among those who participated in this effort.

Conclusion

Nephi commanded that the small plates be handed down "from one prophet to another" (1 Nephi 19:4). Mormon confirms that this commandment was kept when he refers to Jacob's descendants who wrote on these plates as prophets (see Words of Mormon 1:3). The brief accounts left by Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki, when read in light of applicable scriptural context, support Mormon's statement that these men were prophets of God.

Clifford P. Jones *was born in New Mexico and grew up in small towns across the southwestern United States. He earned a BS in accounting from Brigham Young University and a JD with honors from J. Reuben Clark Law School. After practicing law for several years, he became an entrepreneur and businessman. His understanding of and love for the scriptures has come primarily through personal and family scripture study. He and his wife Sharon have four adult children and a growing contingent of grandchildren.*

An Approach to Isaiah Studies

Donald W. Parry

Review of Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-Five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016). 318 pages. $59.95 (hardback); $29.95 paperback.

Abstract: *This review makes a case, briefly, for the unmistakable presence of Jesus Christ in Isaiah's text, which case is based on a corpus linguistic-based description of the Hebrew Bible, equivalent designations of deific names, self-identification declarations by the Lord, and more. And, importantly, one can never set aside the multiple teachings and testimonies of our modern prophets and apostles regarding Isaiah's prophecies of Jesus Christ. Moreover, in my view, a knowledge of biblical Hebrew helps us to penetrate the very depths and heights of Isaiah's text.*

I have been invited to review Joseph Spencer's *The Vision of All*.[1] Before moving on to the review, I extend appreciation to Joseph Spencer for researching and writing a book that deals with Isaiah's text. Spencer and anyone who wholeheartedly seeks to understand Isaiah deserve sincere gratitude and due recognition.

Because the words of Isaiah are so important and expansive, any book about his prophecies — let alone a review of the same — can call to attention, in abbreviated terms, only a handful of factors. The book under review comprises 25 lectures (spanning 298 pages), a three-page bibliography, a one-page subject index, and an eight-page scripture index. Dealing only with Isaiah in 1 and 2 Nephi, its chapter titles include "Nephi's Vision," "The Nature of First Nephi," "Approaching Jacob on Isaiah," and "Nephi's Plain Prophecy."

---

1. I extend appreciation to three Brigham Young University professors for reading this review and for their helpful suggestions.

In my own personal view, Spencer's work presents certain challenges and problems, especially for Christians who maintain that Isaiah's text contains numerous Jesus Christ-focused elements. On this, see the section of this review titled "Searching for Jesus Christ in Isaiah's Text."

Because the chapters in Spencer's book were developed as informal lectures, their prose is consciously "chatty" (viii), pervasively using diction such as "cute beginning" (2), "here's the weird part" (4), "take a stab at Isaiah" (11), "yikes" (23, 116, 141, 237), and "ack" (58). This chatty approach, according to Spencer, has "forced [him] to leave off using footnotes and other distracting scholarly tools" (viii). Spencer's work, then, is admittedly not scholarly; he explains that the bibliography is the "only piece of scholarly apparatus in the whole volume" (viii). But even the bibliography lacks a scholarly comportment: titled "Resources Mentioned along the Way," it lacks dozens of bibliographic entries by scholars and writers who have investigated Isaiah's writings recorded in the Book of Mormon. I am concerned that these omissions may signify to some readers a disregard of previous works in particular or a disrespect for the normal academic process in general. *The Vision of All* may help some readers attain their objectives in trying to get through the Isaiah sections in the Book of Mormon; however, in my view, all readers deserve to know more about previously published insights and approaches and how Isaiah's ancient prophecies were understood and used by Nephi in the Book of Mormon.

Rather than reviewing *The Vision of All* by commenting on its contents line upon line, here a little and there a little, I accept the expansive invitation extended by the book's title to step back and reflect more widely on the long-developed artistry of conducting scholarship on the book of Isaiah. In my experience and considered opinion, academics (particularly those who belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) who intend to explicate Isaiah's text in books or media would do well to possess the following: (1) a comprehensive understanding of the doctrinal framework of the Restoration of the gospel (and acceptance of and compliance with its teachings), and (2) a heart open to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, the quintessential revelator and teacher.

Searching for Jesus Christ in Isaiah's Text

First and foremost, I wish to briefly (*briefly,* because this is a book review and not a scholarly article or monograph) make a case for the distinct presence of Jesus Christ in Isaiah's text. Spencer's understanding of finding Jesus Christ in Isaiah reveals much about his approach to Isaiah.

He writes, "Here it is, put far too strongly at first: *Stop looking for Jesus in Isaiah*" (33; emphasis in original), and "Now, let me be perfectly clear on something: Christ *is* there in Isaiah, I think" (34; emphasis). Note the uncertainty Spencer expresses with the words "I think." He also states, "Isaiah's chief purpose wasn't to predict the Messiah" (34); "When we start digging in Isaiah's writings for clear prophecies of Christ, we find relatively little that makes sense" (290); and "We should be looking first and foremost for the covenant as we read Isaiah, but a major part of the story of the covenant is the mission of the Messiah" (291). To more fully comprehend Spencer's understanding of Jesus in Isaiah's text, one must read these quotations in both their immediate and greater contexts (e.g., see 33–34, 64–65, 152, 160–61, 191, 193, 199–200, 203–7, and 290–91; see also his description of a Messiah, 204–7). Regarding Spencer's imperative to "*stop looking for Jesus in Isaiah*," I take an opposite view. I personally maintain that Jesus Christ (Jehovah) has the greatest character zone in Isaiah's text. Both thematic and linguistic (including corpus linguistic) studies of Isaiah sustain my view.

Above all, it is crucial to recognize that *Jehovah* is "the covenant and proper name of the God of Israel" and that Jehovah Himself is none other than "the premortal Jesus Christ."[2] Church authorities have affirmed the truth that Jesus Christ is Jehovah. President Gordon B. Hinckley stated in 2008, "Jesus was in very deed the great Jehovah of the Old Testament."[3] In 2017, President Russell M. Nelson implored, "Commence tonight to consecrate a portion of your time each week to studying *everything* Jesus said and did as recorded in the Old Testament, for He is the Jehovah of the Old Testament."[4] In "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles," written in 2000, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles asserted that Jesus Christ was "the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New."[5] There are many similar statements by other Church authorities. Those who accept the teaching that Jesus Christ's premortal name was *Jehovah* have a completely different view regarding the prominence of Jesus Christ in Isaiah's text.

---

2. See the Bible Dictionary in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible, "Jehovah," 710–11.

3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "We Testify of Jesus Christ," *Ensign* (March 2008), 4.

4. Russell M. Nelson, "Prophets, Leadership, and Divine Law," Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults, January 8, 2017, Brigham Young University, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/broadcasts/article/worldwide-devotionals/2017/01/prophets-leadership-and-divine-law?lang=eng.

5. "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles," *Ensign* (April 2000), 2.

A corpus linguistic–based description of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the Old Testament), based on the Leningrad Codex, demonstrates the prominence of the name *Jehovah* (specifically, the Tetragrammaton, or hwhy). In terms of frequency, the top six linguistic structures in the Hebrew Bible are function words, or discourse particles (function words in English include *a, all, an, and, as, at, be, but, by, for, from, he, her, I, in, it, no, not, of, on, or, she, so, than, that, the, their, this, to, up, we, what, which,* and *who*). These particles are located in the table below, together with the frequency of use of each particle and the percentage of words in the Hebrew Bible that each particle represents. For example, the conjunction ו (= "and") occurs 50,524 times in the Hebrew Bible and represents 11.68% of all words in the corpus. The definite article ה (= "the") occurs 31,244 times in the Hebrew Bible and, together with ו, signifies 18.90% of the total words.

High-Frequency Words in the Hebrew Bible — Lexical Forms

Hebrew (English)	Frequency	Percentages
ו (and)	50,524	1 word; 11.68% of total
ה (the)	31,244	2 words; 18.90% of total
ל (to, for)	20,322	3 words; 23.60% of total
ב (in, with)	15,608	4 words; 27.21% of total
את–1 (object marker)	10,980	5 words; 29.75% of total
מן (from)	7,594	6 words; 31.51% of total
יהוה (LORD)	6,828	7 words; 33.09% of total

Altogether, the top six linguistic structures in the Hebrew Bible comprise 31.51% of all words in that corpus. These various function words serve in utilitarian capacities in sentence structure. In contrast, content words have a major role in sentences, regardless of the text type or genre, by providing substance. Both function and content words are vital to a literary work, but content words provide considerably more meaning. Function and content words interact to make up an infinite number of expressions, which form sentences, paragraphs, and compositions.

The seventh structure in the Hebrew Bible in terms of frequency is also the first content word — none other than the name *Jehovah*[6]

---

6. Or, more precisely the Hebrew יהוה (YHWH). Space concerns do not permit me to explain more regarding the transliteration *Jehovah*.

(expressed as LORD in many English translations of the Bible); this particularly significant name is used more than 6,800 times in the Hebrew Bible. Jehovah is frequently referred to nominally, but more often He is pronominalized, meaning that Jehovah is very frequently the referent of inflectional elements (e.g., the affix of a verb, preposition, or noun); referential elements include possessive determiners (e.g., *your, his, my*), independent pronouns (e.g., *he, you, I*), and direct or indirect objects (e.g., *me, him*). Thus, linguistically, the name *Jehovah* is the most frequently occurring content word in the Hebrew Bible, and through pronominal forms, Jehovah possesses the most prominent character zone.

In Isaiah, Jehovah's topical apportionment is abundantly greater than any other topic, including Isaiah himself, the prophetess, kings, Zion, Israel, and the Abrahamic covenant (contrast Spencer, 4, 9, and elsewhere). Each reference to Jehovah belongs to a context that provides readers with awareness of His mission, character, or attributes. In Isaiah's text, Jehovah is referred to 450 times. Contrast this frequency with the occurrence of the following content words: *Isaiah* (16 times), *Abraham* (four times), *Hezekiah* (30 times), *Zion* (47 times), and *covenant* (12 times).

Other evidence demonstrates that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus Christ, including a number of equivalent designations of the Lord in the Old Testament that correspond with Jesus Christ in the New Testament. For example, the Lord of the Old Testament is designated Rock: "Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock" (Psalms 28:1). Jesus Christ is also denominated *Rock*: "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). Other equivalent designations include *King* (Psalms 10:16; Revelation 17:14), *Everlasting God* (Genesis 21:33; Romans 16:26), *I Am* (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58), *Savior* (Isaiah 43:3; 49:26; Titus 2:13), *God Is with Us (Immanuel)* (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23), and *Light* (Isaiah 60:19; John 1:9; 8:12). These designations (and others) provide straightforward affirmations that Jesus Christ is indeed the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

While Spencer examines Isaianic passages that many Christians interpret to refer to Jesus Christ, he attempts to diminish that interpretation. For example, he cites Isaiah 7:14 ("Behold a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel") and then remarks, "in context — both textual and historical — there's very little reason for seeing Isaiah's prophetic sign as referring to Jesus" (209). Spencer also cites Isaiah 9:6 ("For unto us a child is born! Unto us a son is given! And the government shall be upon his shoulder! And his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting

Father, the Prince of Peace!") and argues that Hezekiah is the fulfillment of this passage. "You see," Spencer summarizes, "it seems pretty clear in context that Isaiah's prophecy here is focused primarily on Ahaz's son Hezekiah. … It seems pretty clear he's got Hezekiah in mind" (211). But how does Spencer contend that the "Mighty God" (see the passage just cited, Isaiah 9:6) refers to Hezekiah rather than Jesus Christ? He cites two English translations that render "Mighty God" differently than does the King James Verson (i.e., "Hero Warrior" and "one Mighty in Valor"), but the translation "Mighty God" has both lexical[7] support and validation from multiple prominent translations. A knowledge of biblical Hebrew, with support from prominent lexicons, assists in comprehending the meaning of these passages.

Spencer also makes the following incredible claim: "Isaiah … likely wouldn't have understood any of this to point to Jesus" (212).

For multiple reasons, my understanding of Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6 is completely dissimilar to Spencer's. First, the apostle Matthew, using explicit and plain words, wrote that Isaiah 7:14 finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ:

> She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet [Isaiah], saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. (Matthew 1:21–23)

Second, with great clarity and with no hesitation, our modern prophets and apostles testify that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the prophecies in Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6. The following are representative statements:

> **President Gordon B. Hinckley**: "Jesus was in very deed the great Jehovah of the Old Testament, who left His Father's royal courts on high and condescended to come to earth as a babe born in the most humble circumstances. His birth was foretold centuries earlier by Isaiah, who declared prophetically, 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his

---

7. See, for example, Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Brill: Leiden, NLD, 2000), 172, which states, for גבור אל, "Messiah אל ג׳ Is 9$_5$ trad. God the heroic force."

name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6)."[8]

President Thomas S. Monson: "What did the holy prophets of old declare? Isaiah, more than 700 years before the birth of Christ, prophesied, 'Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.'"[9]

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: "Isaiah, a great prophet of the Old Testament, announced the coming birth of the Messiah. 'The Lord himself shall give you a sign,' he declared. 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14). Isaiah also declared: 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever' (Isaiah 9:6–7)."[10]

The First Presidency: "We rejoice with you in another wonderful Christmas season when with all Christendom we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Seeing ahead several centuries, the prophet Isaiah said: 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. … And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6)."[11]

Elder Russell M. Nelson: "Jesus was foreordained to be the promised Immanuel. Remember Isaiah's remarkable prophecy: 'The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold,

---

8. Hinckley, "We Testify of Jesus Christ," 4.

9. Thomas S. Monson, "What Is Christmas?" *Ensign* (December 1998), 4.

10. Dallin H. Oaks, "Prophetic Announcements of Christ's Birth," Christmas Broadcast, December 4, 2016, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/first-presidency-christmas-devotional/2016/12/prophetic-announcements-of-christs-birth?lang=eng.

11. The First Presidency, "First Presidency Christmas Greeting," *Liahona* (December 1988).

a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14). Fulfillment of that prophecy was not just unlikely, it was humanly impossible. Incredible! Everyone knew a virgin could not bear a child. And then for that child to be given such a pretentious name was doubly daring. The Hebrew name — the title of which Isaiah prophesied, *Immanuel* — literally means 'with us is God'! (See Isaiah 7:14, footnote.) That holy name was subsequently given to Jesus in the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants (see Matthew 1:23; 2 Nephi 17:14; D&C 128:22)."[12]

Elder Robert D. Hales: "Christ's coming was foretold for thousands of years. … About 700 years before His birth, Isaiah revealed the circumstances of His birth, life, and death: 'Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14). 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6)."[13]

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland: "What *is* known is that most of the 'greater views' of the gospel found in the teachings of the small plates of Nephi come from the personal declarations of these three great prophetic witnesses of the premortal Jesus Christ — Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah. These three doctrinal and visionary voices make clear at the very outset of the Book of Mormon why it is 'another testament of Jesus Christ.'"[14]

And such very clear statements can be multiplied. In my view, thematic elements in Isaiah 6–9 support the centuries-old Christian understanding that the prophecies in Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6 find fulfillment in Jesus Christ (non-Christians, of course, draw different conclusions). Themes to look for in Isaiah 7–8 include female titles,

---

12. Russell M. Nelson, "Jesus the Christ: Our Master and More," *Ensign* (April 2000), 9.

13. Robert D. Hales, "The Promise of Christmas," *Ensign* (December 2013), 17–18.

14. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 34.

conception, the child being a son, the naming of the son, the child's knowledge, the child before eight years old, land, kings, the role of the Lord, and the refrain "God is with us" (Hebrew: *Immanuel*). In addition, themes to look for in Isaiah 7–9 include the birth of a son, the naming ritual, oppression and the removal of oppression, old kings and the new king, destruction and peace in the land, God's control of history, and divine names. Again, a knowledge of biblical Hebrew makes Isaiah's thematic approaches more comprehensible.

