INTERPRETER

A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship

Volume 52 · 2022

The Interpreter Foundation

Orem, Utah

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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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Should I Be My Brother's Keeper? Yes and No

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: *We typically teach and often even sing that we should be our brothers' (and sisters') keepers. And we do it with the very best and most holy of intentions. For many of us, indeed, loving and caring for our brothers and sisters is at the very heart of what it means to live a life of truly Christian discipleship. And rightly so. But there's another way to think about this matter. I've pondered it for decades, and now, maybe some others will also find it thought-provoking.*

In all the congregations of the Saints where I've participated, one of the most popular and oft-recurring hymns has been "Lord, I Would Follow Thee." With lyrics by Susan Evans McCloud that were set to music by K. Newell Dayley, two of the verses of the hymn read as follows:

> I would be my brother's keeper;
> I would learn the healer's art.
> To the wounded and the weary
> I would show a gentle heart.
> I would be my brother's keeper—
> Lord, I would follow thee.
>
> Savior, may I love my brother
> As I know thou lovest me,
> Find in thee my strength, my beacon,
> For thy servant I would be.
> Savior, may I love my brother—
> Lord, I would follow thee.[1]

1. "Lord, I Would Follow Thee," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1985), 220.

The phrase *my brother's keeper* comes, of course, from the tragic story of Cain and Abel that is recounted in the fourth chapter of Genesis. Here are the two most salient verses of that story:

> And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.
>
> And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? (Genesis 4:8–9)[2]

Cain's insouciant, even insolent, answer to the Lord's question reflects his defiance of God. He is arrogant and unrepentant. And our typical response to him is that, yes, you *are* your brother's keeper. Or, at least, you *should* be.

We all know what it means to be "our brother's keeper" in this sense, and, if we're serious Christians, we aspire to be precisely that and, in fact, to become *better* at being that than we now are. Cain, as we commonly read the story in Genesis 4, is flippantly telling the Lord that he doesn't care where Abel is, that Abel is no concern of his. Certainly, we don't want to emulate Cain — and not only because we would prefer not to incur God's displeasure. Instinctively, we feel that we ought indeed to care about our brothers and sisters and, in so doing, to emulate God, whose "work" and whose "glory," we are told, is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). "Wisdom," according to the Book of Mormon's wise king Benjamin, consists, at least in part, of learning "that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). Having related to an inquiring lawyer the story of "the Good Samaritan," who ministered kindly to an injured Israelite — a stranger, and no relation — the mortal Jesus admonished the lawyer to "go, and do thou likewise."[3]

The apostle Paul implies, by his famous linking of it with faith and hope, that love, or "charity" (as the King James Bible renders the Greek term ἀγάπη [*agape*]), is a divine gift; the prophet Mormon, in a letter shared with us by his son, explicitly counsels us to pray to God to be *granted* that divine gift.[4]

Thus, clearly, we should love and serve our brothers and sisters. In this sense, without question, we should ideally be our brother's keeper.

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2. Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations here are from the King James Version.
3. Luke 10:37; for the story, see Luke 10:30–37.
4. See 1 Corinthians 12–13 and Moroni 7:46–48.

But there is another perspective on the matter that is perhaps worth considering and learning from.

More than five decades ago, having just arrived from California as a student at Brigham Young University, I attended a lecture by Chauncey C. Riddle, a professor of philosophy at BYU who was, I think, the dean of the University's graduate school at the time. Unfortunately, I don't recall the overall title or theme of the lecture nor, frankly, much else about it. But one thing I do recall and have pondered ever since, because it was so unanticipated.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" asked Professor Riddle, echoing Cain's sneering response to the Lord's question.

"No," he answered — very much to my surprise. Cain was *not* his brother's "keeper." Nor are we the "keepers" of our brothers and sisters.

This was not the answer that I was expecting. Still, the logic of his answer was intriguing to me.

To explain what he intended, Professor Riddle appealed to the patriarchal order of things and to the concept of stewardships.[5] Fathers and mothers, he observed, bear specific responsibility for the care and teaching of their children. They are bound to answer or to respond in the event that a wrong (whether of commission or omission) has occurred. They are answerable to God or to some other higher authority — and in very particular ways that do not apply to other people.

In every nation or jurisdiction of which I'm aware, the law recognizes the special responsibility of fathers and mothers. They are expected to feed and clothe their children, and to care for them when those children are incapable of caring for themselves. And, of course, the scriptures also recognize this special responsibility. For instance, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, declaring that "if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8).

Likewise, the Lord had this to say to his Church in a revelation that was given through the Prophet Joseph Smith at Hiram, Ohio, on 1 November 1 831 and then expanded under his direction when it was published in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants:

> And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not

5. For what follows, I'll be reconstructing what Professor Riddle said based not so much upon actual memory but upon how I would conceive and make his argument today. The details of his lecture and of his specific argument are, sadly, gone from my remembrance.

> to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents. For this shall be a law unto the inhabitants of Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized. … And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord. (D&C 68:25–26, 28)

Indeed, when they are young, we can tell our children what to do and how to behave, and we can expect them (however messy and inexact and difficult it may turn out in actual practice!) to obey. In an analogous way, people who have been assigned various stewardships — whether in the military or in other organizations (very much including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) — bear the authority, to one degree or another, to direct those within their area of jurisdiction or stewardship and bear responsibility to do so wisely and well. (In some specific areas, certain people are actually legally designated as acting *in loco parentis*, "in the place of a parent.")

But I have no authority, as a father, to discipline or direct the children of another father. If I'm serving as a bishop, I have the authority to lead the ward over which I've been assigned to preside, but no authority whatever to lead the adjacent ward. This simple principle is relevant to many areas of our lives: one of the many reasons that gossip is wrong is that, unless I'm a trial judge or a juror or someone else specifically tasked with considering such things, the personal or family matters of another individual are, flatly, none of my business. To borrow a phrase from Voltaire's *Candide*,[6] I should cultivate my own garden and not meddle in the gardens of others.

This, Professor Riddle contended, was at the root of Cain's error: he had no authority over his brother Abel, who was at the same level in the patriarchal order that he was. He surely had no authority to terminate Abel's life. He was not, in that sense, Abel's "keeper."

We can perhaps shed some light on this by examining what the word *keeper* means, in the phrase *my brother's keeper*. The King James rendering of the Hebrew word שֹׁמֵר (*šōmêr*) as "keeper" has, it seems, been retained by most English translations across the board. And what, exactly, does this imply? In English, a "keeper" is a person who takes care of animals or who is in charge of a building or of inanimate objects.

6. Voltaire, *Candide* (New York: Boni & Liveright, Inc., 1918), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19942/19942-h/19942-h.htm.

Thus, we speak of zookeepers, beekeepers, the keeper of a lighthouse, or the keeper of antiquities in a major museum or of paintings and sculptures in an art gallery. We also use the term *custodian* in many such cases, so it is significant to note that Jerome's ancient Latin Vulgate[7] rendition of *šōmêr* is *custos*, from which the English word *custodian* derives. The Greek Septuagint[8] uses φύλαξ (*phúlax* or *phylax*) to translate *šōmêr.* The English equivalent of *phúlax* is *guard* or *sentry.* (Compare our word *prophylactic*, which refers to something that protects, guards, against disease or some other condition.) At Genesis 4:9, the *Common English Bible*[9] and the *Complete Jewish Bible*[10] have "Am I my brother's guardian?" while the 1979 *Nouvelle Edition de Genève*[11] has "*suis-je le gardien de mon frère*?"

These renderings are instructive. Was Cain's question a mocking and demeaning allusion to the fact that Abel, the brother he had just murdered, had been a keeper of sheep? (Sheep aren't exactly well known — and likely never have been — for their rational choices or their intellectual acumen. They aren't fully free.) We commonly use the term *custodian* to refer to responsibility for inanimate or non-sentient things, and the term *guardian* to denote stewardship over children or over adults who have been ruled incapable of governing themselves. If we place a sentry over someone, that person is a prisoner.

But Abel was neither a child nor incompetent. He wasn't Cain's captive. He was a fully functioning and free adult, entirely capable of governing himself, and Cain had no right over his life. In fact — and we need look no further than the 1991 Disney animated film *Beauty and the Beast*[12] or its 2017 remake[13] with live actors to see an illustration of this — we regard the false declaration of a person's incompetence to gain

7. The Latin Vulgate Old Testament Bible (website), https://vulgate.org/ot/genesis_4.htm.

8. The Septuagint: LXX (website), https://www.septuagint.bible/-/genesis-4#.

9. Common English Bible (website), https://www.commonenglishbible.com/explore/passage-lookup/?query=genesis+4.

10. Common Jewish Bible (1998), https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+4&version=CJB.

11. Nouvelle Edition de Genève (1979), https://www.bible.com/bible/106/GEN.4.NEG79.

12. *Beauty and the Beast*, directed by Gary Trousdale & Kirk Wise (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 1991).

13. *Beauty and the Beast*, directed by Bill Condon (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2017).

control over him or his property as a particularly flagrant and horrifying injustice.

Once a child has reached maturity, though, or if a person gains or regains the ability to make her own responsible decisions, our answerability regarding such a free person substantially changes. Consider, for example, the case of the apostle Paul, as he took leave of the saints at Ephesus. Addressing them, he said:

> And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. (Acts 20:25–27)

In other words, he had conveyed to them everything that he was divinely commanded to convey. Now, since he had done his duty toward them, the responsibility for what they would do with his teaching was theirs. A passage from the prophet Ezekiel is directly relevant in this context:

> Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,
>
> Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman:
>
> If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people;
>
> Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.
>
> He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul.
>
> But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

> So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.
>
> When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.
>
> Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. …
>
> Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:1–9, 11)

But who has been set by the Lord as a watchman? Surely, we might say, the apostles and the prophets have been. And perhaps local leaders, too, for those within their stewardship. And parents, for their children. In a specific way, though, *all* of us have been so appointed. In the spring of 1959, President David O. McKay addressed members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were gathered in the Salt Lake Tabernacle for the Church's 129th Annual General Conference. "Every member a missionary!" he told them. "Somebody will hear the good message of the truth through you."[14] And that divine assignment, given through a prophet, has never been revoked: "It becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor" (D&C 88:81).

Thereafter, once we have adequately conveyed the message of the Restoration — and please note my use of the word *adequately* — our principal responsibility toward our brothers and sisters has been discharged *in that respect*. We still have the responsibility, of course, to care for the poor and the needy in the Lord's way. We are still under an obligation, if we can, to do no harm.[15] We are still to love and take

14. David O. McKay, *Conference Report* (April 1959), 122, https://archive.org/details/conferencereport1959a/page/n123/mode/2up.

15. This is more difficult than it sounds, and perhaps more so in our time — when some seem overeager to claim harm or victimhood. But it's still an aspiration. I think, in this regard, of Paul's concern (in 1 Corinthians 8) about eating meat that had been offered to idols. He felt that it was, in and of itself, a matter of moral and theological indifference. But it might mislead a fellow Christian. "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest

an interest in the welfare of our children and our siblings and our neighbors. Apart from specific ecclesiastical or legal assignments or personal transactions, though, we have no calling to judge them or to issue directives to them. That is God's role. ("Who am I to judge another," Susan Evans McCloud's lyric asks, "when I walk imperfectly?"[16] "For," Eliza R. Snow's familiar hymn points out, "'tis high to be a judge."[17]) And, in the end, we are not responsible for their choices.

Likewise, missionaries are expected to work hard and to take their message as well as they can to as many people as they can. Thereafter, the people to whom they take their message are free to receive it or to reject it. The farmer prepares the soil and plants his seed, but a successful harvest isn't entirely within his power. To make a similar point, the ancient Stoic philosophers of Greece and Rome were fond of an analogy involving a bowman or archer. The archer is responsible for which bow he decides to use, which arrow he selects from his quiver, how strongly he pulls the bowstring back, how still he stands, what target he chooses, and how well he aims. Once he releases his arrow, though, his responsibility comes to an end; his influence has reached its limit. A puff of wind might change the course of his arrow. Perhaps the arrow will break or fall apart in mid-air. It may be that someone or something will come between his arrow and his chosen target. Perhaps the target will move.[18]

While we cannot dictate how others will receive our message, we have considerable control over whether and how we will commend and defend and teach the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ over. Some of us have chosen the Interpreter Foundation as an important means of advocating the claims of the Restoration and, thus, fulfilling our divine obligation. We hope that you'll consider joining us.

I make my brother to offend" (8:13). And a further note: Although it's often thought that the famous medical dictum "First do no harm" comes from the Hippocratic Oath, it actually doesn't. It comes, instead, from another treatise attributed to Hippocrates (ca. 470–360 BC), *On the Epidemics* or *De morbis popularibus.* See *Hippocrates,* trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 1:165, https://archive.org/details/hippocrates0001unse/page/164/mode/2up.

16. "Lord, I Would Follow Thee."

17. "Truth Reflects Upon Our Senses," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1985), 273.

18. It goes back to Antipater (d. ca. 130 BCE) and was picked up by, among others, Cicero (d. 7 December 43 BCE). But I was reminded of it by a much less remote and exotic author, and I draw upon his summary of it: Rolf Dobelli, *Die Kunst des digitalen Lebens: Wie Sie auf News verzichten und die Informationsflut meistern* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2019), 175.

I want to express my gratitude here to the authors, reviewers, donors, designers, source checkers, copy editors, and other volunteers who make the work of the Interpreter Foundation possible in general, including this publication. I particularly want to thank the authors who have contributed to this particular volume, along with Allen Wyatt and Jeff Lindsay, who serve as the managing or production editors for the *Journal*. Like all of the other officers of the Interpreter Foundation, they volunteer their time, their talents, and their labor without financial compensation. Were it not for them, however, there would be no *Interpreter*, and were it not for others like them, the Interpreter Foundation as a whole could not function. By the time you read this, the Foundation will have passed its tenth birthday. That's remarkable. I'm astonished at what we've accomplished together over the ten years of our existence to this point, and I expect even greater things in the future.

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An Unfortunate Approach to Joseph Smith's Translation of Ancient Scripture

Spencer Kraus

Review of Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate: Joseph Smith and the Nephite Interpreters* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2020). 385 pages. $22.99 (paperback).

Abstract: *This is the first of two papers that explore Jonathan Neville's two latest books regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon. Neville has long argued that Joseph Smith did not use a seer stone during the translation of the Book of Mormon, and he has more recently expanded his historical revisionism to dismiss the multitude of historical sources that include the use of a seer stone. Neville's "Demonstration Hypothesis" is explored in* A Man That Can Translate*, arguing that Joseph recited a memorized text from Isaiah rather than translate Isaiah from the Book of Mormon record. This hypothesis, meant to redefine how Joseph Smith used a seer stone during the translation of the Book of Mormon, however, fails to deal with the historical record seriously or faithfully. Neville, in a purported effort to save Joseph Smith's character, ironically describes Joseph as a liar, reinvigorating old anti-Latter-day Saint claims that Joseph simply recited a memorized text, even to the point that Neville defends hostile sources while targeting Church-published histories and publications. He further attacks the witnesses of the translation in an effort to discredit their testimonies regarding the seer stone, and repeatedly misrepresents these sources. Coming from a Latter-day Saint, such claims are troubling and demand a response.*

Despite historical documentation to the contrary, Jonathan Neville has long maintained that Joseph Smith did not use a seer stone during the translation of the Book of Mormon. While belief in or rejection of the seer stone in the historical record will not affect one's

standing within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Neville has recently published two books relating to the translation of the Book of Mormon that explore his two latest theories regarding the translation and Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone. This is the first of two papers that will explore the claims that Neville makes in these two books and offers a thorough response to his unorthodox and unjustified claims.

The first of the two books, *A Man That Can Translate*, deals in detail with the question of Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone, presenting his "Demonstration Hypothesis" as what he believes is a faithful and superior alternative to the historical analysis offered by faithful Latter-day Saint scholars. However, Neville fails to deliver any argument that can be described as an accurate or rigorous analysis of the historical record, or even the Church itself. Neville relies heavily on misrepresenting his sources and making claims from silence, and enough factual discrepancies and contradictions are found within his book that any serious reader will quickly recognize its lack of serious scholarship or peer review. Neville states that as we are all "pursuing truth together," he is open to hearing from anyone who finds anything that he missed or overlooked.[1] I hope his openness to hearing from those who disagree with him is as sincere as he claims, especially as the evidence is weighted against his unorthodox theories.

Neville's approach deals heavily with the definition of the Urim and Thummim and how he believes Joseph Smith understood the word "translation." Neville inserts his misunderstandings into the historical record, producing an analysis that is designed to lead the reader to his conclusions, while discrediting other sources that disagree. Because these two topics are so fundamental to his arguments and his new hypothesis regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon, I will first discuss what Neville says regarding the use of a seer stone by Joseph Smith and what Joseph Smith meant by the term "translate." I will then move into a discussion of Neville's Demonstration Hypothesis, his acceptance of sources critical of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and his targeting of sources produced by the Church. I will also discuss his treatment of the witnesses to the translation and how he attempts to discredit each of their various statements and testimonies regarding the divine translation of the Book of Mormon.

Seer Stone or Urim and Thummim?

A crucial point of contention for Neville comes from the seer stone in the historical record. Much of his work in this book attempts to argue

that no such seer stone was used in the translation of the Book of Mormon because, "the nature of the translation implicates theological and historical issues related to the historicity and divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon itself" — that is, Neville believes that should a seer stone have been used, the "narrative of the ancient creation and preservation of the plates" would be rendered "pointless."[2] Neville goes further to state that use of the seer stone even "contradicts the scriptural narrative," thus questioning whether or not the Urim and Thummim or plates were ever needed and, by implication, whether or not the Book of Mormon could be regarded as historical.[3]

Neville repeats his position multiple times by claiming that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery only ever described translation via the Urim and Thummim — as such, Joseph and Oliver must have used the term Urim and Thummim exactly as Neville proposes, limiting its use strictly to the Nephite interpreters. Neville claims that "Joseph and Oliver responded promptly to *Mormonism Unvailed* by emphasizing that Joseph used *the* Urim and Thummim that *came with* the plates to *translate* the plates. They consistently claimed this throughout the rest of their lives…. In connection with the translation of the Book of Mormon, they never referred to *a* Urim and Thummim as a generic term. Neither of them claimed that Joseph read words that appeared on a seer/peep stone, that he didn't actually translate the plates, or that he had power to translate the plates with anything other than *the* Urim and Thummim."[4] This proposal has several problems.

Early Saints and the Term "Urim and Thummim"

Central to all of Neville's claims is this question — what did early Saints understand by the term "Urim and Thummim" and could they have had a more expansive view of the term than Neville here presents?

According to Neville, there "is no indication or implication that Joseph, Oliver, or anyone else referred to the 'seer stone' or 'peep stone' as *a* Urim and Thummim or vice versa. All contemporary accounts referred to the objects Moroni put in the stone box as *the* Urim and Thummim, the spectacles, or the Nephite interpreters."[5] Neville also repeatedly paints the use of a seer stone in the translation as a recent development in Church history in an attempt to separate the idea from Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.[6] Not only is this a false claim, but Neville's use of the sources is troubling for his hypothesis, since he goes on to cite contemporary sources calling the seer stone a Urim and Thummim.

Neville quotes from the final testimony of Benjamin Winchester, a disgruntled former member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and mission leader. Winchester was excommunicated in 1844, and after a brief time with Sidney Rigdon's church appears to have become opposed to the restoration as a whole. Winchester remarks that Joseph "carried what he called a 'Peep stone' through which he claimed to see hidden treasure & etc. This is what he afterwards called his 'Urim and Thummem.'"[7] While Winchester was hardly a friendly source, he was a contemporary of Joseph Smith who saw little problem in calling the seer stone the Urim and Thummim.

One might claim that Benjamin Winchester was simply parroting a hostile source such as *Mormonism Unvailed*, but such a theory does not withstand critical analysis, since he was not the only one to refer to it in these terms. David Whitmer, who would not have any motivation to cite from sources critical to the Book of Mormon, once told a reporter that "[Joseph] Smith was given by the angel, a Urim and Thummim of another pattern, it being shaped in oval or kidney form. This seer's stone he was instructed to place in the hat."[8] David Whitmer later wrote that Joseph was given power to translate "by means of a stone" before referring his readers to multiple scriptures from the Bible referencing the Urim and Thummim, "being the same means and one by which the Ancients received the word of the Lord."[9] While Neville had claimed almost one hundred pages earlier that *no* contemporary of Joseph Smith described the seer stone by the biblical term Urim and Thummim, Neville now admits that David's use of the term Urim and Thummim "[implied] the term described the stone Joseph used."[10]

Neville later tries to dismiss a journal entry by Wilford Woodruff stating that "I had the privilege of seeing for the first time in my day the URIM & THUMMIM."[11] He tries to explain this via a quote from Brigham Young describing the same event, who recorded that Joseph "explained to us [the apostles] the Urim and Thummim which he found with the plates" and then after discussing seer stones, Joseph "showed us his seer stone."[12] Based on Brigham Young's statement mentioning both the Nephite interpreters and Joseph's seer stone, Neville claims that "[Woodruff's] statement can be interpreted several ways, including the possibility that he didn't care much about the seer stone but was impressed because Joseph still had the actual Urim and Thummim."[13]

However, such a reading cannot reasonably nor responsibly be taken from Brigham Young's journal. He makes no mention of Joseph *showing* the apostles the Nephite interpreters — Joseph just explained

what they were before moving on to discuss seer stones. According to Brigham Young in that same journal entry, Joseph "said every man on earth was entitled to a seer stone, and should have one, but they are kept from them in consequence of their wickedness." This may be an expansion of Joseph's teachings recorded in D&C 130:10–11, stating that "the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17, will become a Urim and Thummim to each individual who receives one" which would be given to the righteous saints "who come into the celestial kingdom." Then, after the discussion of the Urim and Thummim and seer stones, Joseph showed the apostles one of his own seer stones.[14] Here again we have a further statement by Joseph Smith linking seer stones to the Urim and Thummim, showing that the title did not just belong to the Nephite interpreters that he found with the plates. When we consider all the historical evidence, then, Wilford Woodruff's journal is best read as a description of Joseph showing the same item to the apostles in Nauvoo.

Heber C. Kimball was another contemporary of Joseph cited by Neville who appears to have used the title Urim and Thummim to refer to a seer stone. Kimball told the Saints in 1853 that Brigham Young had "everything that is necessary for him to receive the will and mind of God to this people," including the Urim and Thummim.[15] Neville says that it is "congruent with Woodruff's journal entry to infer that what Woodruff saw and what Brigham Young possessed was the Urim and Thummim that Joseph obtained with the plates."[16] As we have already seen, it would assuredly *not* be congruent with Wilford Woodruff's journal entry to believe that the item in question was the Interpreters obtained with the plates. While we might debate what Heber C. Kimball meant in his declaration, either the brown seer stone or the white seer stone (or perhaps even both) seem to be the most likely referent.