Many Latter-day Saint interpretations of Isaiah's text are not unique to Latter-day Saints. Non-Latter-day-Saint Christians, too, interpret scores of Old Testament passages in light of Jesus Christ. As Biblical scholar Hulitt Gloer explains,

> The writers of the New Testament were convinced that the true meaning of the Old Testament is Jesus Christ and that He alone provides the means of understanding it. True interpretation of the Old Testament is achieved by reading Old Testament passages or incidents in light of the event of Christ. … For the early Christians, all Scripture was to be interpreted by the fact of Christ because it is to Him that the Old Testament Scripture points (John 5:39).[15]

Beyond equivalent designations of the Lord and a corpus linguistic description of the name Jehovah, the text of Isaiah refers or alludes to Jesus Christ (Jehovah) in multiple ways:

Names and titles of deity, including *King of Israel* (Isaiah 44:6), *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6), *Lord of Hosts* (Isaiah 54:5), *Redeemer* (Isaiah 49:7), *Savior* (Isaiah 43:3), *Lamb* (Isaiah 53:7), and *Salvation* (Isaiah 12:2)

- Isaianic allusions to the law of Moses, which focuses on Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:24; Alma 25:16; 34:14)
- Theophoric names (e.g., Eliakim, Hezekiah, Isaiah, Joah, Jotham, Uriah, and Uzziah)
- Isaianic references and allusions to ancient ordinances, rituals, and ceremonies, which symbolized Jesus Christ's divine mission and atoning sacrifice
- Prophecies of Christ

---

15. Hulitt Gloer, "Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament," in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler, et al. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 1047.

- Symbols (including metaphors, similes, and implications), types, and shadows of Christ
- Isaiah and his children (Isaiah 8:18)
- Prophetic or revelatory speech forms (i.e., "Thus saith the LORD," "Hearken to the word of the Lord," and "As the Lord liveth")
- The Lord's role in historical events (e.g., nations, kingdoms, and peoples, especially Israel)
- The Lord's role in future events, such as the judgments of the last days, the building and establishment of Zion, His second coming in power and glory, and His millennial reign.
- All of these and much more are set forth in Isaiah's writings.

Let us return, for a moment, to the topic of names and titles of deity (the first bulleted item in the list above). In several self-identification statements in Isaiah, the Lord himself asserts that He is our *Redeemer*; for example, "I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 41:14); "Thus saith the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 43:14); "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 44:6); "Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer" (Isaiah 44:24); "As for our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 47:4); "Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 48:17). See also Isaiah 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16.

Several self-identification declarations, again by the Lord, identify Him as the Savior, for example, "For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour" (Isaiah 43:3); "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour" (Isaiah 43:11); "There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me" (Isaiah 45:21); "And all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob" (Isaiah 49:26); "Thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob" (Isaiah 60:16). See also 45:15 and 63:8. These several declarations are completely transparent and unambiguous statements that reveal Jesus Christ — *the* Lord — to be our Savior and Redeemer. And once again, these statements signify additional evidence that Jesus Christ is indeed revealed in Isaiah's text.

Additionally, several New Testament passages make it clear that the Old Testament (including Isaiah's writings) reveals Jesus Christ:

- "To him [speaking of Jesus Christ] give all the prophets witness" (Acts 10:43).

- "A certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures. … This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord. … For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures [i.e., the Old Testament] that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:24–25, 28).

- "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth" (John 1:45).

- Three such New Testament passages were uttered by Jesus Christ himself! That is to say, Jesus Christ himself testified that the Old Testament scriptures pertained to him:

- "Search the scriptures [the Old Testament] … they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

- "All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44).

- "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he [Jesus] expounded unto them [his two disciples] in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Can the New Testament writers, and Jesus Christ himself, be any clearer?

All of the points presented in this section demonstrate that Isaiah's text is indeed Jesus Christ–focused. I therefore take a contrary view to Spencer, who advised, "Stop looking for Jesus in Isaiah" (33).

Other Matters

Finally, I wish to point out a few general issues that Isaiah scholars must address. With regard to textual variants (which Spencer discusses on pages 95–106 and 292–94), it is doubtful that biblical scholars can adequately conduct text-critical studies on Isaiah's writing recorded in the Book of Mormon.[16] Because the Book of Mormon is an English translation (i.e., we do not have access to the language of the brass plates),

---

16. My own view on this matter has evolved over many years as I continue to research, write, and publish in the field of text-critical studies.

word-to-word correspondences and lemmatizations are impossible. And synchronic/diachronic challenges yet remain. The text-critical approaches of Septuagint scholars Duhm, Klein, Koenig, Ottley, Seeligmann, Tov, Troxel, Ulrich, van der Kooij, and Ziegler underscore the difficulties of using a translation of Isaiah for text-critical purposes. As van der Kooij summarizes, "The text-critical value of LXX-Isaiah is limited because, due to its complexities, it is often difficult to say which Hebrew the Greek text might reflect."[17]

The manner in which Spencer deals with Isaianic authorship (21–24) and "the so-called third Isaiah" (22) reminds me of David Hackett Fischer's *Historians' Fallacies*,[18] especially his chapter titled "Fallacies of Factual Verification" (40–63). One of the fallacies he discusses is that of "negative proof," which "is an attempt to sustain a factual proposition merely by negative evidence. It occurs whenever a historian declares that 'there is no evidence that X is the case,' and then proceeds to affirm or assume that not-X is the case. … The only correct empirical procedure is to find affirmative evidence of not-X — which is often difficult."[19] Besides Spencer's other statements, he writes that the Book of Mormon "omits all of Third Isaiah, all of Isaiah 56–66" (22), and that "there's reason to think that the Book of Mormon wants us to believe that Isaiah 56–66 was in fact missing from the brass plates" (22). But the absence of Isaiah 56–66 in the Book of Mormon is not evidence that these chapters were not on the brass plates nor that these chapters were written by an individual other than Isaiah. Much more could be said regarding authorship issues, but this is not the appropriate place to deal with them.

Several of Spencer's many generalized statements belong to the category of Fischer's "Fallacies of Generalization."[20] For example, in Spencer's claim that "line-by-line commentary … gets dull fast and alienates most readers" (viii), the phrase "most readers" creates a fallacy of generalization.[21] And the fallacy of factual significance is present in Spencer's statement that "we're more interested in Isaiah in the Book of Mormon than we're interested in Isaiah in general" (ix). Such broad, unsupportable claims lack any form of empirical or textual evidence.

---

17. Arie van der Kooij, "Review: Eugene Ulrich and Peter W. Flint, Qumran Cave 1.II: The Isaiah Scrolls: Part 1: Plates and Transcriptions; Part 2: Introduction, Commentary and Textual Variants. DJD 32." *Dead Sea Discoveries* 22 (2015): 116–17.

18. David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper, 1970).

19. Ibid., 47.

20. Ibid., 103–30.

21. Ibid., 103ff.

Spencer writes, "don't get lost in the details" (35), but I take, and recommend, a contrary approach. To better comprehend Isaiah's genius and artistry, one must comprehend the overarching themes, pericopes, text divisions, and intervals of the Masoretic Text, 1QIsaᵃ, and the other Hebrew witnesses of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls. But one must also carefully scrutinize the details in Isaiah's text by decoding the thousands of linguistic forms (including morphological values and lexical structures), poetic arrangements, and rhetorical configurations he used. As God's prophet and seer, Isaiah provided hundreds and even thousands of brilliantly articulated, magnificent particulars that exist in various forms, structures, and configurations throughout his text. He set forth a variety of parallelisms, including through synonyms (Isaiah 9:3), antithetical structures (Isaiah 65:14), complements (Isaiah 5:28), resultative relationships (Isaiah 7:14), gender matching (Isaiah 52:2), grammar (Isaiah 1:10), domains and subcategories (Isaiah 35:9), double similes (Isaiah 1:9), progression (Isaiah 3:13), numbers (Isaiah 17:6), declarations followed by an explanations (Isaiah 3:9), metaphors (Isaiah 5:7), and masculine and feminine nouns (Isaiah 41:2). There are approximately 1100 parallelistic structures in Isaiah of which about 100 are chiastically arranged! His use of figures of speech is of the highest quality. He used metaphors, similes, personification, synecdoche, metonymy, climactic forms, amphibologia, duplication, intertwining words, synonymia, refrain, interpretation, pleonasm, hyperbole, distribution, contrast, name changes, irony, condescension, apostrophe, anticipation, exultation, interrogation, and dialogue, among others. These elements represent significant and fascinating details in Isaiah's text. In short, Isaiah was a masterful rhetorician and a quintessential wordsmith who presented the word of God in an eloquent, persuasive, and powerful manner. It is an indisputable reality that he had an astounding command of the Hebrew language.

It remains for us to fully appreciate and come to know Isaiah's text through diligent study, and especially through the power of the Holy Ghost. Most significantly, we may know, in every particular and in all points, the paramount and significant words of Isaiah that pertain to Jesus Christ and his Atonement. As the Lord himself revealed through his prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 49:26): "I am the LORD your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

Excursus: Using Biblical Hebrew to Comprehend Isaiah

In this excursus, I wish to make a case for acquiring an intermediate (at the very least) or advanced knowledge of biblical Hebrew. (I readily acknowledge, of course, that biblical Hebrew may not be for everyone). In writing about and teaching Isaiah, knowledge of biblical Hebrew is less important than the two items mentioned earlier: (1) a comprehensive understanding of the doctrinal framework of the Restoration of the gospel (and acceptance of and compliance with its teachings), and (2) a heart open to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, the quintessential revelator and teacher.

Before acquiring a knowledge of biblical Hebrew, I had little appreciation for the enhanced comprehension of scriptural texts this significant language allows. But both time and experience have provided me with greater understanding regarding the considerable value of biblical Hebrew, and importantly and personally, the Holy Ghost now opens up avenues of understanding in the Old Testament that were not readily available to me before I learned biblical Hebrew.

Why biblical Hebrew? Based on my experience teaching biblical Hebrew at Brigham Young University for more than a quarter century and publishing multiple books and articles dealing with biblical Hebrew–related topics in scholarly venues (in addition to my publications for Latter-day Saint audiences), I now have a determined view on the importance of knowing biblical Hebrew, especially in approaching the writings of Isaiah and other ancient Israelite prophets.

In my opinion, to truly penetrate the very depths and heights of Isaiah's text, one must have an advanced knowledge of Hebrew. Although every reader cannot be expected to reach that level of linguistic proficiency, perhaps every teacher of the books of the Hebrew Bible would benefit from learning as much as possible about biblical Hebrew and making good use of the many tools and resources that are available to experts and amateurs alike.

There are dozens of reasons why biblical Hebrew informs an understanding of Isaiah in particular, including the following:

- Knowledge of biblical Hebrew opens the way for proper exegetical understanding.
- Isaiah was a quintessential wordsmith whose text contains multiple instances of *hapax legomena*, *dislegomena*, *trislegomena*, and other linguistic forms rare to modern

readers (but not necessarily rare to Isaiah's contemporaries). Many of these forms are difficult to render into English.

- Throughout Isaiah's text are several wordplays (e.g., Isaiah 5:7), theophoric names, proper names, divine names, idioms, sound-patterning (e.g., assonance, consonance, and alliteration), and amphibologia (six instances of such double meanings are found in Isaiah 53 alone), none of which is immediately and confidently comprehensible in English translations.

- A number of Hebrew content words are in some measure untranslatable (e.g., *hesed*, *kpr*, *YHWH*, *ezer*, *goel*, *hrm*, and *cherubim*). Although a translator may approach the meanings of such words, he or she may wish to elucidate the meanings in a note or commentary.

- Isaiah's complicated scene shifts and alternative functions of actors or actants are easier to comprehend in Hebrew than in a translational language that interchanges masculine and feminine forms (nouns, verbs, pronouns) or singular and plural (e.g., Isaiah 57:3–9).

- All translators are biased by their sociocultural and religious backgrounds and doctrinal understanding. Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and atheist scholars will translate Isaiah's words in different ways, and translations are often interpretations. This is equally true of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Moreover, readers should be aware that some translators reject the concept of prophecy, others do not view Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer, and still others have an incorrect understanding of the nature and being of God. The King James Version (KJV) of Isaiah 1:12 serves as an example. Based on the Hebrew consonantal framework, the phrase "When ye come to appear before me [the Lord]" is an impossible reading;[22] the Hebrew consonants convey "When you come to see my face." (The verb "to see" is a *qal* stem rather than a *nip'al* stem, as many text critics have

---

22. See Hinckley G. Mitchell's discussion, which includes other scriptural examples (Exodus 23:15; 34:20, 23, 24; Deuteronomy 31:11; Psalms 42:3) in *Isaiah: A Study of Chapters I–XII* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1897), 93. Many other scholars discuss this passage from Isaiah 1:12.

pointed out). Theologies related to anthropomorphism and theophany may have affected the KJV's translation of verse 12.

- Biblical Hebrew employs seven chief verbal stems: *qal*, *nipʿal*, *piʿel*, *puʿal*, *hipʿil*, *hopʿal*, and *hitpaʿel*; in addition to these seven, Isaiah employs several rare stems: *hitpalpel*, *pilpel*, *polel*, *poʿel*, *polal*, *polpal*, *pulal*, *poʿal*, *hotpaʿal*, *hitpolel*, *hitpalpel*, and *hishtafel*. Because many of these are to some extent complex, readers untrained in biblical Hebrew would have difficulty understanding certain rare forms in Isaiah's text.

- The English pronoun *you* may hearken back to plural or singular and feminine or masculine subjects, but biblical Hebrew has four forms: feminine singular and plural and masculine singular and plural. Knowledge of biblical Hebrew, therefore, proves to be advantageous in determining antecedence, gender, scene shifts, and ever-changing actants.

- Knowledge of biblical Hebrew allows one to determine which Biblical translation is the most accurate, based on the Article of Faith expression "as far as it is translated correctly."