Joseph's white seer stone appears to have been passed down to the apostles after his martyrdom, eventually being placed on the altar of the Manti temple during its dedication by Wilford Woodruff.[17] There is little reason to doubt that Brigham Young, as the President of the Church, would have had it at the time Heber C. Kimball spoke. Furthermore, the brown seer stone that was given to Oliver Cowdery passed to Brigham Young after Cowdery gave it to Brigham's brother Phineas. The brown stone has remained in the Church's possession since.[18] Conversely, while multiple accounts detail the return of the Nephite interpreters to Moroni, there is not a single record that corroborates the idea that Joseph eventually received those interpreters again, not even to show the apostles (none of whom ever claimed to see the Nephite interpreters).[19]

Orson Pratt likewise taught that the Urim and Thummim were not in the possession of the Church while in Utah (contrary to Neville's claim that Brigham Young possessed them), describing the future coming forth and translation of "other records translated by the Urim and Thummim, that same instrument that Joseph Smith used in the translation of the 'Book of Mormon,' *which will again come forth and be revealed to the seer and revelator that God will raise up by which these ancient records will be brought to light*."[20]

It is evident that Joseph and his contemporaries (who were prominent Church leaders and apostles, including two future Church presidents[21]) used the term Urim and Thummim much more broadly than Neville admits. He goes to great lengths to redefine history according to his own conception.[22]

This poor historiography can even be seen in Neville's repeated claims that Joseph and Oliver "never said anything about [translating with] *a* Urim and Thummim, let alone a seer stone found in a well."[23] This is a red herring — the use or disuse of the definite article does not imply what Neville thinks it means. This is especially evident when one considers that the Urim and Thummim is a *plural* term that apparently could be used to describe a single stone (as in D&C 130) or multiple stones, as can be seen in the case of the Levitical high priest's Urim and Thummim (see Exodus 28:30) and the Nephite interpreters. A similar phrase in English might be "I saw the sheep" — in this instance, the word *sheep* can be understood as referring to either a single animal or a whole flock of animals (or any number in between). So how many sheep were seen, and how many instruments were used in the translation of the Book of Mormon? Even if each individual sheep is not described in detail in every retelling of a child's trip to a farm, one cannot simply declare that only a single sheep was seen. Likewise, one cannot claim that multiple instruments of translation were not used by the Prophet Joseph Smith just because he (purposefully) did not go into detail regarding the means of translation.[24]

Seer Stones and "[Contradicting] the Scriptural Narrative"

Another of Neville's key efforts to dismiss the seer stone's role in the translation of the Book of Mormon comes from an apparent trump card for Latter-day Saints. By claiming that the use of a seer stone "contradicts the scriptural record,"[25] he makes agreeing with him the price of maintaining a belief in the scriptures themselves. If you believe the

scriptures, the subtext goes, then you must agree with Jonathan Neville's interpretation of them; if you do not, you are a part of the problem.

However, Neville provides no substantial evidence that the use of a seer stone contradicts the scriptural record. As we will now see, through a selected handful of scriptures he reaches his conclusion through unfounded presuppositions and misreadings of the text. This would be more convincing if he did not portray them as agreeing with him even when he seems to deliberately avoid responding to arguments counter to his position.

Neville first states that "Moroni explained that the record could be read *only* with the interpreters." For this argument, Neville draws upon Ether 3:22–24, which records the words of the Lord to the brother of Jared that "*these stones* shall magnify to the eyes of men *these things* which ye shall write." Neville then states "Whether a stone found in a well could serve the same purpose as 'these stones' that the Lord gave the brother of Jared is a question we can each answer for ourselves."[26] This is a rather coy bit of rhetoric — he won't *say* that the Lord could not mean this, but leave us to draw the conclusion on our own — but it is not an argument.

It is hard to escape the impression that this rhetorical sleight of hand attempts to paper over the fact that nowhere in this scripture does the Lord limit the translation to *just* the stones mentioned in Ether 3. A key insight into what made those stones so special is actually even raised by Neville, albeit inadvertently — these were stones that the Lord had prepared and placed in the prophet's possession to enable future revelations and even translations. According to Wilford Woodruff, Joseph Smith had similarly found at least one of his seer stones "by revelation some 30 feet under the earth."[27] Under such circumstances, it is just as reasonable to claim that Joseph Smith's seer stone could serve translation purposes, because the Lord had placed it there knowing in advance that Joseph Smith would one day find the stone and that he would be able to use it in his prophetic mission.

Another instance comes from Alma 37. Citing the 1830 edition and the Original Manuscript, Neville rightly claims that Alma 37:21 originally used the term *directors* instead of the modern reading of *interpreters*. Neville then states that this change in the 1920 edition reflected "a new interpretation of what the verse 'should' have read" and that the original term *directors* "suggests a meaning different from the 'interpreters' mentioned [elsewhere in the Book of Mormon.]"[28] Neville goes on to declare (based on D&C 17:1 where "marvelous directors"

are given to Lehi) that the term *directors* only refers to the Liahona and perhaps a seer stone given to Lehi that is otherwise unmentioned in the scriptural record.[29]

However, Neville again offers a weak argument with contradictory evidence when he claims that the 1920 change reflected a "new interpretation" of the text. He is well aware of sources — since he quotes them elsewhere — from William McLellin and Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery describing the translation instruments as *directors*, demonstrating that this was *not* a new interpretation of the text pushed into the Book of Mormon by certain Church members, but reflects an understanding of the text that is faithful to its original message. As early as 1847, McLellin described the translation of the Book of Mormon as having been done "by the 'inspiration of the Almighty,' by the use of the means that the Lord had caused to be provided, viz. Interpreters, *Directors*, or more anciently called Urim and Thummim."[30] Later, Oliver Cowdery's wife, who was an eyewitness of the translation, would say that Joseph "would place the *director* in his hat" and then dictate the translation to his scribe.[31] While Neville claims that Oliver Cowdery made a distinction between the interpreters and the directors, his own wife was a contemporary witness that Oliver and the others likely made no such distinction.[32] Neville may disagree, but any counter argument he may provide must address these issues when citing the evidence, not ignore them.

As a final note in this debate, Neville mentions an article written by Stan Spencer that argues that the term *directors* could be an authentic translation of the term *Urim* based off of the Greek Septuagint. Regarding the use of the term *directors* in Alma 37, Spencer notes:

> Alma uses *director(s)* to refer to both the interpreters and the brass ball in Alma 37 and seems to be aware of that fact. He calls the interpreters "these directors" and the brass ball "this director" (not "*the* director"), suggesting that he considers directors to be a class of instruments of which the interpreters and the brass ball are two examples.[33]

Spencer then discusses the term *Urim* in light of its Greek translation, pointing out that "in the books of Moses, [*Urim*] was translated by forms of *deloi*, likely signifying "manifestations," and by *delosis*, signifying "manifestation" or "revelation," or perhaps "direction" or "instruction."[34] Using this interpretation, should Joseph Smith have translated the term *Urim* instead of the common transliteration that we find in English bibles, "it could have been translated with both a plural and a singular

meaning — as *directors* (for the interpreters) and as *director* (for the brass ball) — just as *elohim* is translated as both *gods* and *God* in the Bible."[35]

Neville claims that Spencer's article "doesn't mention that, in today's editions of the scriptures, the only reference to *directors* is in D&C 17:1." However, had Neville read even the first paragraph of the article, he would realize that Spencer had indeed noted that the change in 1920 made sense because "Alma is speaking of the two sacred stones used to interpret ancient writings, and everywhere else in the Book of Mormon those stones are fittingly called *interpreters*. Also, *director* (i.e., in the singular) in the Book of Mormon and *directors* in the Doctrine and Covenants always refer to the brass ball that guided the Nephites to their promised land, not to the two interpreter stones."[36]

Neville goes to greater lengths to dismiss Spencer's scholarship by avoiding any engagement with the latter's arguments. Rather, he refers his readers to comments on the article that "raise interesting points," though none are cited.[37] Looking at the few comments left on the online version of this paper, one also must wonder what comment he could possibly be referring to — none of the comments at the time of this writing challenges Spencer's claim that *directors* is a fitting translation for *Urim* based on their specific uses.[38] And Neville has the responsibility — if he wishes to engage in history instead of special-pleading — to deal with contrary evidence himself, and not rely on blog comments to do the work for him. Given that Neville is likely unable to provide any response to a matter about which he has no training, his avoidance is understandable, though not excusable.

Further evidence that seer stones support, rather than contradict, the scriptural narrative lies in the fact that multiple Church leaders — from the 1800s to the present — have openly taught and supported the historical data showing that Joseph Smith used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. President Russell M. Nelson described Joseph's use of a seer stone positively in 1992,[39] and has most recently reaffirmed that fact in a video produced by the Church at the John Whitmer household, stating "We know they had the golden plates, covered usually, and Joseph used these — the Urim and Thummim, seer stones — in the hat, and it was easier for him to see the light [from the stones] when he'd take that position."[40]

President Nelson is not the only living apostle who has taught that Joseph Smith used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. In a post to social media dated 21 June 2016, Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf stated, "People have asked me, 'Do you really believe that Joseph Smith

translated with seer stones? How would something like this be possible?' And I answer, 'Yes! That is exactly what I believe.' This was done as Joseph said: by the gift and power of God."[41] Elder D. Todd Christofferson has similarly taught that Joseph Smith used a seer stone in the translation of the Book of Mormon in a North America Northeast Member Devotional on 20 October 2019,[42] and Elder Quentin L. Cook discussed both the Urim and Thummim and seer stones in his April 2017 General Conference address.[43]

Even as early as 1888, President George Q. Cannon wrote one of the earliest (and still useful) biographies of the Prophet Joseph Smith, wherein he states:

> One of Joseph's aids in searching out the truths of the record [the Book of Mormon] was a peculiar pebble or rock which he called also a seer stone, and which was sometimes used by him in lieu of the Urim and Thummim. This stone had been discovered to himself and his brother Hyrum at the bottom of a well; and under divine guidance they had brought it forth for use in the work of translation.[44]

While I would like to believe that no Latter-day Saint would claim that these living prophets and apostles are "contradicting the scriptural narrative," Neville has previously stated that Elder Gong's general conference address had fallen victim to "scholars providing bad information to Church leaders."[45] There is thus no small irony in Neville implying that to believe in seer stones means disagreeing with scripture, while not addressing the fact that his disbelief in seers stones means disagreeing with the modern apostles and current president of the Church — and, not incidentally, implicitly charging those same leaders with disregarding scripture too.

Other Poor Arguments Against the Seer Stone

Jonathan Neville has made other weak arguments to dismiss the seer stone from Church history that are worth brief mention. Neville repeatedly conflates the seer stone with Royal Skousen's Early Modern English hypothesis, which states that some Early Modern English may be evident in the finished translation of the Book of Mormon (which, Skousen argues, would be inconsistent with a 19th-Century composition).[46] Neville has long been a critic of Skousen's hypothesis,[47] and so he attempts to wed it exclusively to the seer stone.[48] However, he fails to note that should Skousen be correct, the same traces of Early Modern English could come

from Joseph's use of the Nephite interpreters just as much as it could come from the seer stone in a hat, or any other divine instrument or process. Conflating two entirely separate ideas makes for an excellent strawman, leaving unwary readers none the wiser.

Another strange attack on the seer stone comes from Neville's book *Infinite Goodness: Joseph Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and the Book of Mormon.* The odd remark does not belong in the overarching discussion of Joseph Smith's 1832 History. One single-sentenced paragraph reads "No one proposes the 1832 History came from a stone in a hat."[49] Of course, Neville is correct — nobody in their right mind would claim that Joseph Smith would need a seer stone to record his own life experiences. What Neville does, however, is introduce yet another red herring. Neville uses this undisputed and trivial "fact" as supposed proof against the use of the seer stone in general, but this claim ultimately proves and provides nothing of substance to the matter there discussed (with which seer stones had absolutely nothing to do) or the discussion on the use of Joseph Smith's seer stone in general.

Joseph Smith and the "Translation" of Ancient Records

A key aspect of the interpretation of any historical record is offering a correct understanding of words as historical figures used them. In Neville's work, however, this key aspect appears to be ignored, with modern definitions of words used, offering a form of presentism that is destructive to historical arguments. Because of this lapse, Neville errs repeatedly because he does not understand Joseph Smith's use of the word "translate."

According to Jonathan Neville, when Joseph Smith said that he translated ancient records, it means he translated ancient records much like we would expect a Hebrew scholar to translate the Old Testament:

> Joseph translated the engravings on the plates in the ordinary sense of the word …. The translation was inspired both because of the aid of the interpreters and because, although Joseph had to study it out in his mind (D&C 9:8), the Spirit confirmed the translation he came up with as he dictated it to his scribe. Viewed in this way, the idea that Joseph actually translated the Nephite records into English seems obvious.[50]

Neville also states that the "acceptance of [Joseph's use of a seer stone] means Joseph could not have translated in the ordinary sense of using his best judgement to restate something" from the language used by the

ancient Nephites and the English spoken in Joseph Smith's day.[51] Because of this supposed scholarly translation process, Neville proposes that as Joseph had to "study it out in his mind," the translation process "could have taken two hours per page"[52] but would later "proceed relatively quickly once Joseph understood the Nephite characters and learned how to use the Spirit to guide his word choice and placement."[53] Because Neville's proposed two hours per page would be a slow pace relative to the rapid pace described by witnesses, Neville sees it as evidence against Joseph "reading already translated words" off a stone in a hat (again conflating some of Skousen's proposed theories with the seer stone).[54] Because Neville believes that this was a scholarly translation effort, he argues further that Joseph Smith could pick up where he left off because he would (of necessity) have "ended previous [translating] sessions at the bottom of a particular plate" (an argument made completely from silence).[55]

These claims, however, show circular reasoning on Neville's part that weaken his argument. Neville uses his own presuppositions about how long the translation took in order to provide evidence that Joseph did not use his seer stone. This illogical tactic further illustrates the weakness of his argument. Neville also uses presentism when determining what Joseph Smith meant when he described translating ancient records, using *his* interpretation of the word rather than Joseph Smith's. To make sense of the historical problems that such a reading of Joseph's use of the word *translate* would involve, Neville again misrepresents sources that he cites and ignores Joseph's other translation projects that might challenge his view.

For example, Neville claims that phrases such as "in other words" or "or rather" are best understood *not* as Mormon's rethinking of a phrase or fixing an error that may have crept in as he engraved on metal plates, but "it seem[s] more likely" that it was Joseph who felt that his word choice "did not capture the meaning he wanted to convey."[56] Neville believes that "the existence of [these phrases in the translated Book of Mormon] would be another reason to reject [the seer stone's use] as implausible" because there would be little reason for a divine translation to require a reworking of words or phrases.[57] (He does not explain why, if Joseph was unhappy with his first translation's phrasing, he could not simply say, "Strike that, instead write….")

This is a problem that simply does not exist. He himself notes that Paul used the phrase "or rather" in his epistles, and even Jonathan Edwards used the phrase when not translating any ancient

text, but Neville appears to be unwilling to offer that same liberty to the Nephite authors.[58] Neville likewise fails to consider that should those phrases be authentic to Mormon's writings, it would not discredit the seer stone *or* the Nephite interpreters, because Joseph Smith could as easily have translated these phrases into English from the original text, just as they were translated from the original text in Paul's epistles (who assuredly did *not* write in English).

However, because Neville is intent on dismissing the seer stone as a revelatory instrument used in the translation of the Book of Mormon, this logical analysis escapes his due consideration. He instead moves on to misrepresenting sources that state that Joseph would read words as they appeared on the seer stone. Neville claims that such a possibility "contradicts Joseph's direct claim that he translated the engravings on the plates" (using, of course, Neville's definition of translation),[59] the "witness statements [describing Joseph reading words off of a stone in a hat] reflect inference, assumption, and conjecture." These statements, therefore, should be treated lightly.[60] He likewise claims that "neither [Joseph nor Oliver] claimed that Joseph merely read words that appeared on a seer/peep stone."[61]

Neville, however, quotes a source from Oliver Cowdery explaining the translation in that precise manner. In a newspaper from 1831, Oliver Cowdery is reported to have said that "by looking through [the Urim and Thummim, Joseph] was able to read in English, the Reformed Egyptian characters."[62] While not necessarily describing a stone in a hat, Oliver explained that Joseph merely had to look into his translation instrument to be able to read the characters in English. No mention of any scholarly, two-hour-long effort was ever given by Oliver Cowdery in order to finish a page, despite Neville's "inference, assumption, and conjecture" to the contrary.

It is also incorrect (if not dishonest) to state that all of the witnesses to the translation who testified that Joseph was able to read words off of a stone in a hat were simply basing their claims off of inference, assumptions, or hearsay.[63] David Whitmer testified that it was Joseph Smith who told him that "the original character appeared upon parchment and under it the translation in English,"[64] and on another occasion he stated that Joseph told him and others that the "letters appeared on [the Urim and Thummim] in light and would not go off until they were written correctly by Oliver."[65] Neville cites both of these interviews, but ignores the implications when the data does not match his thesis.

How, then, should we understand Joseph Smith's use of "translate" in light of his prophetic calling? If we accept the presuppositions of Neville, then what can we make of Joseph Smith's other translation projects? Are we to expect that he held in his hands an ancient papyrus written in *koine* Greek by the apostle John and was able to translate Doctrine and Covenants 7 through his (nonexistent) knowledge of the Greek language? Did Joseph Smith have in his possession some ancient Hebrew, Greek, or Coptic manuscripts from which he was able to provide his "New Translation" of the Bible, and if so, what happened to those manuscripts? Did Joseph also learn how to read and translate Egyptian hieroglyphics to provide a scholarly translation of the Book of Abraham?[66] Using Neville's proposed model, none of these translations would be possible. However, when "translate" is understood in the more inclusive sense used by Joseph, it does not require scholarly work to be part of the translation process at all. (None of this is a novel idea; Latter-day Saint scholars have written reams about Joseph's conception of *translation*.[67] Neville neither acknowledges nor engages this work.)

Returning also to Neville's concern that the seer stone invalidates the existence of the plates, while such a concern is valid, it need not be troubling when all things are duly considered. While Joseph did initially use the plates and the Urim and Thummim in the conventional method that Neville accepts, as he spiritually matured and learned how he might receive revelation he apparently was able to receive the words without having to open the plates at any given time. He similarly felt at a later point that he no longer needed to rely on the seer stone for revelation, giving it to Oliver Cowdery. Elder Quentin L. Cook similarly discussed the seer stone and Urim and Thummim in terms of "training wheels on a bicycle" used until Joseph Smith could exercise the faith to receive revelations without relying on these instruments, showing a level of spiritual progression for the young prophet.[68] This is attested by Orson Pratt, who saw Joseph working on the New Translation of the New Testament and wondered why Joseph did not use an instrument like the Urim and Thummim as he did when translating the Book of Mormon: "Joseph, as if he read his thoughts, looked up and explained that the Lord gave him the Urim and Thummim when he was inexperienced in the Spirit of inspiration. But now he had advanced so far that he understood the operations of that Spirit, and did not need the assistance of that instrument."[69]

Joseph's lack of strength following the First Vision (see Joseph Smith — History 1:20) is similarly contrasted with his reaction following the reception of "The Vision" now recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76,

where he joked upon viewing Sidney's composure (recorded as being "limp and pale, apparently as limber as a rag") that "Sidney is not used to it as I am."[70] Even when Joseph was not looking at the characters engraved on the plates as he translated, the translation still took place in close vicinity to the plates, perhaps showing his reliance on their existence,[71] and they would have served as an actual, physical witness to both prophet and scribe that the translation being performed was of divine origin.[72] The existence of the plates still remained crucial to the Restoration, even when a seer stone was placed inside a hat.

However, it is also important to note that even disregarding the Book of Mormon, Joseph could provide (and indeed has provided) translations and restorations of ancient texts *even when he did not have them in his possession*. Examples include Doctrine and Covenants 7 or the visions of Enoch and Moses in the New Translation of the Bible, and these were even translated without a working knowledge in Hebrew, Greek, or Egyptian. Such a translation feat — these were, after all, ancient texts not originally written in English, so "translation" still applies to them — are greater evidence of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling, and could help contextualize how Joseph Smith could provide a translation of the Book of Mormon while using a seer stone in a hat.

Demonstrations and Lies of Translation

Because Neville does not accept all the historical documents, the most untenable of his theories lies at the heart of this book. By redefining how early Saints saw the Urim and Thummim and Joseph Smith's translation projects, Neville attempts to produce a harmonization between his heterodox beliefs and the historical records that he has so far tried to discredit.[73] Ironically, despite Neville's claim to purportedly defend Joseph Smith's character and honesty, his Demonstration Hypothesis is rooted in the presupposition that Joseph Smith was an apparent liar who would take advantage of his friends's trust in him throughout their lives.[74]

The Demonstration Hypothesis claims that Joseph Smith, being unable to show the Nephite interpreters to anyone, assuaged his friends's curiosity by reciting Isaiah from memory with his seer stone in a hat:

> Joseph conducted demonstrations to satisfy curiosity and explain the gift and power of God. He used a stone in a hat, a process with which his contemporaries were familiar, as

> a proxy to demonstrate how he could translate the engravings on the plates by means of the [Urim and Thummim] and then dictate the English words to a scribe…. Joseph simply dictated — from memory — some of the chapters from Isaiah that are found in 2 Nephi today. (I think he recognized Nephi was quoting from Isaiah and he saw this as an opportunity to conduct a demonstration.) …Because Joseph dictated these passages from memory, he did not *translate* them. This made it possible for Joseph and Oliver to truthfully say that Joseph translated the plates with the [Urim and Thummim] even though others observed him dictating Isaiah with [his seer stone].[75]

The sources that Neville uses to support such an audacious claim, however, are lacking and his hypothesis requires a great deal of special-pleading and blatant misrepresentation. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated with the passages of Isaiah that Neville cites, the proposal that Joseph dictated Isaiah from memory is not consistent with textual evidence in the Book of Mormon and early manuscripts of Isaiah. Neville's proposal is effectively an ill-advised resuscitation of early (and still unfortunately common) anti-Latter-day Saint arguments that have little merit.

Misusing and Misrepresenting Historical Sources

There are three main sources that Neville uses to support his initial claims to a demonstration of the translation.[76] One of the first sources Neville mentions is unintentionally ironic: William McLellin in 1880 recounted fifty-five reasons to explain why he no longer sustained any branch of the Restoration. Neville only quotes two: "I do not believe Joseph translated the book of Mormon. He only read the translation as it appeared before him. The Lord translated it for him, so says the book [drawing on 2 Nephi 27:20 for support]" and McLellin did not "believe in pretending to translate with Urim and Thummim when only a small Stone was used."[77] Neville believes that should make everyone reconsider the narrative: "These reasons McLellin listed for not being a [Latter-day Saint] are being taught to new members and the youth of the Church today. That should give everyone pause."

Neville then suggests that it is more "productive (and historically accurate) to articulate a reconciliation of the historical sources" which he will attempt through his Demonstration Hypothesis.[78] Neville apparently sees no problem, however, with "pretending to translate"

while Joseph really just recited Isaiah from memory, nor does he give the same weight to other statements from McLellin, betraying a double standard. Had Neville been consistent, he would have to claim that it should give us pause that the Church still teaches that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God to youth and recent converts, since McLellin became disillusioned with Joseph and criticized him throughout his life.[79]

Another source used by Neville to reinforce his already weak Demonstration Hypothesis comes from an interview of David Whitmer by Zenos Gurley in 1885. Gurley recorded that Whitmer reported "that Joseph had another stone called seers' stone, and 'peep stone,' is quite certain. This stone was frequently exhibited to different ones and helped to assuage their curiosity; but the Urim and Thummim, never, unless possibly to Oliver Cowdery."[80] Neville then concludes from this quotation that Joseph felt he must *demonstrate the translation* with his seer stone, something that Whitmer never claims.[81]

Instead, David Whitmer merely related how Joseph was commanded not to show the Nephite interpreters to other individuals, but Joseph was under no such obligation in regard to his seer stone. Hence, without mentioning the translation method, David described how Joseph could show one translation instrument and not the other. It is disingenuous to misrepresent this interview to force it into Neville's hypothesis.