- Word studies can be conducted accurately only in biblical Hebrew; for example, the English words *atonement* and *atonements* appear 82 times in the KJV Old Testament, but the Hebrew root *kpr* appears 102 times in the Hebrew Bible. This difference indicates that the KJV translators were fluid in their translation of this important word. For a discussion of the difficulties in translating *kpr* and other words into a target language, consult the Hebrew-English lexicons.

- Reading the original language of any author (including Isaiah) encourages greater understanding of that author's cultural, social, intellectual, and doctrinal constitution.

- A host of diachronic-versus-synchronic issues exist when scholars attempt to translate an ancient language, such as biblical Hebrew, into a modern language.

- Respective character zones (e.g., Isaiah, the prophetess, and Hezekiah) and zones of actants (e.g., Zion and Jerusalem) are more clearly articulated in biblical Hebrew than in translations. Actants are referred to nominally and then pronominalized, meaning an actant is the referent of a biblical

Hebrew inflectional element (e.g., affix of a verb, preposition, or noun). Biblical Hebrew allows readers to comprehend pronominalized forms much better than does English.

- Biblical Hebrew's complex verbal aspects (perfective, imperfective, infinitives, etc.) are nuanced differently depending on the context, usage, and form — and there are more than 1200 verbs in Isaiah! Understanding this point is especially important with regard to biblical Hebrew prophetic texts (versus historical narrative texts, legal texts, or wisdom literature). Ewald's taxonomy is useful: "With reference to action, the speaker views everything either as already *finished*, and thus *before* him, or as *unfinished* and non-existent, but possibly *becoming* … and *coming*. … These two ideas, viz. of what is complete and what is incomplete (or coming), sharply distinguished from the point of time at which the speaker takes his stand, lead, of course, to those of the purely past and *future*."[23]

- Poetic parallelisms, chiastic structures, and figures of speech are better comprehended, syntactically and lexically, in biblical Hebrew than in a translational language.

- In productive ways, knowledge of biblical Hebrew frequently affects one's doctrinal knowledge. For example, KJV Isaiah 56:5 reads, "Even unto them will I give in mine house [i.e., the temple], and within my walls a place and a name." But a literal translation is "I will give to them in my house and within my walls a hand and a name."

In taking any approach to the writings of Isaiah, commentators or exegetes would do well to be aware of the disadvantages of working through translations of any kind. Who would want to read a Sanskrit translation of Shakespeare without considering, wherever possible, what Shakespeare wrote in his Elizabethan English? How can a reader grasp Shakespeare's full intent and authorial awareness as well as develop a complete sense of his genius in a translated language? Reading Isaiah in a translational language may be likened to seeing Leonardo da Vinci's *La Gioconda* (i.e., *Mona Lisa*) with the bottom half of her face covered. To appreciate this celebrated masterpiece, viewers would have to rely on a museum docent's verbal description of her famous, enigmatic smile.

---

23. Heinrich Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament*, trans. James Kennedy (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1891), 1–3.

How much we would miss if we were forced to hear a docent's description rather than viewing her smile with our own eyes! It properly humbles all readers when they seek to roll back the barriers of a translated language in order to unveil or reveal the truths that undergird sacred texts. One of the constant desires of Joseph Smith was that, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (Articles of Faith 1:8).

As the prophet of the Restoration, Joseph Smith was occupied with several pursuits of eternal significance. But at one point, he set aside time to acquire a knowledge of biblical Hebrew,[24] even dedicating a room on the third floor of the Kirtland Temple for that purpose.[25] During this pursuit, he recorded a number of statements regarding his study of biblical Hebrew:

- "Our latitude and longitude can be determined in the original Hebrew with far greater accuracy than in the English version. There is a grand distinction between the actual meaning of the prophets and the present translation."[26]
- "My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original."[27]
- "This day [January 19, 1836] we commenced reading in our Hebrew Bibles with much success."[28]
- "May the Lord help us to obtain this language, that we may read the scriptures in the language in which they were given."[29]

Joseph's biblical Hebrew teacher, Joshua Seixas, observed that Joseph had "so far accomplished a knowledge of it [biblical Hebrew], that he is able to translate to my entire satisfaction."[30]

Spencer's book lacks, or fails to communicate, an understanding of biblical Hebrew. Rather it relies on English translations of Isaiah's text and even recommends to readers various modern English translations

24. See Matthew J. Grey, "'The Word of the Lord in the Original': Joseph Smith's Study of Hebrew in Kirtland," in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2015), 239–91.

25. Ibid., 265.

26. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 290; *History of the Church* 5:342–43.

27. *History of the Church* 2:396.

28. *History of the Church* 2:376–77.

29. *History of the Church* 2:391.

30. Grey, "'The Word of the Lord in the Original,'" 270.

(31–32). While these translations are competent, their purposes are different from that of helping modern readers experience even a simulated engagement with the meaning, beauty, and depth of the Hebrew composition. For many of the reasons I've stated, a knowledge of biblical Hebrew would have appreciably informed Spencer's topics and writing. (Far less relevantly, the front cover of Spencer's book depicts a small Hebrew document — with the Hebrew writing upside down! This is likely the publisher's doing and not Spencer's.)

It would be fitting, in my view, for scholars interested in teaching the Old Testament (through classroom instruction or via published writings) to expand their scholarly competence by learning biblical Hebrew. Certainly, a knowledge of biblical Hebrew would greatly enhance their instructional objectives and goals. This knowledge (for Latter-day Saint scholars) would raise the expectation for learning among Latter-day Saint readers and possibly decelerate criticisms of those who oppose Latter-day Saint doctrines. There are not many excuses for biblical scholars — especially in this age of disposable time and computerized resources — for not learning and using biblical Hebrew. By way of comparison, my bibliography for a recently published book for academia (totaling more than 500 pages) on the Hebrew witnesses of Isaiah (the Masoretic Text; the 22 Isaiah Dead Sea Scrolls, e.g., 1QIsa[a], 1QIsa[b], 4QIsa[a–r]; 5QIsaiah and MurIsaiah) lists more than 300 scholarly publications from the past 150-plus years; the authors of each of these publications possess advanced knowledge of biblical Hebrew! Similarly, not one specialized journal of the Hebrew Bible or Dead Sea Scrolls would generally consider publishing an article by someone who lacks sufficient knowledge of biblical Hebrew; to do so would put the reputation of that journal at risk.

Donald W. Parry, *Abraham O. Smoot Professorship, is a professor of the Hebrew Bible at Brigham Young University. Parry has authored or edited 40 books on the Bible, Dead Sea Scrolls, and related topics. His latest title,* Exploring the Isaiah Scrolls and Their Textual Variants, *was published by E. J. Brill, Leiden, NDL, 2020. He has served as a member of the International Team of Translators of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jerusalem, since 1994. Parry is a member of several other professional organizations, including the International Organization of Qumran Studies, Groningen, NDL; The International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Groningen, NDL; the Society for Biblical Literature, Atlanta, GA; and the National Association of Professors of Hebrew, Madison, WI.*

"Somebody Wrote It:" The Book of Mormon's Missionary Message to a 21st-Century World

Jim Bennett

Abstract: *Nathan Oman's "Welding Another Link in Wonder's Chain: The Task of Latter-day Saint Intellectuals in the Church's Third Century" wisely called for "new language in which to celebrate the Restoration." That new language can be found in understanding the power of the Book of Mormon, which is the tangible miracle at the heart of the Restoration that defies the critics. My father, Senator Robert F. Bennett, devoted his final years to arguing that the Book of Mormon's existence is a stumbling block to those who try to dismiss it as an obvious fraud. Those who scoff at the Book of Mormon have yet to come up with a plausible secular account of its existence, and this allows the Book of Mormon to endure as the centerpiece of our missionary efforts. But rather than simply use the Book of Mormon to attempt to answer questions people are no longer asking, we need to create a missionary message that uses this sacred scripture to connect people, directly and personally, to Jesus Christ.*

This is a response to Nathan B. Oman's "Welding Another Link in Wonder's Chain: The Task of Latter-day Saint Intellectuals in the Church's Third Century," published by The Interpreter Foundation on August 9, 2019.[1] In that piece, Professor Oman deftly describes the challenges confronting the 21st-century Church in the face of the rising generation's mass disaffection with organized religion. In order

---

1. Nathan B. Oman, "Welding Another Link in Wonder's Chain: The Task of Latter-day Saint Intellectuals in the Church's Third Century," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019): 141–60, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/welding-another-link-in-wonders-chain-the-task-of-latter-day-saint-intellectuals-in-the-churchs-third-century/.

to kickstart a stalled missionary effort, Oman suggests that our efforts ought to be focused on "[f]inding new language in which to celebrate the Restoration."

Oman stated that the Church's initial missionary message was centered on the idea of a single true, restored church with all the New Testament authority and spiritual gifts. That message held a resonance for a 19th-century populace that waned considerably after the Church's exhaustive fight with the federal government over plural marriage, and in the early 20th century for a time, convert baptisms, in Oman's words, "had slowed to a trickle."[2] It wasn't until the post-World War II Church began emphasizing the power of sealing keys and their saliency in creating eternal families that growth began to markedly increase, leading to exuberant predictions about the Church's future. Sociologist Rodney Stark, a non-believer, announced that "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints … will soon achieve a worldwide following comparable to that of Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and the other dominant world faiths," predicting that by 2080, the Church could see more than 265 million members among its ranks.[3]

While those estimates seemed plausible as the 20th century was coming to a close, they seem ridiculous to many observers today. Stark's predictions were based on growth rates holding steady between 4 and 5 percent, while independent reports suggest that growth has slowed to a mere 1.47 percent as of 2017.[4] And even that number masks the reality that previous strongholds of the Church are struggling to hold their ground. The vast majority of convert baptisms are taking place in developing nations, while congregations in the United States and Europe

---

2. See also Rudger Clawson, "A marvelous work of the Lord – Its wonderful growth – Greatness of the responsibility resting upon the Saints," *72nd Semi Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1901): 7, https://archive.org/details/conferencereport1901sa/page/6. This report chronicles that the Church only added 20,000 members, including children of record, in 1901.

3. Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," in Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and its Members (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 1–8, https://rsc.byu.edu/es/archived/latter-day-saint-social-life-social-research-lds-church-and-its-members/1-rise-new-world.

4. Jana Riess, "Mormon growth continues to slow, especially in the US," Religion News Service, April 13, 2018, https://religionnews.com/2018/04/13/mormon-growth-continues-to-slow-especially-in-the-u-s/.

show signs of contraction rather than expansion.[5] This has led many critics to exult that the Church's best days are behind it.

Professor Oman insists this is not true, and I agree. This is a topic the two of us have discussed in family settings — in the interest of full disclosure, Nate is my brother-in-law, married to my sister Heather — and Nate's call for a gospel message tailored to inspire millennials has led me to ponder the possibilities of what that message might be. I believe the Book of Mormon provides the keys to crafting that new message for two compelling reasons:

1. It defies any and all secular explanations for its origins, which compels even skeptics to take the truth claims of the Restoration seriously.
2. It is a divine catalyst that initiates the kind of personal connection to the Divine that so many millennials are seeking outside the boundaries of organized religion.

I will address each of these in turn.

The Explanation-Defying Book of Mormon ("Somebody Wrote It")

Shortly after the Book of Mormon was first published, this was typical of the reaction it evoked:

> Book of Mormon. — Most of our readers, we presume, have heard of this *pretended revelation.* … A ridiculous story was told about its discovery, *golden plates* were found in a stone box, a Mr. Somebody who could neither *read* nor write, was found able to translate them, and somebody else, equally ignorant, to transcribe them, and a worthy, honest but credulous farmer was found willing to be *ruined* by defraying the expense of publishing … the Book of Mormon. … This matter must be the *ne plus ultra* of fanaticism and delusion. If men will go beyond this in belief, verily there can be no end to their credulity.[6]

These days, if you ask a critic of the Book of Mormon where it came from, it's likely the answer you get won't be much different. The conventional wisdom, both then and now, is that it needs no explanation,

---

5. Peggy Fletcher, "Mormon growth rate falls to lowest level in 80 years, but ups and downs vary by region," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, July 7, 2017, https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=5381411&itype=CMSID.

6. *Rochester Republican* (Rochester, NY), December 28, 1830.

as it's too ridiculous to merit further discussion. In 1831, the *Brockport Free Press* called the Book of Mormon "a fiction of hobgoblins and bugbears."[7] In 2011, comedian Bill Maher likened the characters of the Book of Mormon to leprechauns.[8] When it comes to sneering dismissals of the Book of Mormon, not much has changed over the centuries.

While the Book of Mormon does have some cureloms and cumoms, it contains precisely zero hobgoblins, bugbears, or leprechauns, which is obvious upon even a cursory examination of its contents. It's clear, then, that many (if not most) people making fun of it haven't bothered to read it. As Catholic sociologist Thomas O'Dea observed in 1957, "[T]he Book of Mormon has not been universally considered by its critics as one of those books that must be read in order to to have an opinion of it."[9]

If asked to provide an alternative explanation for its existence, it's not likely that Bill Maher would have one at the ready. If pressed, Maher would likely insist he has no responsibility to do so because the burden of proof for the Book of Mormon's extraordinary claims lie entirely with the Mormons.

This is Maher's line of attack when it comes to religion in general, not just the Book of Mormon.

"There is a growing trend in this country that needs to be called out, and that is to label any evidence-based belief a religion," Maher said in February 2012. "We are not two sides of the same coin, and you don't get to put your unreason up on the same shelf as my reason. Your stuff has to go over there, on the shelf with Zeus and Thor and the Kraken, with the stuff that is not evidence-based, stuff that religious people never change their mind about, no matter what happens. I'm open to anything for which there's evidence. Show me a god, and I will believe in him."[10]

This approach shifts the discussion back to the believer and absolves the skeptic of any responsibility whatsoever. But such an approach presumes there's only one question on the table. If the question is, "Is there a God?" then, yes, the burden of proof is on the theists. But if the question is, "Where did the universe come from?" the discussion gets much more interesting.

---

7. "Mormon Bible," *Brockport Free Press* (Brockport, NY), April 6, 1831, 1.

8. ReligionMASSillusion, "Bill Maher on MORMON RELIGION SHIT," YouTube video, 2:04, October 27, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH608TuO29A.

9. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 26.

10. Stallion Cornell, "Why Is There Bill Maher?" *Stallion Cornell* (blog), February 6, 2012, http://stallioncornell.com/blog/why-is-there-bill-maher/.

If Bill Maher and his fellow atheists address the origins of the universe simply by denying that God was involved, they sidestep the question. To be intellectually consistent, they would need to provide an alternative theory that accounts for a universe that came into being with no divine involvement. If they're confident enough to dismiss God as a possibility, they have to have another explanation.

Suppose, for instance, that in the middle of the night, Bill Maher's pick-up truck suddenly appears in my living room, leaving a path of destruction in its wake. If I take Maher to court to hold him accountable, I have the burden to prove that Maher purposely drove it into the side of my house. Maher can argue that's not how the truck got there. But Maher can't credibly argue that there is no pickup truck. He has to come up with his own account of how his truck ended up in my living room.

The Book of Mormon takes a similar approach to the burden of proof. As Alma replied to the Bill Maher-esque Korihor in Alma 30: 40–41:

> And now what evidence have ye that there is no God, or that Christ cometh not? I say unto you that ye have none, save it be your word only. But, behold, I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true; and will ye deny them?

Like the pick-up truck and the universe, the Book of Mormon exists. If the only question is, "Is it true?" then only the faithful need to answer. But if the question is, "Where did it come from?" then both sides have to make their case. So far, the critics don't really have a conclusive (let alone convincing) one to make. Or, more accurately, they have too many cases to make.

I saw this firsthand when I was writing my line-by-line reply to *The CES Letter*,[11] which devotes over a quarter of its entire text to attacks on the Book of Mormon.[12] In his attempt to account for the Book of Mormon's origins, Jeremy Runnells argues, in turn, that the Book of Mormon was:

a) Plagiarized from the King James Bible.

b) Lifted from maps and place names from a 2,000-square-mile area he describes as the "lands of Joseph Smith's youth."

c) Plagiarized from pirate stories about Captain Kidd.

d) Plagiarized from Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*.

---

11. Jim Bennett, "A Faithful Reply to the CES Letter from a Former CES Employee," Canonizer, September 2018, https://canonizer.com/files/reply.pdf.

12. Jeremy T. Runnells, *CES Letter: My Search for Answers to My Mormon Doubts* (Las Vegas, NV: CES Letter Foundation, 2017), https://cesletter.org.

e) Plagiarized from the book *The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain*.

f) Plagiarized from the book *The First Book of Napoleon*.[13]

Some see the sheer volume of arguments against the Book of Mormon's authenticity as persuasive evidence against it, but the opposite is true.

For example, to prepare my line-by-line response to the CES Letter,[14] I took it upon myself to read the entirety of *View of the Hebrews* — available for free online at Book of Mormon Central's website,[15] which would be a curious place to hide the source material for Joseph Smith's alleged plagiarism. Like the Book of Mormon, *View of the Hebrews* is a book often cited without being read. Five minutes with the text of *View of the Hebrews* is enough to disabuse anyone of the notion that it has anything to do with the Book of Mormon.

View of the Hebrews is a polemical essay, not a narrative story, and none of its arguments make their way into the Book of Mormon's pages. It is written in contemporary English rather than the King James/Middle English language found in the Book of Mormon, and it is a much shorter work — roughly 44,000 words in total, compared to the 265,000 words in the Book of Mormon. If there were any lengthy passages of plagiarism, they would come up with a simple Google search.

For those who understand how flimsy the charges of *View of the Hebrews* plagiarism really are, the theory shifts to how Joseph stole a handful of phrases and words from a number of different sources and somehow cobbled all these together into an internally consistent, theologically complex, and Semitically-influenced tome markedly different from any and all of his supposed source materials. For an uneducated 23-year-old farmer in the 18th century, that would be a process every bit as miraculous as gold plates and an angel, if not more so.

Hugh Nibley, in his classic work *The Myth Makers*, highlighted how multiple arguments against Joseph Smith ended up defeating each other:

First, as to our witnesses — their quality and their quantity. The latter was excessive, the former defective. There were altogether

---

13. Ibid.

14. Bennett, "A Faithful Reply to the CES Letter from a Former CES Employee," 79, 85.

15. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996), https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/view-hebrews-1825-2nd-edition.

too many witnesses. … All of which might be forgiven if their stories were not intrinsically absurd and thoroughly conflicting.[16]

Such is the case with the proliferating alternatives for the supposed source of the Book of Mormon. The book still stands as the tangible miracle at the heart of the Restoration. That is the heart of the testimony of millions of believers. It was also the final message my own father gave in a fireside he delivered three weeks before his death. And, if you will indulge me as I recount some personal, family reminiscences, I would like to share how that final fireside cuts to the heart of why the Book of Mormon is vital to fashioning a new missionary message for a 21st-century audience.

My father is the late Senator Robert F. Bennett, who was instrumental in bringing the Olympics to Salt Lake City in 2002. During that timeframe, he expressed his frustration with media coverage of the Church, specifically with regard to the Book of Mormon. He lamented that "publications that discussed the Book of Mormon in any degree of detail almost universally treated it as an obvious fabrication, one whose claims and history were so bizarre that no one with any common sense could believe it to be authentic."[17]

That led Dad to begin writing what would become his book *Leap of Faith: Confronting the Origins of the Book of Mormon*, the production of which took him the better part of seven years. Its release raised the eyebrows of a number of political pundits who thought it nothing more than a campaign gimmick, as Dad, at the time, was engaged in a very tough race he eventually lost. But time has been quite kind to the book, and many now recognize it as a sober and valuable work.[18]

Six years after his book was published, Dad discovered that he had pancreatic cancer. Prior to his diagnosis, Dad had planned to move from his townhouse in Arlington, Virginia, to his childhood home in Salt Lake City, which he had purchased more than a decade earlier with the intent of living in Salt Lake City full time. But the cancer changed his plans, and he decided to seek treatment at Johns Hopkins University Hospital,

---

16. Hugh Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 189.

17. Bob Bennett, *Leap of Faith: Confronting the Origins of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), ix.

18. Daniel Peterson, "Taking a 'Leap of Faith' in Bennett's book on the origins of the Book of Mormon," *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), April 28, 2016, https://www.deseret.com/2016/4/28/20587425/taking-a-leap-of-faith-in-bennett-s-book-on-the-origins-of-the-book-of-mormon#leap-of-faith-confronting-the-origins-of-the-book-of-mormon-by-bob-bennett-was-published-in-2009.

which had a global reputation as the best place to receive treatment for pancreatic cancer. The cancer had not spread, but the tumor was impinging on an artery, which made it impossible to remove. The goal, then, was to shrink the tumor by means of chemotherapy and then, by means of surgery, slice it out of his body.

It seemed a good plan at the time, but the tumor remained stubborn, and while the chemo kept it from growing, it wasn't shrinking, either. The goal shifted. The new plan was to kill the tumor and just leave it there. After another round of chemo and a new round of radiation, this was the presumed outcome. Dad came back to Utah for Christmas, and all seemed to be well. He had survived for a year after his diagnosis, and the idea that he had more years to come seemed like a real possibility.

Alas, no. The last day of February 2016, we learned the cancer had spread, and spread aggressively. He had only a few months left to live. Maybe weeks. It was time to get his affairs in order.

Since leaving the Senate, Dad had been extraordinarily active, and he had no interest in slowing down. Cancer had caused him to streamline his activities — he resigned from all the corporate boards he said he "didn't want to be on anyway" — but he still wasn't willing to retire. He focused only on the things that truly mattered to him.

Learning that his days were definitely numbered, even more things fell by the wayside. There were only a handful of projects that remained high priority, and his scheduled April 10, 2016, fireside on the Book of Mormon was at the top of his list.

The assignment to give a fireside on the subject of the Book of Mormon came from the bishop of the Arlington Ward, and Dad saw this as more than just another speaking opportunity. He felt this was a calling from God, and he prepared accordingly. When he was told the cancer had spread, he almost immediately said, "I've got to stay alive for the fireside." He repeated this over and over again, and the mantra worked.

On the night of April 10, 2016, my father sat on a stool in the Arlington Chapel's cultural hall and delivered a 50-minute sermon on the Book of Mormon. Weakened by cancer, he stayed seated much of the time, but he repeatedly stood to write on a blackboard, diagramming much of the book's complexity for the gathered congregation. He spoke, as was his custom, without ever referring to notes. He spoke clearly and forcefully, and all who attended knew they were seeing something remarkable. You can listen to a rough recording of the fireside and read a transcript on my personal website.[19]

19. Stallion Cornell, "My Father's Final Sermon," *Stallion Cornell* (blog), June 19, 2016, http://stallioncornell.com/blog/my-fathers-final-sermon/.

That was Sunday. On Monday morning, he suffered a severe stroke that left him paralyzed and confined to a hospital bed. He died three weeks later.

To his family, this seemed clear evidence that the Lord was sustaining my father specifically to share this one, simple message. After the fireside, Dad's work was done, and he was called home. Whatever this message was seemed likely to be a pretty big deal.

So what was the message for which the Lord kept him alive to deliver? This is how he described it: "The Book of Mormon exists," he said. "That means somebody wrote it. … Somebody created it before 1829. You have to explain who wrote it. It's here. It's physical. It cannot be waved away the way some of the descriptions of visions and other things could be waved away. … You can't get around that question. You can't avoid it. Who wrote it?"

Who, indeed? That's not a simple question to answer, nor was it designed to be. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland declared,

> For 179 years this book has been examined and attacked, denied and deconstructed, targeted and torn apart like perhaps no other book in modern religious history — perhaps like no other book in any religious history. And still it stands. Failed theories about its origins have been born and parroted and have died — from Ethan Smith to Solomon Spaulding to deranged paranoid to cunning genius. None of these frankly pathetic answers for this book has ever withstood examination because there is no other answer than the one Joseph gave as its young unlearned translator.[20]

A Divine Catalyst — The Book of Mormon's Missionary Message to a 21st-Century World

The Book of Mormon's miraculous origins make it impossible to dismiss by anyone who examines it with any degree of seriousness. But that miracle is only the beginning of the journey, not the end. Secular evidence is not sufficient to produce faith that leads to baptism, temple covenants, and a lifetime of consecration to the Kingdom of God. The miracle of its production can open the door to a deeper discussion, but ultimately, the Book of Mormon's salience is in the effect it has on those who read and ponder its contents.

---

20. Jeffery R. Holland, "Safety for the Soul," *Ensign* (November 2009), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2009/10/safety-for-the-soul?lang=eng.

When I was serving as a young missionary in Scotland from 1987 to 1989, President Ezra Taft Benson spoke of the importance of "flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon."[21] My mission president, Joseph Fielding McConkie, insisted that the Book of Mormon was the key to all missionary success. He wrote:

> Our instruction is to use the Book of Mormon to prove the Bible true, not the Bible to prove the Book of Mormon true. When this truth is pointed out, the usual response is, Well, the Bible is common ground — we need to begin our discussion on common ground.
>
> In fact, as we have shown, the Bible is not common ground; it is battleground and has been from long before the time of Christ. … Bruce R. McConkie stated it well when he said, "It is easier to convert people to the Book of Mormon than it is to convince them of what the Bible is really saying."[22]

Herein, however, lies the challenge for modern Latter-day Saint missionary work. We have long recognized that the Book of Mormon is the "keystone of our religion," but we have not always used it as the focus of our missionary efforts. In the 1950s, Elder LeGrand Richards's book *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* provided the template for missionary discussions, despite the fact that it was a collection of biblical proof texts that scarcely referenced any Book of Mormon passages at all.[23] Thankfully, when President Benson became the President of the Church, the Book of Mormon rightly took center stage where it belongs.

Even at center stage, what role should the Book of Mormon rightly play as we introduce it to a 21st-century world? This cuts to the heart of Nathan Oman's initial question about using new language to celebrate the restoration. I'm convinced that to revitalize our missionary efforts, we need to make the Book of Mormon the heart of a revitalized message that directly, personally, and intimately connects them with the divine. People do not join the Church or remain faithful in the Church because they have compiled an adequate list of evidences that defy secular

---

21. Ezra Taft Benson, "Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* (November 1988).

22. Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Here We Stand* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 88.

23. LeGrand Richards, "What the Gospel Teaches," *Ensign* (May 1982), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1982/05/what-the-gospel-teaches?lang=eng.

explanation and link the Book of Mormon to the ancient world. Those evidences are important and even essential to some, but they sustain pre-existent faith rather than create it anew.

People don't join the Church when the Book of Mormon proves that Latter-day Saints are reading the Bible correctly or that our theology is the most accurate or logical. Again, such discussions are helpful to many Latter-day Saints, but they do not carry with them the power of conversion to those not of our faith.

People join the Church because they feel the Spirit when they read the Book of Mormon. That is a personal, intimate encounter that has the potential to bring them to Christ.

A personalized Book of Mormon message would be a notable shift in our missionary focus. Religion reporter Jana Reiss framed the problem this way:

> We are still behaving as though "Which church is true?" is the question most people are asking. … More Americans, especially young adults, are opting out of religion altogether. As one of them said to me recently, "Why do I even need religion? Like, at all?"
>
> Why, indeed?
>
> … Missionary efforts that begin with a promise of propositional truth (which millennials don't care about) and end with an assurance of exclusive priestly authority (which they also don't care about) are going to go over like a lead balloon. Those approaches are asking the wrong question for this people in this age.
>
> What, then, are better questions?
>
> … We need to listen to the questions that people are actually concerned about.[24]

If the question, then, is not "Which church is true?" but rather, "Why do I even need a religion at all?" we are blessed indeed, because the Book of Mormon is the answer to both questions. And since it is the second question people are currently asking, our message ought to be tailor made to respond to it.

The Book of Mormon is the catalyst that allows us direct access to heaven in a way nothing else does or can. It does so through a means that

---

24. Jana Riess, "Commentary: For Latter-day Saints, 'which church is true?' isn't the right question anymore," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, July 12, 2019, https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/07/12/commentary-latter-day/.

defies the critics and provides the kind of direct, firsthand encounters with God that people of every generation crave.

The 20th section of the Doctrine and Covenants anticipates the variety of messages that accompany the Book of Mormon. That revelation cites the Book of Mormon not just as evidence, but as proof of a number of different assertions. The Book of Mormon is in the business of "[p]roving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old; Thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever" (D&C 20:11–12).

In the days of Joseph Smith, it seems likely that more people were interested in proof of the truthfulness of the Bible and of God's willingness to call prophets than is the rising generation today. But people in all generations are hungry for a God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Book of Mormon provides needed evidence that such a God exists and loves us beyond measure. It not only demonstrates that God speaks to prophets, it also gives assurance that God can speak to each of us individually. And that personal component — the one-on-one encounter with the Spirit of God that is facilitated and inspired by the Book of Mormon's message — is the answer to the questions so many people are asking in the 21st century.

Personalizing the Book of Mormon message does not mean we need to abandon the institutional Church, our unique truth claims, priesthood authority, or any of the things essential to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It means, rather, that we should use the Book of Mormon to connect people to heaven and, once so connected, to have faith that God, having answered their first and most pressing question, will answer those they're not asking, too. There is a spirit and a power to the book that ensures that the Restored Gospel will continue to grow and flourish in preparation for the second coming of the Lord.

My father's final sermon concluded with a similar theme.

"Well, the time is gone," he said about 45 minutes into his presentation, "but I need to end with the main point." He recognized this was an odd way to structure a sermon. "You say, 'Gee, you've been rambling for 45 minutes. Get to the main point.'"[25]

Prior to the "main point," Dad had spent all his time recounting the various compelling evidences for the Book of Mormon's authenticity as a historical document. He cited the existence of Nahom, a burial site mentioned in the Book of Mormon that was discovered years after

---

25. Cornell, "My Father's Final Sermon."

Joseph Smith had died. He talked about all the metal plates that had been dug up since Joseph Smith's time, noting that people mocked Joseph for his "Gold Bible," yet history has shown that writing sacred records on plates and burying them for future generations was a practice rooted in antiquity. He also highlighted the use of ancient Egyptian names in the Book of Mormon that were unknown at the time of the book's publication.