However, Neville misrepresents another source even further — to the point that he offers direct contradictions to what the source says and what he thinks it should say. Neville cites an interview of David Whitmer published in the *Millennial Star* (and elsewhere in the *Chicago Tribune*) that reads as follows:

> In order to give privacy to the proceeding, a blanket, which served as a portiere, was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eyes of any who might call at the house while the work was in progress…. In fact, Smith was at no time hidden from his collaborators, and the translation was performed in the presence of not only the persons mentioned [Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer], but of the entire Whitmer household and several of Smith's relatives besides. The work of translating the tablets consumed about eight months, Smith acting as the seer, and Oliver Cowdery, Smith's wife, and Christian Whitmer, brother of David, performing the duties of [scribe], in whose handwriting the original manuscript now is. Each time before resuming the work, each present

> would kneel in prayer and invoke the Divine blessing on the proceeding. After prayer, Smith would sit on one side of the table, and the [scribes], in turn, as they became tired, on the other. Those present and not actively engaged in the work, seated themselves around the room, and then the work began. After affixing the magical spectacles to his eyes, Smith would take the plates and translate the characters one at a time.[82]

Neville claims this source must demonstrate how Joseph "dictated in front of a group without consulting the Urim and Thummim or the plates,"[83] yet Whitmer says precisely the opposite. There is no mention of the seer stone being placed in a hat, nor are the plates described as being out of the picture. Rather, Whitmer is recorded as saying that both the plates and the Nephite interpreters were used. We might argue that this is a conflation of what the reporter had been told, but Neville's own account of this source does not hold up. If he cannot fairly tell us what the account baldly states, why ought we to trust his interpretations of other sources?

Neville also draws attention to the blanket that "was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eyes of any who might call at the house while the work was in progress" and states that had the plates been covered, "a blanket would not be needed to shield them" from other people's view.[84] This is another quick argument that Neville makes without seeming to think through what the source was saying or the historical context behind it. Had Joseph and his scribes ever translated a portion of the Book of Mormon downstairs (an atypical event in the Whitmer home, but still possible on occasion nonetheless), the blanket was expressly used to shield the process from the view of anyone who might visit the Whitmers at that time.[85]

A third issue Neville takes with this source deals closely with his belief that Joseph Smith translated the plates at a slow and scholarly pace of two hours per page.[86] "Joseph dictated fast enough that his scribes tired and traded off,"[87] says Neville, claiming that this "also indicates it was a demonstration."[88] However, one would be hard-pressed to find support for this claim from the source Neville uses — while the scribes did trade off as they became tired, nothing is said regarding the atypical speed that Joseph Smith displayed when he (as Neville has it) speedily recited Isaiah from memory.

The scribes switching places could be indicative of any number of reasons, most likely sitting and writing for long periods of time. By contrast, under Neville's two-hours-a-page model, it seems to be less

likely that the scribes could grow tired of writing and would demand a much faster pace in order to translate the rest of the Book of Mormon in time.[89] This source thus "solves" the problem that Neville has invented (however, it would get tiring and test the patience of the scribes, one would imagine, if they had to wait two hours while Joseph worked out a scholarly translation). Neville has "solved" a problem that he invented through his return to an old argument from critics of the Church — he claims that Joseph didn't really translate the plates (or, in this case, a portion of them), but only feigned to do so (which is ironic, given the title of his book).

Isaiah, Nephi, and the Masoretic text

As a final note on the Demonstration Hypothesis, it is worth examining the claim that Joseph Smith merely recited portions of Isaiah from memory. Neville begins his discussion on the matter by stating that there are "inexplicable anomalies" between the King James Version (KJV) of Isaiah and 2 Nephi 13–21 that "are typical of memorization errors."[90] Neville argues from silence that because there is not a quote of Joseph "*saying* it was a translation," we are unable to claim whether it is or not.[91] Neville offers no reason to suggest that Joseph ever claimed any part of the Book of Mormon came about by means *other* than a translation, as no source could ever support such a claim, and so he can only hope that a claim made from silence can stand in for the evidence he needs. That is poor historiography. (Joseph likewise never said that the third word of the Book of Mormon was a translation, so it probably wasn't — we can see how absurd this quickly becomes.)

After briefly discussing some Isaiah variants that differ widely from the KJV and, Neville recognizes, are perhaps produced by a retranslation, he claims that these variants "make more sense as errors in reciting memorized material."[92] Unfortunately, Neville appears entirely unwilling to view minor differences in the Isaiah portions of the text as retranslations as well, since many of the variants do not dramatically alter the meaning or clarify the text. This is an unfair assumption of what the translation *must* be, and it is important to note how even the most minor of changes could still reflect a retranslation of an ancient Isaiah text. (It would in fact be suspicious if a retranslation matched word-for-word, especially words of little consequence.)

For evidence that Joseph Smith was able to recite Isaiah, Neville errs by twisting more sources to fit his narrative. For example, Neville claims that based on Joseph Smith's 1838 history and his encounter with the angel

Moroni, "Joseph recognized the scriptures Moroni quoted by chapter and verse — well enough to recognize the changes." Neville also uses Joseph's multiple sermons quoting extensively from the Bible to suggest that Joseph Smith could have memorized and recited Isaiah during the translation of the Book of Mormon.[93] What Neville fails to consider, however, is how each of these instances were recorded at a much later date — between hearing Moroni in 1824 and writing about it in 1838, Joseph had ample time to discover the references for the scriptures that were repeated to him multiple times by the angel (or, perhaps, Moroni could have told him the specific chapters and verses that he was quoting for Joseph to refer to the next day — a possibility that Neville fails to consider). Similarly, most of Joseph's recorded sermons date from well into his prophetic career. They were preceded by a long apprenticeship during which he had received multiple revelations, translated an entire book of scripture, and after he had begun retranslating the Bible. These later sermons, then, cannot be used as evidence of Joseph Smith's familiarity with the Bible years earlier in his life.

Neville similarly uses an anecdotal fallacy by comparing his own memory and experiences to that of Joseph Smith: "I once memorized Ether 12, which has more words than Isaiah 18–19 combined. It's not that difficult."[94] Obviously, citing Neville's own ability to memorize scripture says *nothing* about history itself, and is a poor argument. It is also a relatively poor analogy, since the Isaiah passages are much longer than Ether 12, contain language that is more complex and opaque, and Neville has much more education and literacy than Joseph in 1829.

Neville even endorses sources written with the intent of destroying the Prophet's character and the nature of his work. He cites an 1831 article published by a critic of the Church who accused Joseph Smith of reciting the New Testament to an unsuspecting Martin Harris. Neville states that this is another evidence of another "demonstration" (i.e., feigned translation) given to Martin Harris: "[I]f Martin wanted to know how the translation worked … such a demonstration would be an effective solution — just as it was for the observers in Fayette."[95] Elsewhere (and in a connected vein), Neville suggests that Joseph "drew on his mental language bank to render [the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi] the way he had memorized [the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew]."[96]

In response to claims that Joseph Smith recited from the Bible by memory (and especially Isaiah), both Royal Skousen and Brant Gardner have pointed out that such a reading of the text is not supported by the manuscript evidence,[97] which groups Isaiah into larger thematic groups

rather than the somewhat awkward KJV chapter divisions (which were imposed upon the published Book of Mormon almost forty years after Joseph Smith was killed in Carthage). There are enough variants in the text that likewise align with ancient manuscripts that makes coincidence an unlikely explanation for how Joseph Smith's poor memory (considering how Neville believes these variants are memorization errors on Joseph's part) could align so well with ancient sources.[98]

While Neville claims that all of 2 Nephi 13–21 was recited from memory,[99] he includes three tables in his book that describe various textual variants only in 2 Nephi 17, 19, and 20. Though these tables are flawed (even introducing many variants through his own error that are not attested in any Book of Mormon), he presents them as evidence that 2 Nephi is best understood as containing recitation errors.[100] It is worth considering these variants to see that they more plausibly arose and are best understood *not* from Joseph's faulty memory, but rather as a translation of an ancient text.[101]

2 Nephi 13:1 Compared with Isaiah 3:1

Regarding the variant in this verse, John Tvedtnes wrote:

> The problem found in this verse is known to biblical scholars, who generally consider the text to be corrupt (the New English Bible deletes the problematic passage). [The] KJV speaks of "the stay and the staff" but then goes on to mention the "stay of bread" and the "stay of water." The word translated "stay" from [the Masoretic Text] is ms'n, while its feminine counterpart, ms'nh, is translated "staff." The occurrence of the latter but once in [the Masoretic Text]/KJV destroys a parallel (probably caused by dropping the feminine singular suffix) which is corrected in [the Book of Mormon].[102]

Thus, the verse as presented in the Book of Mormon likely reflects an ancient reading that Joseph would have been unaware of had he simply recited his KJV from memory.

2 Nephi 13:10 Compared with Isaiah 3:10

The only variants in this verse are the preposition with identical meanings: *to* in the KJV and *unto* in the Book of Mormon. John Tvedtnes wrote concerning this variant:

> While there is no difference in meaning here, [the Book of Mormon] nevertheless seems to be stressing the preposition. Curiously, there is no preposition at this point in [the Masoretic Text], though one would expect it. It is there,

> however, in IQIsa (as a superscript) and the Peshitta (which also has the plural, thus confirming [the Book of Mormon]'s "them" vs. [the] KJV's "him" which follows). The parallel word, "wicked," in the same verse, does have the preposition in [the Masoretic Text], and we should expect it to be here also. We thus have evidence of the antiquity of the text from which [the Book of Mormon] came, as compared with [the Masoretic Text].[103]

2 Nephi 13:26 Compared with Isaiah 3:26

John Tvedtnes notes how the Masoretic Text contains a finite verb that is not captured in the KJV, but is reflected in the Book of Mormon, making the Book of Mormon a more literal and a superior translation than the KJV in this instance.[104]

2 Nephi 15:30 Compared with Isaiah 5:30

The Book of Mormon reads, "if *they* look," compared to the KJV "if *one* look." As Tvedtnes notes, while the Masoretic text contains a singular verb, it can be understood in the collective (i.e. plural) sense. Furthermore, the Septuagint contains a plural verb, matching the Book of Mormon.[105] The Book of Mormon thus reflects a genuine ancient reading.

2 Nephi 16:12 Compared with Isaiah 6:12

John Tvedtnes again notes how the Masoretic Text contains a finite verb that is not captured in the KJV, similar to Isaiah 3:26. This is reflected in the Book of Mormon, making the Book of Mormon a more literal translation than the KJV in this instance.[106]

2 Nephi 17:1 Compared with Isaiah 7:1

The 1830 Edition of the Book of Mormon originally reads "Rezin king of Syria," compared to the KJV's "Rezin *the* king of Syria." The Masoretic Text does not include the *heh* prefix before the word "king," so the Book of Mormon provides a more literal translation of this verse.

Neville mistakenly identifies a second variant that does not exist: he claims the Book of Mormon reads that the kings "went up *towards* Jerusalem," but that reading is not attested. The Book of Mormon matches the KJV.

2 Nephi 17:11 Compared with Isaiah 7:11

Neville erroneously transcribes the Book of Mormon as "ask either in the depths," rather than "ask *it*" as it matches the KJV. The Book of Mormon also makes *depths* and *heights* plural, as other translations of the Bible have rendered it to be more readable in English.[107]

2 Nephi 17:14 Compared with Isaiah 7:14
The Book of Mormon reads, "*shall* bear a son," making the verb explicitly in the future tense. This matches the Masoretic Text, from which the KJV was derived. The KJV translators, however, elected not to include the second *shall*.[108]

2 Nephi 17:15 Compared with Isaiah 7:15
The Book of Mormon reads, "that he may know to refuse the evil and *to* choose the good." This is a perfectly acceptable translation of the verb into English from Hebrew and reflects translator preference.[109]

2 Nephi 17:17 Compared with Isaiah 7:17
Neville fails to note the removal of the italicized *even* near the end of the verse. Like other italicized words, it is not original to the Hebrew and a perfectly acceptable translation could not include the word, such as in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

2 Nephi 19:3 Compared with Isaiah 9:3
While the KJV reads "*not* increased the joy," the Book of Mormon removes the negation. Regarding this difference, Tvedtnes notes:

> Jewish scholars of the [Masoretic Text] sometimes realized that a mistake was present in the biblical text. But since it was forbidden to alter the sacred scriptures, they left the error as a *Ketib* ("that which is written"), while adding a footnoted *Qere* ("that which is read") to be vocalized in reading the text. In this passage, the *Ketib* of [Masoretic Text] has the negative particle, while the *Qere* deletes it.[110]

Expanding on Tvedtnes's findings, I would also add that the word that does appear in the Masoretic Text (לא) is pronounced the same as לו, meaning "to him." This word need not always be translated expressly when context is clear, and it is the sort of error one could reasonably expect a scribe to make when taking oral dictation. Joseph Smith would have been unaware of this fact, and yet he provided a translation more befitting the original reading.