"All of this is interesting," he said, "and it's fun, and it's important for us to know as we get attacked by those who are leaving the Church by telling us Joseph Smith was a fraud, the Book of Mormon is a forgery, and so on — important for us to have the tools [to address these issues.]" But he insisted that "it's not the main point."

"You don't need to know about the location of Nahom," he said. "You don't need to know about the proliferation of plates. You don't need to understand about ancient names in order to live a more successful and worthwhile life. You need to know about the Lord Jesus Christ."

He recounted an experience from his mission in Scotland more than 60 years earlier, in which he met Bill and Marian Proctor. "When we called on Bill and Marian Proctor for the first meeting, we had left a Book of Mormon with Marian," he said. "We had gone tracting that morning, came back that night. He was reading it — Bill Proctor was reading the book by the fire, which I took as a good sign. And then he stood up and came to me, and he said, 'Look, lads, I know why you're here, and you're wasting your time. I have no intention of joining your church. But this is an interesting book you have. So I'll tell you what let's do. I'll buy your book, and you go on your way, and we'll both save time. Agreed?'

"I said, 'Agreed. Yep. But as long as we're here … '

"Okay, so as long as we're here, we sat down, and we gave them the first discussion of the Book of Mormon. And then we asked the magic question — when would be a good time for us to come back? And he gave us an appointment back, and there's much more to the story, but very powerfully, before I left Scotland … "

Then Dad started to tear up. "Excuse me," he said. "I get dewy-eyed at the dedication of a parking lot."

After regaining his composure, he continued. "Before I left Scotland, I said to him, 'When did you know? Bill, when did it happen [that you knew] the Book of Mormon was true?' And he said, 'Oh, that first night.' He said, 'The Spirit was there overwhelmingly, telling me it was true.'"

Bill Proctor "didn't need any internal or external validations, or any intellectual analysis. All he needed was an open heart and the presence of the Holy Ghost, and he knew. The Book of Mormon can survive any

attack by any enemy of the Church because the Proctor example has been repeated millions of times, in every culture, in every country, all around the world."

Dad was absolutely right.

Jim Bennett *is the author of* A Faithful Reply to the CES Letter *and a founding partner of Canonizer.com, a website designed to build consensus on controversial issues. He is also one of the founders of the United Utah Party and ran for Congress in 2017 as its first candidate. He is a former columnist and editorial writer for the* Deseret News, *as well as the former Marketing and Artistic Director for the Tuacahn Center for the Arts in Southern Utah. He and his wife, Laurel, are the parents of five children, two of whom are currently serving full-time missions in Argentina.*

Rethinking Alma 36

_____

Noel B. Reynolds

Abstract: *While Alma 36 has long been one of the most admired examples of classical Hebrew chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, critiques in the last two decades have questioned whether, in fact, it really meets the requirements of classical biblical chiasms. The principal objections have pointed to the large sections of the chapter that are not easily included in the chiasm as outlined by John W. Welch and other proponents. Until now, this debate has not taken note of dramatic new developments in the analysis of Hebrew rhetoric over the last fifty years. The following essay turns to the discoveries made in this new approach to Hebrew rhetoric and shows that when the new "levels analysis" is incorporated into a study of Alma 36, the entire text does have a role to play in the extended chiastic structure of the chapter.*

[Editor's Note: An abbreviated version of this paper was presented at the 2019 Sperry Symposium and was included in that shortened form in the symposium volume. See *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42*, edited by Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith, Religious Studies Center, 2019, 451–72. This complete and updated version is herein published by *Interpreter* with permission of the RSC.]

In 1967, John W. Welch was serving as a missionary in Germany and noticed a scholar's explanation of chiasmus as a rhetorical structure that recurs in various parts of the Bible. While the penchant for parallelism that characterized Old Testament writers was widely recognized by that time, the discovery that reverse parallelism was also commonly used by Old and New Testament writers was relatively recent and not yet widely accepted. Welch was no ordinary missionary in terms of his scholarly and scriptural preparation, and he immediately saw the possibility that Nephi and his successors may have been familiar with that rhetorical pattern and may have used it in the writings we now know as the Book of Mormon. He went

to work immediately and found numerous examples of chiastic structures in the Book of Mormon text, prominent among which was Alma chapter 36. These discoveries fueled Welch's 1970 master's thesis and a long list of subsequent publications that presented additional discoveries and further refinements in his understanding of the phenomenon, addressed both to Book of Mormon readers and to biblical scholars generally.

In his 1991 abbreviated summary of his earlier writings on chiasmus, Welch reports that "Alma 36 was one of the first chiasms I discovered within the Book of Mormon" and that it continues to be one of his favorites. "It is a masterpiece of composition, as good as any other use of chiasmus in world literature, and it deserves wide recognition and appreciation."[1] By that time, Alma 36 had also become a favorite of informed readers of the Book of Mormon and had even been included in non-Latter-day Saint publications on biblical chiasmus.[2] Welch himself had become well known and much appreciated by Bible scholars for his insightful compilations and his comprehensive bibliography of chiasmus studies across all relevant disciplines.[3]

But approval has not been universal. Using criteria for evaluating chiasticity in texts developed by Welch and other experts,[4] a serious, though small, chorus of doubters emerged. One early criticism that continues to surface is the recognition that in spite of the large number of parallel terms that can be identified in Alma 36, there are still many sentences and even paragraphs that do not seem to have a place within

1. John W. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 116.

2. In his comprehensive reader's guide for the text of the Book of Mormon, Grant Hardy notes that Alma 36 reflects "a careful, deliberate arrangement of Alma's conversion story: "The reversing, balanced halves indicate that Alma had spent some time and effort organizing his memories of an event twenty years earlier into a rhetorically compelling, aesthetically pleasing form." Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 141.

3. John W. Welch (editor), *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim, DEU: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), includes five articles written by Welch and six by other scholars, including several written for this volume by some of the best-known scholars in the field of Old Testament studies. Welch's analysis and commentary on Alma 36 can be found on pp. 206–207.

4. Six of these are compared in an online chart provided by Welch's Chiasmus Resources web site: http://chiasmusresources.johnwwelchresources.com/criteria-chart accessed January 22, 2016. Prominent among these criteria is the shared view that a good chiasm will not contain much material that does not fit into the chiastic structure.

the proposed chiastic structure.[5] Unfortunately, there has been some confusion about Welch's latest writings that has to be addressed. Welch's final in-depth treatment of Alma 36 was never published in a journal or a volume but was simply made available in a 1989 "FARMS Preliminary Report."[6] The 1991 essay that is better known as a chapter in the popular *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* was in fact much abbreviated, unnecessarily inviting criticisms that might not have emerged had the 1989 version been more widely consulted. In what follows, I will defend Welch's assessment of Alma 36 by offering extensions and modifications of his 1989 analysis that are inspired by important developments in the study of Hebrew rhetoric in recent decades. As far as I can tell, these insights of biblical scholars have not previously been introduced into Latter-day Saint discussion of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.

Because contemporary scholarly work on the Bible has demonstrated important advances for our understanding of these ancient texts through this kind of intensive analysis, students who appreciate the close relationship between the Bible and the Book of Mormon will recognize the importance of bringing a similar approach to their study of the Book of Mormon. In what follows, I will explain some of the most recent developments of this kind in biblical studies and apply them to Alma 36 as a demonstration of their potential for enriching our interpretations of the Book of Mormon.

New Understandings of Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric

Beginning about three centuries ago, a few European scholars — sometimes without any awareness of the parallel efforts of others — noticed rhetorical structures featuring repetition and parallelism in the books of the Hebrew Bible. By the 19th century, a few noted reverse parallelisms (chiasms) as well. Initially, it was short chiasms where the key terms were close together, as in poetry. But gradually chiasmus, like parallelism generally, was recognized as an organizational principle that

---

5. I will not document here the long history of critiques and defenses that have been raised. A helpful review and documentation of this debate by Boyd F. Edwards and W. F. Edwards can be found online at "Response to Earl Wunderli's Critique of Alma 36 as an Extended Chiasm." See http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1572&context=physics_facpub, accessed October 28, 2019. The defense is more completely documented online at http://www.jefflindsay.com/chiasmus.shtml, accessed October 28, 2019.

6. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in Alma 36," FARMS Preliminary Report (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1989), https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/chiasmus-alma-36-1.

could be used for larger texts — and even for entire books of prose. As a result of this growing body of rhetorical studies and reinterpretations of the books of the Old Testament, it is now widely recognized by biblical scholars that in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE, Hebrew writers shared a highly developed set of rhetorical principles and techniques which distinguish their work dramatically from the ancient rhetorical traditions of Greece and Rome. These developments offer a powerful step forward in our understanding of their writing strategies and of the meanings their works promote.

My review of two recent books in this field presents a more comprehensive report on these developments.[7] In this paper, I will rely principally on the discovery that when longer texts are organized chiastically, the ordered elements of that chiasm will consist of subordinate units of text that will themselves be delimited and organized according to some rhetorical principle — and will not necessarily be best understood through a listing of all the repeated words, phrases, or topics that may occur in a chiastic order. In fact, these subordinate units may contain their own subordinate units, thus illustrating the principle of subordinating levels of rhetorical structure in Hebrew writing that some analysts have found extending to as many as eight levels when they include grammatical and philological parallels.[8] Because we do not have the original language version of Alma 36, we cannot go that deeply in our analysis. But I will propose going all the way to a seventh subordinate level at one point in my analysis of Alma 36.

Some of the criticisms directed at Welch's analysis of Alma 36 may have assumed the principles of Hebrew rhetoric mentioned above are rules that provide templates into which a writer was expected to force his text. That would be a serious misunderstanding. Rather, the leading studies of Hebrew rhetoric have identified patterns or rhetorical principles they have found in use in a wide variety of adaptations by different authors. But these

---

7. *See* Noel B. Reynolds, "The Return of Rhetorical Analysis to Bible Studies," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 91–98, for a brief introduction to the current state of understanding as represented in Hebrew rhetorical studies. The two works selected for this review were Jack R. Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism,* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), and Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

8. For the most detailed explanation of rhetorical levels, see Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis,* 199–308. Further commentary, historical background, and explanation can be found in his most recent volume on this general topic: Roland Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*, trans. by Leo Arnold (Boston: Brill, 2012), 51 ff.

authors obviously felt free to use those principles or patterns creatively to help them express the content of their writings. As I have compared the biblical examples identified by these scholars with the examples we find in the Nephite writings, I am repeatedly impressed that the latter are often more artistic and innovative in their applications of the principles of Hebrew rhetoric in their compositions than anything we have in the biblical writings. That would definitely be true of Alma 36.

What soon becomes evident as we attempt to analyze the structures of these kinds of texts is that any particular word, phrase, or sentence may be drawing simultaneously on others to provide its full meaning — some of which may be close by and others which may be placed at some considerable distance in the text. Commentators have noted that the rhetoric we have learned in the Western tradition is *hypotactic* in that it is direct, open, linear, and logical. Hebrew rhetoric, in contrast, is *paratactic* in that it tends to be indirect, making important points both through its structure and through words that may have their full meaning developed and adjusted gradually throughout the text.[9] As Alma demonstrates in chapter 38, he is capable of both forms of narration when he retells the same conversion story and principles to his son Shiblon quite directly with much of the same phrasing, but without the carefully developed rhetorical structures of chapter 36. It is tempting to speculate that a writer like Alma might have made this special effort with a text that he intended to be used widely in pedagogical situations in the powerful and memorable form that he has given to it.

Both Welch, in his analysis of Alma 36, and his critics and defenders tended to rely principally on the earlier practice of analyzing longer texts by focusing on the sequence of repeated terms they contain. Using that approach, it is understandable that critics could find the extensive pieces of the text that do not fit readily into Welch's chiasm to be problematic. However, by 1989, Welch and a few others were beginning to recognize the potential importance of subordinate textual units, even without guidance from Hebrew rhetorical analysts. It should be noted, however, that while Welch's 1991 refinement of his analysis of Alma 36 retains the 34-element analysis of repeated terms, it then drops back to his 1989 division of the text into 22 units (11 sets of parallels) for his extended interpretation. In retrospect, this move constitutes a prescient step in the direction of the emerging scholarly consensus about Hebrew rhetoric.[10]

9. See the discussion in Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric*, 73–34.

10. Donald Parry makes some similar moves as he notices and accommodates other parallel elements that are not reflected in the larger chiasm of the chapter. See

The analysis of Alma 36 I will now present extends that move and demonstrates that when 17 sub-units of the text (eight sets of parallel text units plus one central unit) are analyzed separately, subordinate rhetorical levels emerge. This shows that all the "extra text" that has bothered critics is in fact built into the complex chiastic structure of Alma 36 in ways that support and enrich that larger rhetorical unit and that conform to 7th-century Hebrew rhetoric as currently understood.

Analyzing Alma 36

The following observations are offered before the presentation of the rhetorical analysis of the complete text of Alma 36 in the hope that it will make the analysis both more intelligible and more meaningful. Careful readers will want to return to this list after reading the analysis to see if they agree these conclusions are fully supported by the analysis.

As will be seen, a central claim underlying these observations is that the rhetorical structures and the doctrinal themes propounded by Alma to his son are so carefully woven together, the two must be interpreted simultaneously. One of the great virtues of Hebrew rhetoric is that it facilitates a marriage of structure and message in a powerful way that engages the reader's intellect on multiple levels. Like earlier biblical writers, Alma is using both words and rhetorical structures to convey meaning. I find that in this chapter the two cannot be productively separated. The real test of the rhetorical analysis is its success in portraying and supporting the doctrinal teaching. For that reason, I have taken the unusual step of listing nine conclusions about both form and content at the beginning.

1. Using the categories and terminology proposed by Meynet in his most recent handbook of Hebrew rhetoric, Alma 36 would be seen as a "concentric composition" because it has an odd number of text units with the center unit providing a turning point for the larger chiasm with its sixteen parallel units.[11]

2. The most striking feature of the chiasm that organizes the text of Alma 36 is that the middle half of the chiasm employs

Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2007), 318–21.

11. Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*, 163 ff. Meynet allowed himself one neologism in his treatise on Hebrew rhetoric and labels this kind of chiasm a *concentrism* and notes that "concentrism is found on all levels of text organization."

reverse polarity between the parallel units of text. That is, beginning with the account of Alma's attempts to destroy the church of God in verse 6, each textual unit will parallel a later unit that negates or reverses some of its content, and, therefore, does not just repeat the same phrases or sentences, as is the case in the first half of the chiasm. This structural reversal strongly suggests that the first and second halves of the chiasm will have additional messages of their own.

3. Negative parallelism is common in Hebrew rhetoric, especially in simple couplets where a contrast is presented. What has no precedent that I am yet aware of is the construction of an entire half of a large, chiastically organized text using negative parallels. This rhetorical innovation allows Alma to divide up his message in a memorable way. He can use the first half to confirm the traditional promises of the Abrahamic covenant as applied both to biblical Israel and to Lehi's branch — understood as prospering and protecting faithful Israel in this world's affairs. Then the second, or central, half can be devoted to his personal experience with the new covenant of Christ's gospel and the greater spiritual blessings it bestows on his repentant followers, both in this life and in the next. This gospel requires every convert to turn back, reversing direction through repentance, in order to walk with God on the path he provides.

4. In the first half of that center section, Alma tells his own story of apostasy or rebellion against God. In the second, he proclaims the universal application of the gospel to "whomsoever" will listen and supports that proclamation by reference to the actual experience of the thousands who have been converted through his preaching. Point by point, the consequences of his sins are negated in parallel passages by the gospel blessings he and others experienced following repentance. In this way, Alma implicitly confirms the Book of Mormon view that the full and true meaning of the Abrahamic covenant given to Israel is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the invitations and promises it offers to all men and women as individuals.[12]

---

12. For a comprehensive analysis of these two covenants as understood by the Nephite prophets, see Noel B. Reynolds, "Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant through the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018), 39–74.

5. Alma uses the rhetorical structure itself as a powerful demonstration of the gospel principles he is teaching. The Hebrew word for repentance means to turn back — meaning, to turn away from our own self-chosen paths back to the path the Lord has prepared for us. Both the chiastic structure of the text and the personal history it recounts focus dramatically on Alma's turning back and its dramatic consequences for himself and for others.

6. Alma places a factual reference to the atonement at the precise center of the chiastic structure. The atonement is the decisive reality that makes it possible for men and women to abandon the ways of sin and turn back to the way of the Lord. The negative to positive flip that occurs at the structural center of the chiasm, where the atonement is first mentioned in an infinitive phrase, signals that it is this atonement of Christ that can replace the negatives of human life with eternal positives.

7. The atonement reference in turn is framed by Alma's two explicit references to Jesus Christ, first remembering his father's teachings about Christ—and then turning to Christ personally, trusting in him and the effectiveness of his atonement.

8. The covenant that we make at the time we repent — to keep the commandments and take his name upon us — leads to the profound spiritual experience of being born again. That experience provides Alma and his converts with the divine knowledge, motivation, and ability to endure to the end faithfully.[13]

9. Alma opens and closes his long chiasm with nearly exact repetitions of language designed to catch the ear of most readers and to warn them to watch for more complex employment of Hebrew rhetoric in the rest of the passage. The noticeable variations in the repetitions at the end of the chapter will also warn the experienced reader of similar texts to watch for developments in the central and more complex portion of the text that will augment the meaning of the repeated phrases. The teachings of the central portions of the text will inform expanded meanings of the briefer introductory and concluding statements.

---

13. As Alma explains in his non-chiastic rehearsal of the same story and principles to his second son Shiblon, "blessed is he that endureth to the end" (Alma 38:2).

Level Analysis for Alma 36

Perhaps the most important advance in studies of Hebrew rhetoric over the last half century has been the discovery mentioned above that large rhetorical structures constitute text units which are usually subdivided into further text units with their own internal rhetorical structures and so on, potentially through several levels of subordination. So the first step in rhetorical analysis is to find the boundary markers between text units at these various levels, starting at the top.

In the sections that follow I will identify the rhetorical levels I find in Alma 36. This will provide necessary background for the subsequent discussion of the individual text units organized by a variety of rhetorical structures at each level.

Level 1

The Book of Alma is a major text unit designated by Mormon as compiler. We should assume he had a plan and reasons for including several different sections in the one book. The heading Mormon provides at the beginning and the final verses at the end explicitly define the book's boundaries by the transition from the reigns of the kings to the reign of judges at the beginning, and specifically of Alma the Younger as the first chief judge to the transmission of the records to Alma's grandson Helaman at the end. By starting at the level of the book, I am respecting the paradigm for rhetorical levels laid out particularly by Meynet. But it remains to be determined whether Mormon followed these same rhetorical principles in compiling the Book of Alma (as Alma evidently did in his composition of the piece we know as Alma 36) which he appears to have excerpted from a much larger record four centuries later.

Level 2

I am not prepared at this point to propose a division of the major textual units of the Book of Alma into sections from Mormon's point of view.[14] Quite obviously, we have a wide range of separate stories and events included in the one book, which are in turn drawn from the records of two different prophets, Alma and his son Helaman. A grouping of three

---

14. Grant Hardy proposed a promising structural analysis for Alma 1–44 as one rhetorical unit divided into six smaller units that together form a chiastic structure. See Grant Hardy, "Nurturing Faith: Literary Patterning in the Book of Mormon," in *Give Ear To My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42*, edited by Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2019), 369–88.

chapters (XVII–XIX) in the 1830 edition is devoted to commandments given by Alma to his three sons, all of which is presented in first-person voice, suggesting that Mormon had excerpted this text directly from Alma's record. The three-way division of this section of the Book of Alma is reinforced both by the text itself and by text marking preserved in the translation process. Orson Pratt's 1879 re-division of the text into smaller chapters and verses[15] recognized the rhetorical shift in the Helaman chapter by dividing it into two precisely at the end of the opening inclusio.[16] The much shorter Shiblon chapter was preserved as one, and the long Corianton chapter was divided four ways, giving us a total of seven chapters, chapters 36–42 in the modern version.

Level 3

Chapter 36 is set off from the rest of this section of the book as an *inclusio*. The first sentence ends with the phrase "my words," and the final sentence ends with "his word." Inclusio may be the most common technique for setting boundaries between larger sections of text in the Hebrew Bible. It works nicely for chiastic texts as well because it repeats at the end of the text unit the same word or phrase that is used at the beginning. Note that the repeated words do not necessarily signal the principal theme of the text unit they set off. The identification of particular words as markers of an inclusio is vindicated when the internal rhetorical structures of the proposed inclusio conform to that division in convincing ways.

Level 4

When the text in this level-3 inclusio is analyzed into level-4 sub-units, a rhetorical structure of 17 elements emerges — 16 of which constitute the eight parallel pairs of the chapter-length chiasm. The 17th unit at the center is itself a single chiasm, imitating at the center the essential structure of the larger whole. The 17 sub-units are distinguished from one another by their internal rhetorical structures, which vary according to

---

15.   The text quoted throughout this paper is taken from the critical edition of the Book of Mormon: Royal Skousen (ed.), *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). *See* page *xl* of the "Editor's Preface" for an explanation of chapter breaks and versification.

16.   An *inclusio* is a rhetorical device widely used in the Bible and other ancient literatures to mark where a special unit of text begins and ends. This demarcation can be accomplished by repeating at the end of the passage a word, phrase, or even a sentence from the beginning of the passage, thus providing it with obviously intended bookends. For a helpful explanation of *inclusio*, the history of this usage in studies of biblical rhetoric, and biblical examples of its use, see Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric*, 325–27.

the contents of each, and not according to some larger pattern. But once these sub-units are so distinguished, the larger chiastic organization of the chapter can be seen.[17] The following list identifies the key parallel semantic elements in the textual level-4 sub-units that are paired chiastically (A with A*, B with B*, and so on through text units H/H*).

Level 4 Analysis: The Concentric Organization of Alma 36

Parallel by Repetition

A/A*	"my word" = "his word"
B/B*	"that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land"
C/C*	remember "the captivity" of our fathers
D/D*	"trust in God" and be "supported in trials, troubles," and afflictions (faith in Jesus Christ and enduring to the end).
E/E*	knowledge "of God" = "born of God"

Parallel by Negation

F/F*	"destroy the church of God" = "bring souls unto repentance"
G/G*	"fell to the earth" = "stood upon my feet"
H/H*	"that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God" = "my soul did long to be there"

Turning Point

I	Jesus Christ atoned for the sins of the world.

I have included the inclusio boundary markers of Alma 36 in the chiastic analysis as A and A* because taken together, they articulate a minor theme of the larger unit by explaining how Alma's word can become the Lord's word. From that simple beginning, there is a gradual

---

17. In Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric*, 25–36, the author provides general principles and common patterns by which texts can be delimited into sub-units. He provides an instructive example when he goes on in chapter 4 to apply these to his analysis of Jeremiah (pages 37–59).

progression of rhetorical complexity in the eight pairs of text units. Parallels B, C, and D are matched by the simple repetition of their central concept with approximately the same vocabulary in sub-units B*, C* and D*. The parallel between E and E* teaches how the "knowledge of God" comes from being "born of God." Text units F, G, and H tell Alma's story as an enemy of God and his church, while the reverse polarity of their parallel units in F*, G*, and H* shows how the blessings of the atonement in the lives of those who repent reverse all the negatives in Alma's sinful life. The central chiasm in unit I portrays the transformation of the anguishing sinner who can call upon Christ into a saint who is "born of God," through the power of the atonement, a transformation that is elaborated throughout the rest of the chapter.

I am proposing this 17-unit analysis as a modification of the 22-unit discussion that Welch offers in his 1989 and 1991 updates. Each of these 17 units will be analyzed rhetorically later in this paper.

Levels 5/6/7

Each of the 17 textual sub-units of the larger chiasm has a developed substructure of typical Hebrew rhetorical character. Note that in the following analyses, level-4 units are marked by capital letters, level-5 by small letters, level-6 expansions by small roman numerals, and, in one case, Arabic numbers for level-7 expansions on level-6 material. As will be shown below, this division of text units into a descending series of subordinate units allows the rhetorical analysis to include every word of the larger text without rearrangement.

Review of Welch 1989 and 1991

As described above, Welch's analysis proposes 17 words or phrases repeated in reverse order providing the "main girders" of the structure of the chiasm. He then assigns these 34 parallel terms to 22 natural sections in the text of Alma 36. In the analysis that follows, I re-analyze the division into textual sub-units and reduce the total number to 17. I believe that Hebrew rhetoric as now understood would favor seeing the 17 units of text as the structure of the chiasm, even though there really are 34 terms that can be paired in a chiastic ordering.

Welch based his commentary in both the 1989 and the 1991 articles on the 22 text sections. He also identified some substructures in these sections, including one chiasm and three double triplets with parallel content for each pair. This was clearly an imaginative and prescient step in the direction of the emerging discovery of Hebrew rhetoricians that

these kinds of texts often turn out to be organized at several levels, using similar forms of repetition and parallelism at each level. Welch's 1989 paper reports some early steps in this direction in previous contributions from other writers as well.[18]

Full Text Analysis of Levels 4, 5, 6, and 7

What follows is a rewriting of the text following a long-established technique of using vertical alignments to indicate both shifts in text level and subordinate elements within text units. No perfect system has been developed for rewriting these complex texts. Different scholars have used different systems according to personal preference and system effectiveness for specific texts. The goal is always, as in the present case, to make the textual structure as intelligible as possible with the imposed vertical layout.[19]

Structure A/A*

1[20] A   My son, give ear to *my words*,

30 A* Now this is according to *his word*.

The opening and closing lines employ a simple inclusio to mark this chapter off as a separate unit of text within a larger section of the Book of Alma. The story that follows will tell us how Alma's words became the words of the Lord, as the variation in the phrase suggests. This opening line is a salutation and invitation to listen or hear, which also becomes a repeated theme in the larger textual unit. This form recurs six times throughout the chapter, but the recurrences do not usually bear any structural weight. They do have their own rhetorical value in some occurrences, as will be noted below. Hebrew rhetoric also recognizes that Old Testament writers occasionally add a line at the end of a completed rhetorical structure as "ballast" to balance, complete, or summarize the thought.[21] The last line of Alma 36 (A*) seems to perform that function.

---

18. See, for example, the analysis reported in Welch, "Chiasmus in Alma 36," 7–10.

19. See Meynet's explanation of "rewriting" in Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*, 188.

20. The verse numbers of the 1981 Latter-day Saint edition are provided in the left margin for the reader's convenience.

21. Lundbom borrows the concept of ballast lines from Muilenburg and George Adam Smith and illustrates the form these took in Isaiah in Lundbom, *Biblical*

Unlike many inclusios where the mere repetition of a term marks the boundaries of the text unit, the statements in which the repeated term is located here clearly signal their roles as beginning and ending statements for the passage — providing, in effect, doubled evidence of the intended boundary markers. But there is also a subtle shift of meaning from "my words" in the opening line and "his word" at the end of the passage. We might naturally assume that the intended meaning of "my words" simply calls our attention to the text which follows. But by setting this term up in parallel with "his word" we will come to realize that Alma is also signaling that this passage will contain Alma's presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are multiple terms used for *gospel* in the Book of Mormon. In a 2013 study, I was able to establish the interchangeability of four terms for *gospel* in the Book of Mormon.[22] The term *gospel* is used 42 times referring to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The most distinctive but least used term is *doctrine*, referring to the doctrine of Christ, which occurs 25 times. Much less recognized, but more frequent in the text with 82 occurrences with this same meaning, is *the way*. But even more frequently the gospel is referred to as *the/his word*. Of the 962 occurrences of this term in the Book of Mormon, a full 278 seem to refer directly to the gospel message, including the final verse of Alma 36. And so, we can read the opening and closing lines of Alma 36 as references to the gospel of Jesus Christ as presented therein and as featured in the central chiasm of the chapter.

Structure B/B*

B

1   a   for *I swear unto you,*

        b   *that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God,*

        c   *ye shall prosper in the land.*

B*

30   a   But behold, my son, this is not all. For *ye ought to know as I do know*

Rhetoric, 133–35. Alma is able to get the same effect with simpler and briefer constructions.

  22. See Noel B. Reynolds, "This is the Way," *Religious Educator* 14 (2013, 3), 75–79.

b   *that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God*

c   *ye shall prosper in the land*;

a* and *ye had ought to know* also

b*   *that inasmuch as ye will <u>not</u> keep the commandments of God,*

c*   *ye shall be cut off from his presence.*

B* uses the same triplet structure modeled in B, making it parallel in both the content and the structure. But B* goes on to extend the parallel by adding a negative version of the same triplet to teach Helaman the consequences of failing to keep the commandments. It is typical of Hebrew narrative and parallelism that a repetition with terminological variation can be used to expand or intensify the meaning of the first statement.[23]

Alma is quoting here from the promise that both Lehi (2 Nephi 1:20) and Nephi (1 Nephi 2:20–21) said they had received from the Lord. Its inherent ambiguity allows it to suggest a curse on a whole people (the Nephites or the Lamanites), or a curse on individuals who fail keep the commandments, thus bringing the gospel perspective into a classic version of the Abrahamic covenant. Alma plays on that ambiguity by beginning and ending the chapter quoting this promise, which in its Nephite version seems to stand in as a surrogate for the Abrahamic covenant and/or the Mosaic covenant as these have come down to the Nephites.