2 Nephi 19:7 Compared with Isaiah 9:7
The Book of Mormon differs from the KJV by its noticeable removal of the possessive pronoun *his*, among other minor changes. However, the Book of Mormon actually provides a more accurate translation of the Masoretic Hebrew (which lacks the prenominal suffix) than the KJV, and such a reading is also supported by other modern translations of the Bible such as the Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh*.

2 Nephi 19:9 Compared with Isaiah 9:9

The Hebrew word for inhabitant can often have a collective meaning. While the KJV and the Book of Mormon differ in whether it is translated as a singular or plural noun, each are acceptable translations, and in the context of this verse, the Book of Mormon provides a better translation.[111] The Book of Mormon reading is also reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls.[112]

2 Nephi 19:14 Compared with Isaiah 9:14

The Book of Mormon reads, "Therefore *will the Lord* cut off from Israel" whereas the KJV reads "Therefore *the Lord will* cut off from Israel." These two readings are virtually identical and each are acceptable translations of the Hebrew.

2 Nephi 20:6 Compared with Isaiah 10:6

The Book of Mormon reads, "I will send him against *a* hypocritical nation compared to the KJV's "*an* hypocritical nation." These are once again identical phrases, with only a modernized spelling offered by Joseph Smith, typical of a translator for his time.

2 Nephi 20:29 Compared with Isaiah 10:29

The Book of Mormon translates the name "Ramah" instead to *Ramath*. As Tvedtnes notes regarding the changed ending of the name:

> [Ramath] would be the more ancient form of the name, with the old feminine *-ath* suffix which, in later (usually even biblical) Hebrew disappeared in the pausal form of the noun. Compare verse 28, where both [the] KJV and [the Book of Mormon] have the name "Aiath," with the same feminine ending. This is particularly interesting, since it is *ʿyt* in [the Masoretic Text], but was written as ʿyh^{t} in IQIsa, with the *-t* suffix apparently added as an afterthought (it is in superscription), following a writing which shows later pronunciation. That is, IQIsa originally wrote it as "Aiah" — as [the Masoretic Text] wrote "Ramah" — and later added a superscript letter to show the older form "Aiath," possibly copying an older manuscript. This provides evidence that the brass plates are from an older source than [the Masoretic Text].[113]

In short, even Neville's abbreviated tables contain numerous errors. Many could have been avoided had he sufficient competence in Hebrew, or was conversant with the Latter-day Saint literature on these matters, or even copied the text from the Book of Mormon accurately. He is no more accurate when citing scripture than he is other historical documents.

Choosing Sources Unwisely Regarding Joseph's Seer Stone

As already shown, Neville's arguments repeatedly misrepresent his sources. Two especial areas are worth mentioning in detail: Eber D. Howe's 1834 *Mormonism Unvailed* and various publications made by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mormonism Unvailed

Mormonism Unvailed serves as both a tool to promote Neville's Demonstration Hypothesis and as a weapon against any who claim that Joseph Smith used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. This inconsistent privileging of the first "anti-Mormon" book is especially ironic considering the amount of vitriol that Neville has previously leveled against organizations friendly to the Church's claims, such as Book of Mormon Central, FAIR, the Interpreter Foundation, and even Church publications such as the *Ensign*, stating that they repeat the arguments presented in *Mormonism Unvailed* positively.[114]

For example, throughout his book Neville tries to portray the seer stone narrative as something concocted by Howe as a baseless attack against Joseph Smith and the Church. In fact, sources relating the use of a seer stone predate Howe's work. Despite his hostility to a key aspect of Howe's screed, Neville sees in *Mormonism Unvailed* the perfect tool to tie his "history" together. He repeatedly claims that Howe set the seer stone and the Nephite interpreters as "explicitly alternative explanations."[115] Neville also claims that Howe made a distinction between the "spectacles" or "Urim and Thummim" with Joseph's seer stone (derisively called by critics of the Church, including Howe, a "peep stone").[116] By creating two alternative methods of translation, Neville claims that Howe made a straw-man argument that would be easier to dismantle: "[Howe] ridiculed the idea of a 'translation' by means of a seer stone in a hat, whether the instrument was a 'peep stone' or the [Urim and Thummim]."[117] Of course, although Neville believes Howe "conflated" the two translation methods, he is unwilling to believe that Joseph's faithful contemporaries could do the same.

Neville, however, is unfair in his use of sources, even to the point of clearly contradicting himself on the same page. Immediately after claiming that Joseph and his contemporaries understood Howe as presenting "two alternative, competing explanations of the translation of the Book of Mormon," he immediately quotes from *Mormonism Unvailed* to show that Howe *didn't* set up the Nephite interpreters and the seer stone as mutually exclusive: "Now, whether the two methods for

translating, one by a pair of stone spectacles 'set in the rims of a bow,' and the other by one stone, were provided against accident, we cannot determine — *perhaps they were limited in their appropriate uses* — at all events the plan meets our approbation."[118] While Howe ridiculed both the Nephite interpreters and the seer stone, he was not just mutually exclusive to whether or not Joseph placed either instrument in a hat[119] — Howe ridiculed all forms of modern prophetic revelation.[120] He further confuses the Urim and Thummim/Nephite interpreters with the biblical Urim and Thummim used by the Israelite High Priest, which is a claim that the Book of Mormon never makes, nor do scholars associate the Israelite Urim and Thummim with anything that could appear to a modern viewer to be spectacles.[121]

To judge whether or not Neville reads Howe correctly, consider how Joseph and Oliver responded to it. Howe made every effort to claim that the Book of Mormon was flawed, fictitious, and incompatible with the revelations recorded in the Bible.[122] He further made every effort to ridicule the translation of the Book of Mormon through *any* prophetic means. Joseph Smith and other early saints responded to Howe not by refuting the seer stone translation as Neville claims,[123] but they instead linked *all* tools of translation to the Urim and Thummim — sacred tools mentioned in the Bible — to underscore the divinity of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's calling and revelations. As further evidence of their perspective, we recall that Oliver's letters, which provide a brief history of the Church, are further worded such that it cannot be ascertained exactly whether or not the phrase "Urim and Thummim" originated with Moroni or another individual in our dispensation. This issue was apparently not important enough for him to make this distinction — his priority was defending the gospel.

Howe's work is so seriously flawed and disparaging of the Church and its founding events that it is astonishing that any Latter-day Saint could claim to support his book today. However, Neville surprisingly supports many claims in *Mormonism Unvailed* that are meant to degrade the character of the Prophet Joseph Smith and cast doubts on the restoration of the gospel.

Neville quotes an affidavit included in *Mormonism Unvailed* meant to deride Joseph's honesty. In Peter Ingersoll's affidavit, he claims that Joseph Smith did not correct a toll collector when he paid him the correct price but got half of his money back in the end. When questioned about the money, Ingersoll claims that Joseph told him he handed the collector the correct amount, so he fulfilled his end of the deal. Neville

claims that Ingersoll's statement should be taken to be accurate and is demonstrative of "Joseph's willingness to let others make inferences without correcting them."[124] However, should such a story be true, it would make Joseph Smith a liar (a passive one at best and a deliberate one at worst), as Ingersoll intended to paint him. Not only was Ingersoll's Joseph dishonest in his payment and knew it to be so, but he also then actively withheld the truth for his own personal gain. Neville, like Ingersoll's Joseph, likewise needs to hide the truth for his own gain in order for the Demonstration Hypothesis to hold water. So, he endorses Ingersoll's slander and uses it as evidence.

Ingersoll continues his affidavit and claims that Joseph confided in him that he had a bag full of sand and tricked his foolish family into thinking that he had found a sacred book. According to Ingersoll, Joseph didn't believe such a book even existed, but he would have his fun with the fools and see what he could profit from it.[125] Neville claims that this affidavit reflects something that Joseph Smith *actually* said in order to prevent others from trying to steal the plates: "It seems plausible that Joseph would seek to deter [future theft] attempts *by spreading the word that he didn't really have the plates*. A confidante such as Ingersoll would be an effective method to spread such a rumor."[126] Neville further claims that Joseph lied and had others lie for him to "deflect attention" from the plates.[127] Whereas Neville first painted Joseph Smith as a sly trickster who withheld the truth, he now paints the prophet as a liar whose shady tactics would inevitably prevent many from ever accepting the Book of Mormon. If Joseph Smith had lied to his contemporaries, such as Ingersoll, why would they ever have any desire to read a book that he knew the "translator" himself had lied about? Why would he or his close friends ever desire to join the Church, having been told by Joseph himself that it was based on a lie? If Neville is correct, then Joseph Smith, even after having been called to restore the Lord's Church, would seemingly be prohibiting others from coming to Christ in a monumental way. I do not believe that any Latter-day Saint in good faith can make such a claim, and following Neville's hypothesis presented here to its logical end offers a disturbing characterization of Joseph Smith.

Honoring and Promoting Mormonism Research Ministry

Another example that shows Neville's willingness to use sources directly opposed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints if it serves his revisionist account, is his repeated citations to Mormonism Research Ministry's (MRM) online edition of the *Journal of Discourses*. MRM is

a conservative evangelical anti-Latter-day Saint ministry that has long been opposed to the Church and has sought to attack it through a variety of tactics. It is thus troubling to see Neville refers his readers to them at all. However, this problem is compounded by his defense of the website in one of his citations: "[This is] an easy-to-use website that some *perceive* as 'anti-Mormon' but is merely offering a resource."[128]

There is no question whatsoever that MRM is an "anti-Mormon" ministry in intent and content. (MRM doesn't like being called *anti-Mormon* because they feel it means they're against Mormons. They do say, however, "we may plead guilty to being against Mormonism, we are not at all against Mormons"[129] It is clear, however, that their opposition is to the Saints's faith — which concerns me, but apparently does not concern or persuade Neville.)

It is astonishing that Neville claims in one breath that organizations such as Book of Mormon Central or FAIR (and even a Church magazine) are promoting sources meant to destroy faith when he himself does so openly and brazenly by a group that will tout their own "anti-Mormonism" — until one realizes that the "faith" that Neville seeks to protect is faith in his own "history." In that case, MRM is welcome, but the *Ensign* might not be, as we will now see.

Targeting Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

While Neville uses *Mormonism Unvailed* with a lack of introspection and lauds Mormonism Research Ministry, he also treats Church publications with an increased amount of vitriol for their mention of the seer stone. Specifically, Neville misrepresents and attacks the *Ensign*, the Church's official history *Saints*, Church manuals, and even general conference addresses.

Neville disparages two issues of the *Ensign*, and in both cases he attacks an article written by a general authority Seventy. The first is Elder LeGrand R. Curtis, Jr.'s article regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon, published in the January 2020 *Ensign*. Neville has previously eviscerated this piece on one of his many blogs and compared it to *Mormonism Unvailed*, accusing it of publishing "revisionist history."[130] (Given that Neville uses *Mormonism Unvailed* when it serves his purposes, how is it consistent for Neville's readers to regard a comparison to *Mormonism Unvailed* as a fault in this instance, but not his own reliance on Howe's work?)