The traditional biblical interpretation of these covenants tends to measure "prospering" in terms of territorial independence, multiplication of descendants, and wealth. But in this chapter, Alma's focus on the gospel and the atonement of Christ provides an eternal perspective to the concept of prospering, so that by the time we reach the end of the chapter, "keeping the commandments" and "prospering in the land" have taken on a far richer meaning than Israelites in Lehi's day may have envisioned when reading Deuteronomy 29, and any perceived distance between the covenant of Abraham and the covenant of Christians will have evaporated completely.

---

23. Robert Alter used Psalm 13 to illustrate this typical pattern in Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 62–64.

Structure C/C*

C

2   a   I would that *ye should do as I have done in remembering* the *captivity of our fathers*,

          i   for they were *in bondage*

          ii   and *none could deliver them*

          iii   except it were

               1   the God of Abraham

               2   and the God of Isaac

               3   and the God of Jacob;

          ii*   and *he surely did deliver them*

          i*   *in their afflictions.*

C*

          i   for *he hath brought our fathers out* of Egypt,

          ii   and he hath swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea;

          iii   and he led them *by his power* into the promised land;

          i   yea, and he hath delivered them *out of bondage and captivity from time to time.*

29   ii   Yea, and *he hath also brought our fathers out* of the land of Jerusalem,

          ii*   and he hath also *by his everlasting power* delivered them

          i*   *out of bondage and captivity from time to time,* even down to the present day.

        a*   And I have always *retained in remembrance their captivity*;

       BL   yea, and *ye also had ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity.* (ballast line)

While these level-4 units are clearly presented as parallels, the abundance of parallel and repeated elements they contain offer multiple options for outlining their internal rhetorical structures. I propose above what seems to me the simplest analysis, and the one that recognizes the most repetitions. Unit C begins, and C* ends, with the same direct appeal to Helaman — that he remember the captivity of their fathers as his father, Alma, has done. These sentences appear simultaneously as two of the scattered forms of address to Helaman in Alma 36 and provide an inclusio that binds the two units together as one literary unit when C and C* are read together. The complex sentence that begins verse 2 is broken apart into two sentences when repeated at the end of C*, while preserving exactly the same content.

The four clauses that are spliced together in the remainder of verse 2 can be set out at level 5 as a five-part chiasm that identifies their *bondage* with their *afflictions* and asserts at its center the unique power of Israel's god. C* picks up immediately after the general claims made in C to provide in a level-5 structure specific instances of God's deliverance of his people. First, the classic example of ancient Israel's delivery from Egypt is presented appropriately as a triplet that specifies the three key elements of that formative deliverance: (1) he "brought our fathers out of Egypt," (2) he "swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea," and (3) he led [our fathers] "by his power into the promised land."

Still at level 5, the three remaining clauses are then stretched into a four-element chiasm that expands Israel's history of deliverance to include in principle the many divine interventions witnessed "from time to time" by the Nephites, "even down to the present day." For just as God "brought our fathers out of Egypt," so he has "also brought our [Nephite] fathers out of the land of Jerusalem."

Examples of additional exodus accounts would obviously include Nephi's flight from the land of their first inheritance and the first Mosiah's flight from the land of Nephi to Zarahemla. Counting Lehi's flight from Jerusalem, the Nephites and Mulekites now combined are heirs to at least four exodus experiences since the classic deliverance from Egypt. Specifically mentioned by the angel in Alma's earlier account of this experience, were (1) the escape of his own father with his converts from the city of Nephi, first to the valley of Helam, and then on to Zarahemla, and (2) the subsequent escape of the remaining Nephites from the city of Nephi back to Zarahemla (Helaman 27:16).

Together, the level-5 triplet and chiasm of C* witness and emphasize the unique power of Israel's god as acclaimed by the chiasm in C and echoed

explicitly in both rhetorical structures in C*. He "led [ancient Israel] *by his power* into the promised land, and the Nephites have seen how "*by his everlasting power* [he] delivered them out of bondage and captivity."

C* concludes by separating the two statements merged in the complex opening sentence of C into two sentences, which together bring the constructive inclusio of the combined C and C* to a conclusion. By separating them, the last sentence can be used as a ballast line to provide a final and rhetorically independent emphasis on Alma's primary purpose in these passages — urging Helaman to follow his fatherly example in remembering the captivity of their fathers.

Implicitly, this message of deliverance is meant to evoke Alma's summary of the many instances in which God delivered him (Helaman's own father) from the trials, troubles, and afflictions of life; from the dangers of bonds, prisons, and death with which he was threatened in his service to God; and his knowledge that God will lift Alma "up at the last day to dwell with him in glory" (the final words of D* that preceded C*). And once again, Alma identifies the promises of the Abrahamic/Lehite covenant with those of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This focus on the promises of the covenant of Abraham now turns out to serve as a frame for the even greater promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ in D and D*, where we learn that those who trust in God will be lifted up "at the last day to dwell with him in glory." So, the covenant of Abraham turns out to be a surrogate for the gospel of Christ — so formulated that it can be understood by Israel and all the world. And the power of Israel's god to bless and punish can be measured by the experience of the Israelites and the Nephites through cycles of obedience and rebellion.

This interpretation is reinforced by the explicit mention of "the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" at the beginning of the chapter, in the center of the chiasm in verse 2, and the repeated reference to "Jesus, the Son of God" at the center of the central chiasm of the chapter in verses 17–18. As Welch noted in 1989, Nils Lund had reported the tendency of the Psalms to mention the divine names at the center of chiasms.[24] These mirroring statements at the beginning and the center of this text alert us to Alma's recognition that Jesus is the God of Abraham, and that we should not be surprised to learn that the covenant given to Abraham will turn out to be the same offered in His gospel. In the next chapter, Alma will complete his teachings and commandments

---

24. Welch, "Chiasmus in Alma 36," 27, referring to Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), 41.

to his son Helaman and will emphasize the guidance of God — provided through the director as it led Lehi to the promised land — as an analogy to the gospel, which can guide all men and women to eternal life. This linkage is explicit in both the language and the chiastic structure of Alma 37:44–46:

A   For behold, it is as easy to give heed to *the word of Christ,* which will point to you a straight course to *eternal bliss,*

B   as it was for our fathers to give heed to *this compass*, which would point unto them a straight course to the *promised land.*

C   And now I say, is there not a type in this thing?

B*   For just as assuredly as *this director* did bring our fathers, by following its course, *to the promised land,*

A*   shall *the word of Christ*, if we follow its course, carry us *beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.*

Structure D/D*

D

3   And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth,

a   and therefore, I beseech of thee

b   that thou wilt hear my words

c   and learn of me,

==============================

a   for *I do know*

b   that whomsoever shall *put his trust in God*

c   shall be *supported in their trials and their troubles and their afflictions*

d   and *shall be lifted up at the last day.*

D*

27   c*   And I have been *supported under trials
                        and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all
                        manner of afflictions.*

            i   Yea, God hath *delivered* me from
                                prisons and from bonds and from
                                death.

        b*   Yea, and I do *put my trust in him*

            i   and he will still *deliver* me.

28   a*   And *I know*

        d*   that he *will raise me up at the last day,*

            i   to dwell with him in glory.

    BL   Yea, and I will praise him forever

D begins with an appeal to Helaman ("I beseech thee) to "hear my words and learn of me," and is the most prominent of the scattered salutations or invitations to listen or hear as discussed above under A. This line does not readily fit into the rhetorical form of the passage, except possibly, as an aside to Alma's readers, begging them to listen to and learn this central message. For we have here another structure, much like the combination of C and C*, where the two parallel sections feature the same message and repeat the same terminology. As C and C* were combined into one inclusio, when read together, so D and D* form a chiasm when viewed together. Each of these is presented as Alma's testimony that (1) "whomsoever shall put their trust in God," (2)" shall be supported in their trials and their troubles and their afflictions," and (3) "shall be lifted up at the last day." In D, this message is presented as universal, for all people "whomsoever," in a straightforward quatrain, without commentary. And, unlike the Abrahamic covenant, it is offered to all people as individuals. But in D*, Alma makes it his personal testimony — slipping three times to level-6 commentary to provide personal facts that support his general claims. He personally has been supported in his trials, troubles, and afflictions — "from prisons and from bonds and from death." He puts his trust in God and knows "that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory."

Verse 3 begins with a repetition and expansion of the same appeal to Alma's son Helaman made in verse 1. These statements addressing his son

as the audience provide the second of six such forms of address that are largely independent from the rest of the presentation's structure, though they are rather evenly distributed — three in each half of the chiasm. This second appeal, however, is unique in that it points to Helaman's youth as Alma's reason for sharing these words and for encouraging him to learn from his father. Presumably, this appeal, like the teaching that follows, is intended to have universal application to all who may benefit from Alma's teaching, and especially to the youth.

What follows will be what Alma would teach Helaman (and others in their youth). The message of D is focused: Those who trust in God (faith in Christ), will be supported in trials and lifted up at the last day. The emphasis seems to be on the difficulties of this life, identified and specified as "their trials, and their troubles and their afflictions." The first three of the four principal elements are framed as the promise of the Abrahamic covenant, but now extended conditionally to all men, universal in its scope: "whomsoever shall put their trust in God." The universality of the promise foreshadows the introduction of the gospel version of the promise in Alma's fourth element — the promise of being "lifted up at the last day." This addition transforms this universalized version of the covenant of Abraham into a straightforward gospel merism articulating the first and last elements of the six-element gospel formula — those who exercise faith in Christ will be saved. The gospel requirement of enduring to the end is also invoked implicitly by the references to trials, troubles, and afflictions.[25]

D* picks up with a repetition of the same three elements of the Abrahamic covenant, but in reversed order, forming a chiasm when read with those lines from D, but then also repeating the gospel promise of being lifted up in a fourth line.

    a   I do know...

    b   ...put their trust in God...

    c   supported in trials, troubles and afflictions

    d   lifted up at the last day

    c*   supported in trials, troubles and afflictions

---

25.   For an explanation of how Book of Mormon writers used abbreviated lists (merisms) of the six basic gospel principles to evoke the reader's knowledge of the full list hundreds of times, see Noel B. Reynolds, "Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017), 106–34.

b*		...put my trust in him...
a*	And I know...	
d*		raise me up at the last day

D* begins with a repetition of the same Abrahamic promises, but now as reports of Alma's own experience with God wherein he has been "delivered" from great difficulties, a specific threesome to match the specifications of the promise: "from prisons and from bonds and from death." He doubly emphasizes the unconstrained range of the promise to be supported under trials and troubles of every kind and in all manner of afflictions. This embedded doubled emphasis is echoed in the next sentence, which affirms that God "will still *deliver* me," repeating the synonym for *being supported* that Alma has introduced in the personal reference to prisons, bonds, and death in the preceding sentence. These two doublings, which are not part of the chiastic structure given to the articulation of the Abrahamic promises, prepare us for the finale, which emphasizes and expands the same gospel promise added at the end of D as an ending for D*.

This presents us with a powerful, and possibly unprecedented, variation on standard chiastic form and also clearly signals the parallelism of segments D and D*. Both begin with the same three elements in a shared structure and end with the same addition that transforms blessings in this world promised through the covenant of Abraham into blessings in eternity promised to those who keep the new covenant of Christ. While the first reference to being lifted at Dd provides a focal point for the resulting chiasm, the repetition at D*d* can serve as a ballast line by being held to the end. This creative arrangement also allows Alma to apply his affirmation of personal testimony ("and I know...") at the end of the constructed chiasm to the repeated and expanded gospel promise of being raised up at the last day—forging a formal link between the chiasm articulating the covenant of Abraham and the repeated conclusion articulating the gospel promise.

It should also be noted that this constructive chiasm in D/D* marks the conclusion of the first half of the grand chiasm of Alma 36. If the rest of the text were removed, it would provide a central chiasm in the same way verses 17–18 do for the whole chapter, and it could be read without the illumination of the gospel message that will be witnessed in the central section of the chapter. Placed at this key transition between Alma's endorsement of the covenant of Abraham and the personal account of his own conversion and acceptance of the covenant of the gospel of Jesus

Christ, it foreshadows the chiasm outlined in I and dramatizes Alma's teaching that brings the two covenants together in one.

Structure E/E*

E

4   a   And I would not that ye think that I know *of myself*—

      b   not of the temporal but *of the spiritual*,

      c   not of the carnal mind but *of God*.

5   c*   Now behold, I say unto you: If I had not been born *of God*,

           i   I should not have known these things.

      b*   But God hath *by the mouth of his holy angel* made these things known unto me,

      a*   not of any worthiness *of myself*.

26 E*

      a   for because of *the word which he hath imparted unto me*,

      b   behold, *many hath been born of God*

      c   and hath *tasted as I have tasted*

      c*   and hath *seen eye to eye as I have seen*.

      b*   Therefore *they do know of these things* of which I have spoken as I do know;

      a*   and *the knowledge which I have is of God*.

In E and E*, Alma provides an explanatory preface for the personal conversion account that will follow. Again, the focus is on knowledge of God and how men can gain that knowledge. While both E and E* are positively related, unlike the level-4 pairs of text units that will follow, E introduces the language of negative alternatives that will provide the dynamic for the next three pairings, using "not" six times. In this pairing, Alma uses parallel six-line chiasms to clarify that the testimony he bears, the knowledge he wants to share, is not of the temporal or carnal mind, but is of God. In both chiasms, Alma connects his experience of being *born of God* with the knowledge *of God* which he received *by the*

mouth of the holy angel. The connections and format shared by these two passages are so strong that they could be read sequentially, out of their actual order, without any hint of discontinuity or interruption.

Another important contribution of Welch's 1989 paper was his analysis of "weaving factors" the author had devised to link contiguous text units together, to prepare the reader for changes in topic or language, and to make the whole read smoothly and seamlessly and not bounce from one text unit to the next in a noticeable way.[26] E begins and ends with Alma's insistence that this special knowledge he has received was not a result of his own effort or wisdom or of his own worthiness. Lines 2 and 5 clarify that this was not a temporal experience, but a spiritual one, for God made these things known to him by sending a holy angel. The two center lines equate this knowledge received of God with the experience of being born of God, as line Ec*i dips to level 6 to make that connection.

E* makes the same linkages but goes on to show that through the *word/knowledge* given *of God* to Alma, many others have received the same knowledge, being also *born of God.* Here, the center lines enigmatically expand the description of that experience by Alma's reference to what he and they had *tasted* and that they had *seen eye to eye.* We know from v. 24 that it was "exceeding joy" that they had tasted. From verses 20 and 24, we know that Alma saw "marvelous light" and "God sitting upon his throne."

The focus on the source of this knowledge is thematic throughout Alma 36. The very inclusio that marks the beginning and end of this literary unit equates "my word" with "his word"— Alma's word with God's — suggesting implicitly that the passage will teach us how a man's word can become the word of God. In E and E*, Alma makes clear that his knowledge, his testimony, comes from being born of God, which in his case included being arrested and taught by an angel. E* describes the ripple effect of one person being born of God as he shares the word, or the gospel of Jesus Christ, which enables others to have the same experience — gaining the same knowledge, tasting the joys of the Spirit, and seeing the things he has seen.[27]

------

    26.   Welch, "Chiasmus in Alma 36," 24–25.

    27.   For a superb analysis of the Book of Mormon terminology *born of God, cut off from his presence,* and other related phrases, see Jennifer C. Lane, "Born of God—Partaking of the Fruit," in *Give Ear To My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42,* edited by Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2019), 109–27.