In his article, Elder Curtis discusses how Joseph Smith used the Nephite interpreters and his own personal seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. Neville, however, attempts to misrepresent Curtis's remarks as agreeing with Neville's own Demonstration Hypothesis. Noting Elder Curtis's statement that Joseph Smith used at least one other seer stone, Neville remarks: "The paragraph does not specifically state that Joseph used the 'other seer stone' *for translation.* The vague wording accommodates the idea that Joseph used the 'other seer stone' for other purposes."[131] But, if this article is so accommodating to Neville's views, why the complaints about revisionist history and comparisons to anti-Latter-day Saint literature? He protests too much.

Neville's reading is in clear contradiction to what the article actually states. Elder Curtis is connecting the seer stone to translation through not only the context of the article, but through his footnotes as well — a footnote that refers to a previous article in the *Ensign* that Neville previously discussed in the blog post cited above and heavily criticizes in the next chapter in his book. Based on Neville's previous discussion of this article on his blog and his use of the article's sources, it would appear that Neville is aware that his statement is an unfeasible reading of Elder Curtis's words (that's why they must be criticized and attacked), yet he attempts to justify his Demonstration Hypothesis by twisting this article's words to fit his needs. This is a dishonest use of sources in every regard.

The article that Elder Curtis cites and Neville discusses at length, "Joseph the Seer,"[132] goes to great lengths to discuss Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone in the translation of the Book of Mormon. Neville states that this article is wrong to state that evidence "shows" Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone because "the 'translation' element was an inference by the witnesses."[133] As we saw above, it reflects Neville's own worldview, *not* the historical record — but it again puts the lie to Neville's claim that Curtis's article can really be harmonized with the Demonstration Hypothesis after all.

Neville also attacks *Saints*, the new documentary history of the Church, which he has also done many times on his blog.[134] I could say much more, but it suffices to note that Neville insinuates that the Church historians who wrote *Saints* plagiarized from David Whitmer's *An Address to All Believers in Christ* because both discuss Joseph's seer stone using similar words.[135] In reality, both Whitmer and *Saints* share a common source: The Book of Mormon. Neville makes much of *Saints* describing the seer stone "[shining] in the darkness," and Whitmer

says that "in the darkness the spiritual light would shine," yet Neville fails to recognize that *Saints* is making a clear connection to the Book of Mormon which describes in many instances about stones shining in darkness.[136] (Neville could benefit from *Saints's* example — it is not a fault for histories to reflect the concepts found in the sources. The use of a single descriptive word from multiple sources does not constitute "plagiarism." It is simply good historiography.)

Neville also attacks the Gospel Topics essay discussing the translation of the Book of Mormon as well as the 2020 *Come, Follow Me* manual prepared by the Church for individual and family study of the Book of Mormon. Neville states that because the manual uses both the terms *Urim and Thummim* and *seer stone*, then it contradicts either itself or Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery — a false dichotomy of his own invention.[137] He also attacks the seer stone's use in the manual by raising straw men such as, "In what way did God prepare the seer stone" compared to the Nephite interpreters?[138]

Neville's treatment of the Gospel Topics essay is just as disingenuous, claiming that the essay does not teach what Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery taught.[139] (Neville even includes two lengthy appendices on this essay attempting to fix its supposed "errors.")[140] In one of these, Neville states that "there are no historical records" that justify attributing the idea of Joseph using a seer stone to translate originated with Joseph Smith, which as we have seen at length is false. Ironically, Neville also states that this is "pure speculation passed off as fact," and yet Neville himself will offer pure speculation regarding Oliver Cowdery that he explicitly states as a fact elsewhere in his book, as we will soon see.[141] Neville also attempts to weaken the validity of the essay through "guilt by association" because Dan Vogel, a vocal critic of Joseph Smith and the Church, also believes Joseph used his seer stone (although Vogel rejects the idea of a divine translation).[142]

Finally, Neville states that no General Conference address since 2007 has taught that Joseph Smith used the Urim and Thummim to translate the Book of Mormon. Up until then, Neville believes, all leaders of the Church were uncompromising in their rejection of the seer stone, which is demonstrably untrue.[143] Neville seems to link this date to an interview about the translation with Richard Lyman Bushman that discusses the seer stone, but Neville fails to note that Church leaders have discussed the Urim and Thummim by name since 2007. As recently as 2017, Elder Quentin L. Cook discussed both the Urim and Thummim and the seer stones being used to translate the Book of Mormon.[144] The Urim and

Thummim was also mentioned by name by Elder Lynn G. Robbins of the Seventy in 2016, making Neville's analysis all the weaker.[145]

Attacking the Witnesses

In a lengthy portion of his book, Neville seeks to reinterpret the testimonies of various witnesses to the translation to destroy confidence in their testimonies. If he can do this, it is easier to reject the historical records that contradict his Demonstration Hypothesis. Part of this effort uses citations from psychologists regarding the inherent malleability and subjectivity of memory, leading him to claim that it is "natural for people to think their memories are accurate, but it's also unrealistic, except when there are specific details that make a particular memory memorable."[146] Aside from the tautology of saying something is memorable only if it is memorable, we are apparently to accept that serving as a witness to the translation of new scripture does not count as "memorable."

Interestingly, in a table that Neville includes to rate the importance and credibility of the witnesses to the translation, Neville ranks Lucy Mack Smith *above* the first-hand witness of the scribe Martin Harris, and further places *Mormonism Unvailed* above Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery, an eye-witness to the translation.[147] This is evident of another way that Neville attempts to discredit the witnesses — all sources dating after 1870 "appear to have been influenced by William E. McLellin," according to Neville, but we will see that his reasoning is faulty.[148]

Neville claims that the witnesses to the translation were affected by the need to respond to the Solomon Spaulding theory and shaped their testimonies in response. He also discusses at great length the Three Witnesses and Emma Smith's testimonies, attempting to discredit them through a variety of means.[149] Each of Neville's claims will be analyzed against the historical record.

The Witnesses and *Manuscript Found*

Central to Neville's rejection of various statements from the historical record is the infamous *Manuscript Found* by Solomon Spaulding. Long claimed to be a source for the Book of Mormon until *Manuscript Found* was actually found, it is clear from the historical record that Joseph Smith and his contemporaries did see a need to respond to this claim and defend the truth of the translation of the Book of Mormon. However, Neville draws certain conclusions that are not supported by the historical record in this regard.

According to Neville, "The honorable end [of refuting the Spaulding theory] justified the means of altering their testimonies."[150] Because of this, the witnesses to the Book of Mormon were technically lying and bearing false witness, but they were doing so with a good intention after recognizing that "truth is not always an effective defense."[151] (If Neville endorses this strategy, it makes it all the harder to credit his revisionism, since he too could then justify lying to defend his history's truth. If this were the case, it could explain much of the egregious misrepresentation that we have seen so far.)

Because of the Solomon Spaulding theory, Neville argues that the seer stone took the center stage in the eastern United States where Harris and Elizabeth Cowdery remained. Furthermore, Neville conflates responding to the Spaulding theory with testifying of the translation with a seer stone. Neville believes that Oliver Cowdery and other leaders of the Church were able to respond to the Spaulding theory "without resorting to [the seer stone]."[152] However, while Oliver Cowdery does explicitly call out the Spaulding theory in his 1846 testimony when seeking readmission to the Church, it does not mean that he does not believe the seer stone was used in the translation, as Neville claims.[153] It is important to note that nowhere in Oliver's writings or any leader of the Church's writings that anyone denounced the seer stone being used as an instrument of translation — indeed, as discussed above, they saw it as a Urim and Thummim and had no issue calling it by that name. They did, however, explicitly reject the Spaulding theory, it being antithetical to the Restoration.

Neville plays fast and loose with his sources to make it appear as though the seer stone is inseparable from the Spaulding theory, ignoring earlier sources discussing a seer stone that predate the conception of the Spaulding theory, thus permitting him to paint the historical record and testimonies of the witnesses as lies told honorably. This is of course not a new approach — his Demonstration Hypothesis already charges Joseph Smith with this claim (whether he intended it or not).

Misrepresenting Oliver Cowdery's History

The one witness to the translation that Neville actually paints in a positive light (despite his misrepresentation of him) is Oliver Cowdery. Unfortunately, Neville's treatment of Oliver's history is flawed and filled with Neville's unjustifiable assumptions and speculation mislabeled as facts.

Neville elevates Oliver Cowdery's eight letters to near-canonical status throughout his book, based on his belief that Joseph Smith had these letters republished in all but one Church periodical throughout his life.[154] While Neville claims that Joseph Smith expressly had the letters republished, he never cites a source supporting this — because no such source exists. As Stephen Smoot previously pointed out, these letters were never republished under Joseph Smith's direction or given special treatment by the prophet in any way — the letters, in fact, contain factual errors that make it hard to believe Joseph had as large a role in their composition as Neville would apparently like his readers to believe.[155]

Neville also asserts without evidence that Oliver Cowdery saw the golden plates in Harmony, Pennsylvania, when Oliver attempted to translate the Book of Mormon, because the translation model that Neville proposes requires that to be the case.[156] However, the historical record stands in stark silence and even opposition to this theory. Oliver testified that an angel had shown him the plates when he became one of the Three Witnesses; nowhere did he ever say that he saw the plates before this time. Furthermore, Joseph Smith himself was relieved when Oliver, David, and Martin had seen the plates. According to Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph exclaimed to her:

> [Y]ou do not know how happy I am The Lord has caused the plates to be shown to 3 more besides me who have also seen an angel and will have to testify to the thuth [truth] of what I have said for they know for themselves that I do not go about to deceive the people and I do feel as though I was relieved of a dreadful burden which was almost too much for me to endure, but they will now have to bear a part and it does rejoice my soul that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.[157]

This is not someone who had previously shown the plates to Oliver Cowdery. Up until this time, Joseph described himself as "entirely alone" and being weighed down by a "dreadful burden." Had Oliver seen the plates sooner, these comments regarding the plates would make little sense. It appears evident that Oliver's participation in the translation was different than what Neville proposes.

Another claim that Neville makes is the most ironic. Despite his insistence that Joseph's use of the seer stone is based solely on inappropriate speculation passed off as fact, Neville himself offers this very approach in his own work. Neville claims that when Oliver Cowdery sought readmission to the Church, "Oliver still had in his possession

the brown seer stone Joseph had given him…. The stone was probably in his pocket."[158] Neville later states in his book that "Oliver possessed Joseph's brown seer stone…. *It was in his pocket* as he stood and spoke [at Council Bluffs]."[159] This speculation is based on *no* historical evidence whatsoever other than a well-known fact that Oliver was given the seer stone. Neville raises the issue that Oliver didn't hold up the seer stone to show the congregated Saints, and yet he cannot even verify Oliver then had the stone in his pocket to begin with. In short, Neville presents his speculation and passes it off as fact, only to build a fragile interpretive structure thereon — the same error for which he reproaches faithful historians.

David and Elizabeth Ann Whitmer

The rest of the witnesses fare worse. Their history is not just misrepresented, but treated with vitriol so that their testimonies might be less credible regarding seer stones. David Whitmer, the longest living of the Three Witnesses, never rejoined the Church after his excommunication in 1838, and Neville uses that fact to his advantage in an apparent attempt to dismiss his testimonies regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon.

Neville, for instance, uses David Whitmer's *An Address to All Believers in Christ* dishonestly, not distinguishing between something that David was testifying about and those about which he allowed his own personal feelings to reflect. In fact, Neville even claims that Whitmer believed that the Latter-day Saints in Utah "were 'in error' about various doctrines and practices" immediately after Neville — *not* Whitmer — discussed the Urim and Thummim, and that "denying that Joseph used the [Urim and Thummim] fit his [Whitmer's] objectives."[160] Neville also claims that after David was excommunicated, "David turned against Joseph and this may have affected his memory … David sought to persuade people not to follow the [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints], but he also wanted people to accept the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon."[161]

Neville here — whether intentionally or not — paints the seer stone narrative as a matter of faith for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a whole. If you believe what Joseph taught, you *have* to reject the seer stone; if you believe Joseph could have used a seer stone (like David Whitmer) you are in error. And, because Whitmer believed some other (completely unrelated) doctrines taught by the Church were incorrect, to accept his first-person account of the translation is to

necessarily accept his views about everything else. This is a straw man focused on his readers's emotions — while Neville, ironically, disregards Church teachings on Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon in order for him to fit the evidence into a contrived box of "truth" to which only he has the key. (This argument reflects Neville's naïve "all or nothing" approach as well.)