Structure F/F*

F

6   a   For I went about with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church of God.

        b   But behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.

7   c   And behold, he spake unto us as it were the voice of thunder,

        c*   and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet.

        b*   And we all fell to the earth,

        a*   for the fear of the Lord came upon us.

24 F*

        a   Yea, and from that time even until now I have *labored* without ceasing

        b   that I might bring *souls unto repentance*,

        c   that I might bring them *to taste of the exceeding joy of* which I did taste,

        c*   that they might also *be born of God*

        b*   and *be filled with the Holy Ghost.*

25   a*   Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceeding great joy in the fruits of my *labors*;

F and F* mark the beginning and conclusion of the central section, or second half, of the chiastic organization of Alma 36 where the principal parallels will be negative. Their efforts to destroy the church, described in F, will be transformed as they "labored without ceasing" to bring others to repentance and to taste the joy they have tasted — to be born of God and filled with the Holy Ghost. Because of the negations of F in F*, there is little direct parallel in the details and wording of the before and after story.

Both F and F*can be analyzed as similar six-line chiasms. Both rely more on related meanings (positive and negative) than they do on word repetitions to signal their chiastic structure. In F, Alma describes how

he and the sons of Mosiah (not fearing God) went about destroying the church. F ends as the "fear of God" overcomes them. The coming of the angel to stop them is paired with their being effectively stopped and falling "to the earth." The thunderous voice of the angel is paired with the trembling of the earth.

F*, like Alma 36 itself, has the virtue of being marked off as an inclusio, with the same term (labor) being emphasized in the opening and closing sentences. But the line pairings of the chiasm depend more on equivalent meanings, as in F, than on repeated terms. The first and last lines refer to Alma's labors as a teacher of the gospel. The other two line pairs make the links in convert experience — between repentance and being filled with the Holy Ghost in the second pair and being born of God and tasting exceeding joy in the third pair. At the beginning, F provides an implicit contrast between the mission of the angel and that of Alma and his associates. The full story of F and F* illustrates the reverberating power of witness, as the angel's witness to Alma spurs his witness to those he converts, and they in turn convey the same testimony to others.

Structure G/G*

    G

8	a	But behold, *the voice said unto me: Arise.*	
	b		And *I arose and stood up* and beheld the angel.
9	c		And he said unto me: *If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed*, seek no more to *destroy the church of God*.
10	d		And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was *for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs.*
11	e		And the angel spake more things unto me, *which were heard by my brethren,*
	e*		*but I did not hear them.*
	d*		For when I heard the words, If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God, *I was struck with such great fear and amazement*
	c*		lest perhaps *that I should be destroyed*

b*   that *I fell to the earth*

a*   and *I did hear no more.*

23 G*

      a   But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again,

      b   and I stood upon my feet

      c   and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

G and G* continue the pattern of negation in the level-4 chiasm of Alma 36. Three of the five sets of parallel lines in G are parallel by negation. In G/a Alma hears a voice, and in G/a* he "did hear no more." In G/b he stands up, and in G/b* he falls "to the earth." In G/c the angel threatens Alma with personal destruction, and in G/c* he expresses his fear of being destroyed. In G/d he describes being paralyzed for three days, and in G/d* he explains the paralysis, saying that he "was struck with such great fear and amazement." In G/e Alma reports that his brethren heard other things the angel said, but in G/e*, he clarifies that he personally "did not hear them." G* reverses the major developments of G as Alma regains his strength, stands up, and manifests his new spiritual status — being born of God. While G presents a ten-element chiasm, G* is a simple triplet, demonstrating again that parallel units of a chiasm do not need to display the same rhetorical structures in their sub-units.

Structure H/H*

    H

12   a   But I was *racked with eternal torment*,

           i   for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree

           ii   and racked with *all my sins.*

13   b   Yea, I did remember all *my sins and iniquities*,

           i   for which I was tormented with the pains of hell.

      c   Yea, I saw that *I had rebelled against my God*

           i   and that I *had not kept his holy commandments.*

14		ii	Yea, and *I had murdered many of his children* —
		iii	or rather led them away unto destruction—
	c*		yea, and in fine, so *great had been my iniquities*
		i	that the very thoughts of coming into the presence of my God
		ii	did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.
15	b*		O, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct, both soul and body,
		i	that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God
		ii	to be judged *of my deeds.*
16	a*		And now for three days and for three nights was I *racked,*
		i	even with the pains of *a damned soul.*

H*

20	a		And O what joy and *what marvelous light* I did behold!
	b		Yea, *my soul was filled with joy* as exceeding as was *my pains.*
21	c		Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there can be *nothing so exquisite and so bitter as was my pains.*
	b*		Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand there *can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.*
22	a*		Yea, and methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, *God sitting upon his throne,*
		i	surrounded with numberless concourses of angels
		ii	in the attitude of singing and praising their God. (Cf. 1 Nephi 1:8)

BL   Yea, and my soul did long to be there.

The pairing of H and H* presents the most vivid parts of the reversal between the two halves of the central chiasm. The presentation in H may be more difficult to sort out rhetorically because so many of the level-5 elements are themselves units that have their own internal rhetorical structures at level 6. Ha, Hc, Hc*, and Hb* are all triplets which have their own internal structure. If we are not using levels analysis, these can easily look like extra text, even though they are clearly relevant to the larger story. H is a longish 6-element chiasm as it dips four times into the sixth level of rhetorical organization. But once these level shifts are recognized, H is relatively easy to sort out because it does depend on straightforward repetitions of terms or concepts in its level-5 chiastic structure. In a/a*, Alma reports how he was "racked" with "eternal torment" or "the pains of a damned soul." In b/b*, he reports how the memory of his "sins and iniquities" tormented him—how he feared to be judged "of [his] deeds." In c/c*, he confesses that "he had rebelled against" his God, "so great had been [his] iniquities." In the level-6 additions through second and third lines of triplets, we learn that Alma's "soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree," that because he "had not kept his holy commandments," "the very thought of coming into the presence of [his] God" at the judgment did rack his soul "with inexpressible horror." These are phrases and concepts introduced at the sixth level that Alma can now employ in further level-5 parallels.

The 5-element chiasm of H* features the reversal of the pains and guilt that are so forcibly expressed in H. The "marvelous light" Alma reports in H*a corresponds to his vision in H*a* of "God sitting upon his throne." In H*b, the pains are gone and his "soul was filled with joy." H*b* intensifies that description saying "there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy." H*c provides the central turning point with language that reflects back to H*b and forward to H*b*. While emphasizing the exceeding level of the pains reported in H*b, he calls them "exquisite and bitter," setting up the language for the description of his newly received joy when stating "there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy." The b/c/b* sequence in H* has the interesting feature that each of the lines has some phrasing in common with each of the other two lines. *Exceeding joy* in b links to *exquisite and sweet joy* in b*. But b and c are linked by *my pains*. And c and b* share *can be nothing so exquisite and so bitter/sweet*.

At the end of H*, Alma adds another ballast line — that in seeing this vision of God's throne, his soul did long to be there — negating and balancing the comment in Hb*i that he feared to be brought into the presence of God. This simultaneously provides the common element linking H and H* on level 4, while maintaining the negating character of this section of the level-5 chiasm.

In H*, the first and last lines are both reporting what Alma saw. In H*a*, we learn that the "marvelous light" of H*a was the vision of the heavenly council referred to in other passages where the heavens open and the prophet receives his call. It would appear that Alma has subsequently discovered 1 Nephi 1:8, and in writing up chapter 36, uses it as a validation of his own experience. As Welch observed in 1991, Alma inserts this quotation from 1 Nephi 1:8, which is the longest verbatim quote of one person by another in the Book of Mormon.[28] Furthermore, if we can assume that his audience would be familiar with the sentence following the one he has quoted from verse 8, in which we learn that Lehi also saw Jesus Christ "descending out of the midst of heaven" whose luster "was above that of the sun at noonday" (1 Nephi 1:9), we would understand that Alma shares the same concept of the Father and the Son that Nephi displays in this passage and more explicitly in 2 Nephi 31. Combined with Alma's invocation of the divine names as discussed above, we can see Alma teaching an extraordinarily clear understanding of Jesus Christ over half a century before Christ's birth.

Structure I

17	a		And it came to pass that as I was thus *racked with torment*,
		i	while *I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins*,
	b		behold, *I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy* unto the people
		i	concerning the coming of one *Jesus Christ, a Son of God*,
	c		*to atone for the sins* of the world.
18	b*		Now, *as my mind catched hold upon this thought*,

---

28. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," 126.

<div style="margin-left: 2em;">

i   I cried within my heart: *O Jesus, thou Son of God*,

ii   *have mercy on me,*

    1   who art in *the gall of bitterness*

    2   and art *encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.*

19   a*   And now behold, when I thought this, I *could remember my pains no more.*

    i   Yea, I was *harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.*

</div>

The remaining text at the center of Alma 36 is presented as a single, complex, level-5 chiasm — the two halves of which define the narrative center of the level-4 text unit at the same time that it instantiates repentance, the focal doctrine of the chapter. This powerful convergence at the turning point of the larger level-4 chiasm is focused in this level-5 abb*a* type chiasm. Both a and a* include a 6th-level element that recalls Alma's being "harrowed up by the memory of [his] sins." Both b and b* begin with a mental action of remembering or catching hold of the same thought. But the main content and action is pushed down to the sixth and seventh rhetorical levels of the text. After remembering the prophecy that Jesus will come "to atone for the sins of the world," Alma cried to Jesus in his heart, pleading for the mercy that the atonement enables and articulating the extremity of his need, being "in the gall of bitterness" and "encircled about by the everlasting chains of death."

Because the central invitation or command of Christ's gospel is that all men must repent and come unto him, this central narrative unit provides an autobiographical account of just such a turning back to God at exactly the point where the rhetorical structure turns back. All that has been stated negatively will now be replaced by wonderful positives. And this miraculous event or turning from extreme wickedness to righteousness is only to be understood in terms of the central infinitive phrase referring to the atonement of Christ. This powerful conjunction of rhetorical form, personal transformation, and doctrinal teaching establishes Alma 36 as one of the greatest literary gems of the Book of Mormon.

It is also worth noting how the almost casual indirection of "<u>one</u> Jesus, <u>a</u> Son of God" in Alma's distant memory provides dramatic contrast to the totally personalized and immediate "<u>O</u>, Jesus, <u>thou</u> Son of God, have mercy on <u>me</u>." Can anything be more personal than our sins?

The vast distance that Alma had long maintained between himself and God collapses completely in this desperate plea for mercy. As the chiasm in Alma 36 dips here for the first and only time to level 7 to explain his reversal and prayer for mercy, we see Alma self-described as "in the gall of bitterness" and "encircled about by the everlasting chains of death"— a realization that motivates true and lasting repentance.

Mapping the Rhetorical Structure of Alma 36

Because there are so many things going on at each juncture in this complex rhetorical structure, I have prepared Table #1 to summarize the rhetorical dynamics at each stage. The 17 level-4 elements of Alma 36 are arranged by pairs in the left-hand column, mirroring the organization of the preceding presentation. The second column identifies the semantic links between the paired elements that give the level-3 unit its structure. The third column states the rhetorical form(s) used in the substructure of each level-4 unit. In Hebrew rhetoric, there is no requirement that there be any syntactic relationship between the rhetorical forms of sub-units of parallel elements of a chiasm, but as column 4 shows, in Alma 36, only one of the eight pairs displays syntactic independence. Three rely on simple repetition, three feature parallel chiasms, and two creatively form a new inclusio or chiasm when aligned.

Analysis of Level-4 Sub-Units

Structure	Semantic Link	Rhetorical Forms of Sub-Units	Syntactic Relationship
A	"my word"	personal address	
A*	"his word"	ballast line	repetition
B	"that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land"	triplet	
B*		triplets with negation	repetition
C	Helaman should do as Alma has done in remembering the captivity of the fathers	inclusio marker and chiasm	repetition frames inclusio
C*		triplet, chiasm, inclusio marker	three sub-units of same inclusio
D	"Trust in God" and be "supported in trials troubles," and "afflictions"	personal address and quatrain, chiastic unity with displaced doublets, and quatrain with ballast line	fourth element for climax
D*			

Structure	Semantic Link	Rhetorical Forms of Sub-Units	Syntactic Relationship
E	"born of God"	chiasmus	parallel 6-element chiasms
E*	"knowledge of God"	chiasmus	
F	antithetical: "destroy the church of God"	chiasmus	antithetical
F*	"bring souls unto repentance"	chiasmus	6-element chiasms
G	antithetical endings: "I fell to the earth"	chiastic storytelling	independent
G*	"I stood upon my feet"	triplet	
H	antithetical: "that I might not be brought to … God"	6-element chiasm with 4 triplets	antithetical 6/5-element chiasms
H*	"my soul did long to be there"	5-element chiasm with ballast line	
I	antithetical: "racked with torment"/ "pains no more" repetition: "Jesus … Son of God"	complex chiasm with 3 internal levels	positive and negative repetition

Conclusions

This paper introduces students of the Book of Mormon to the tools of analysis that have been developing in recent decades in the study of 7th and 8th century BCE Hebrew rhetoric. Scholars now recognize that much of the Hebrew writing in Lehi's day used the rhetorical assumptions and expectations of this writing school in order to communicate meaning more powerfully through both words and textual structure. The principal innovations are based in the recognition that larger texts are divided into discrete smaller texts, which in turn can be divided again and again into multiple subordinate levels of textual units. Each of those units at the different levels will have its own rhetorical structure. Most of these structures feature one or more forms of parallelism or repetition.

While criticisms of published chiastic analyses of Alma 36 have pointed to large sections of text not readily included in the traditional chiastic analysis of that chapter, application of the tools of Hebrew rhetoric reveal a chiastic structure that appears to be fully organized at subordinate levels, leaving no extra text unaccounted for in the analysis. The resulting analysis also reveals a powerful work of art in which

literary structure, gospel teaching, and narrated repentance experience converge in a fully integrated and mutually supporting way.

The merging of Lehi's version of the Abrahamic covenant promises for this world with Alma's own account of the eternal-world promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ clearly indicates that Alma — and most likely other Nephites — understood these as two ways of talking about the same thing. The explicit reference to the atonement of Jesus Christ at the precise center of the chapter-length chiasm emphasizes its essential role in God's salvation for individuals and nations.

Noel Reynolds (PhD, Harvard University) is an emeritus professor of political science at Brigham Young University, where he taught a broad range of courses in legal and political philosophy, American Heritage, and the Book of Mormon. His research and publications are based in these fields and several others, including authorship studies, Mormon history, Christian history and theology, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.