Neville further quotes Whitmer extensively regarding what he witnessed during the translation of the Book of Mormon, and then immediately tries to say that because Whitmer didn't say the word "witness," he wasn't actually a witness.[162] This is an argument easily dismissed — the words "I witness" do not automatically make a witness credible, nor does its absence weaken a witness's testimony of any event. This is grasping at straws.

Neville also attacks Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery — David's sister and Oliver's wife. In addition to claiming that *Mormonism Unvailed* was a more reliable source than Elizabeth's testimony,[163] he paints her and David's testimonies as influenced by William E. McLellin.[164] Because Elizabeth's affidavit and most of David's testimonies postdate 1870, Neville believes that this discloses a collaboration by all the witnesses to tell the same message, perhaps in league with William E. McLellin. This, however, ignores how the seer stone was discussed and well-known long before 1870, and there is little evidence to suggest that McLellin had any effect on David Whitmer's retellings of his experiences. There is also no evidence that Elizabeth's affidavit was altered with ill intent or shaped to be other than what she claimed it was — an eyewitness, day after day, of Joseph Smith translating the Book of Mormon with his face in his hat with his seer stone.

Assassinating Martin Harris's Character

Neville's treatment of Martin Harris is unfortunately worse than his treatment of any other witness discussed so far. Neville effectively offers a lengthy character assassination of Martin Harris, detailing his time spent apart from the Church, in an effort to undermine his authority as an eyewitness as a scribe to the Book of Mormon.[165] (Just as he endorses *Mormonism Unvailed*'s assault on Joseph Smith, Neville simply returns to another well-worn anti-Latter-day Saint attack originally designed to undermine the Book of Mormon. Consistent with his methods, he does *not* use the same argument against his more preferred witness, Oliver Cowdery, who likewise spent time out of the Church.)

Neville's treatment of Martin is similar to his treatment of David — he weaponizes their time outside of the Church to dismiss them wholly, regardless of the fact that they remained true to the Book of Mormon and their witness of it the entire time. In fact, in Neville's table of various accounts of the translation, Martin Harris — a scribe to the Book of Mormon — is awarded a place as a second-hand account of events, a contradiction with the definition of "scribe to the Book of Mormon" which readers are sure to easily notice.[166]

In his discussion of Martin's infamous meeting with Charles Anthon, Neville also portrays Martin as unreliable. Martin is made over into an over-enthused man who may have misunderstood Anthon, yet no discussion is given of how Anthon changed his story throughout the years in clearly contradictory terms.[167] Anthon, not Martin, proved to be the inconsistent witness to the event. Martin was also willing to put his money where his mouth was, and undertake significant financial and personal risk to publish the Book of Mormon. Neville's efforts to belittle him and his first-person testimony should discomfort any Latter-day Saint.

Neville changes his story regarding Martin multiple times throughout the chapter dedicated to him. First, Neville attempts to paint Martin's discussion of the seer stone as the effect of a frenzied mind and an after-effect of a weak spell that Neville insinuates Martin never fully recovered from, despite the source saying that Martin remained in excellent health after the incident: "This 'singular event' [when Martin grew weak] suggests a possibly serious health problem. Could it have affected Martin's memory? We'll never know, but it was after this that he claimed Joseph used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon."[168]

Unfortunately for Neville, such a diagnosis of Martin's health is entirely unfounded and unsupported through the historical evidence. Given that none of his contemporaries thought there was anything wrong with Martin Harris's memory (even into old age), and given how cogent and convincing they found him, it appears evident that this event did *not* affect Martin's memory or mental capacity in any way. Neville saying "we'll never know" whether it did or not is also incorrect — people in the 1800s knew what confusion or dementia looked like, and so the historical record would be almost certain to tell us if there were any clear signs of a mental problem. Such a diagnosis of a long-dead historical figure is complicated further because the patient in question is, in fact, dead — as Ronald Walker stated, "It is difficult enough to pronounce a diagnosis with a patient emitting a stream of consciousness

on the couch without being a biographer separated from a subject by time and distance."[169] Neville also makes this diagnosis entirely without *any* medical training or background, which underlines his inability to offer any serious argument to Martin's mental capacities. (This recalls how Neville's inability in Hebrew compromised his criticisms of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.)

The intent of this untenable claim becomes clear when Neville retells one of Martin's interviews where he *doesn't* mention the seer stone *immediately following this false diagnosis*; he mentions the Urim and Thummim: "By means of Urim and Thummim 'a pair of large spectacles' as Mr. Harris termed them, was the translation made."[170] If Martin was mentally incapacitated long after the weak spell, then why ought we to trust his account given just after it? As always, Neville's interpretive method shifts with whatever will serve his one-track historical goals.

Neville's argument is further weakened by earlier accounts — before the purported head injury — of Martin Harris talking about both the seer stone and placing divine instruments in a hat for the translation, which would include the seer stones from the Nephite interpreters themselves: "Joseph had a stone which was dug from the well of Mason Chase…. In this stone he could do so many things, to my knowledge…. The stones [now discussing the stones from the Nephite interpreters] were white, like polished marble, with a few grey streaks. I never dared to look into them by placing them in the hat." [171] Neville conveniently ignores what Martin said *prior* to the "singular event," because if he were to deal honestly with his sources, he could not here pass Martin off as a man of an addled mind. But Neville must find reason to believe that Martin's testimonies involving a seer stone are not to be trusted, and so only sources he can use to promote his agenda are used.

Another equally untenable claim that Neville makes is the suggestion that Martin, like David, Elizabeth, and even Emma Smith, was aware of each other's testimonies and sought to shape his own to align with theirs. Neville even makes mention of William E. McLellin again during this brief discussion, apparently alleging — still without evidence — that McLellin had a greater part to play in shaping how the witnesses testified of the Book of Mormon's translation.[172]

Even after Martin has been made into a victim of a frenzied mind or conspiracy to shape the narrative in the east, Neville uses a statement that fits his ends uncritically: "Martin's final statement about the translation [before his death] said nothing about a seer stone." [173] If Martin was such a compromised witness, why should this statement give his readers any

sense of hope or solace? Neville continuously tries to make Martin's testimonies at odds with each other based on the terminology that Neville is imposing upon the historical materials, ignoring the fact (as evident in this case especially) that Martin discussed *both* instruments of translation. Unless one has an "all or nothing" view of evidence, just because he doesn't mention both instruments in every testimony does *not* make one account more or less valid than the other — unless you have a historical model that must be proven, come what may.

Neville also mistakenly insinuates that at the same time Martin was speaking about the seer stone, Church leaders such as Orson Pratt responded to this claim not only by *not* mentioning Martin's accounts, but also by not even mentioning the seer stone, using instead only the term "Urim and Thummim."[174] If, however, it was something that they felt they needed to respond to, there is no indication in the historical record that they ever saw accounts of Joseph using a seer stone to translate as troublesome. If they were troubled by it, one would expect a direct denunciation, not the universal silence that bodes poorly for Neville's claims.

One final abuse of Martin's testimonies and Joseph's character is evident in Neville's continued rejection of all accounts relating to a seer stone. As Martin told Edward Stevenson:

> Martin Harris related an incident that occurred during the time that he wrote that portion of the translation of the Book of Mormon which he was favored to write direct from the mouth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He said that the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone…. Martin found a stone very much resembling the one used for translation, and on resuming their labor of translation, Martin put in place the stone that he had found. He said that the Prophet remained silent, unusually and intently gazing in darkness, no traces of the usual sentences appearing. Much surprised, Joseph exclaimed, "Martin! What is the matter? All is as dark as Egypt!" Martin's countenance betrayed him, and the Prophet asked Martin why he had done so. Martin said, to stop the mouths of fools, who had told him that the Prophet had learned those sentences and was merely repeating them, etc.[175]

Rather than view this interview in light of the other historical records that affirm that Joseph indeed used both instruments in the

translation of the Book of Mormon, Neville attempts to describe this as another "demonstration" performed by a cunning Joseph to dupe an unsuspecting and overzealous Martin:

> If Joseph was using a seer stone he'd had for years, a stone he stared inches away from his nose inside a hat at many times, it is unimaginable that Martin could find a random stone identical enough that Joseph couldn't tell the difference. One wonders also why, if the seer stone was so valuable, Joseph would have left it out in such a manner that Martin could swap it without Joseph knowing.
>
> The way Martin tells the story comes across as Joseph playing along with Martin's test. He sits, silently (as Martin infers he is unable to read anything on the stone). Then he looks up and asks Martin what the problem was.
>
> Why would Joseph ask Martin what the problem was unless he knew what Martin had done?
>
> Joseph surely was aware of Martin's need for reassurance. Under a strict command not to show the plates or interpreters, conducting a demonstration with the seer stone would be a logical solution that, hopefully, would satisfy Martin. The stone swap was a fitting conclusion to the matter.[176]

Neville then says that the whole incident may not have even happened: Martin either exaggerated, misremembered, or was confused because of the fall that Neville believes addled his mind, except when he agrees with Neville and the fall's effects are conveniently absent. Or, Neville also proposes, Martin "realized Joseph was merely playing along with him" later in his life.[177] Neville dismissively labels this story a "fun anecdote" and evidence that "Joseph played along with it" to validate Martin's faith — as if faith based on a lie could ever be as strong as faith based on divine truth.[178]

There are multiple issues with Neville's analysis. Neville wrongly believes that Joseph should be able to tell one dark-colored stone from another when it is in a hat held up to block all light from entering the hat — this is a faulty assumption, out of place in reality or history. There is no way to describe how similar the other stone could be to Joseph's seer stone, and it is unrealistic to expect Joseph to be able to tell it apart from his own seer stone when there is no light. It is also unrealistic to expect that Joseph wouldn't feel like he could trust the stone in Martin's

presence for a few minutes should he have to leave the room — they were close friends, and Martin had proven himself a priceless friend and support for the work earlier in their friendship. Neville also ignores the verisimilitude of the account — Martin and Joseph were down by the river casting stones. Martin just happened, it seems, to find a stone that looked enough like Joseph's. It may even have been that which gave him the idea of a test. It's the sort of detail that rings true.

Neville also mistakes Joseph's confusion for a sly deception, knowing full well what Martin had done. This is to push his Demonstration Hypothesis yet again. Neville also seeks to make Martin an untrustworthy source by either making him an overzealous exaggerator for attention, a man afflicted with a confused mind, or someone who knew it was a hoax but still told it as if it were true anyway. In the final scenario, Neville paints both Joseph and Martin to be liars, and in all scenarios, Joseph is a liar and Martin is an untrustworthy witness for anything useful. But this conclusion is more congenial to him than the chance that his history might be wrong.

Rejecting Emma Smith's Testimonies

The final witness that Neville dismisses is Emma Smith. Although she never came to Utah, she never abandoned her faith in her husband's prophetic calling, nor the Book of Mormon.[179] But because she never came to Utah, Neville plays many of his same tricks he used on David and Martin to reject her witness entirely.

Emma had a rocky relationship with Brigham Young after Joseph was murdered in Carthage, which only adds fuel to Neville's fire. Emma would deny that Joseph ever taught or practiced polygamy, which led to more division between her and the Saints in Utah. Neville uses some of Brigham Young's more heated statements regarding Emma uncritically in hopes that her testimonies of the translation can be rejected entirely, failing to relate the context behind those statements. He also does not tell us that no Latter-day Saints ever challenged or disputed her testimony of the translation.[180]

Saints in Utah did, however, challenge Emma's testimonies regarding the practice of plural marriage by Joseph Smith. When Joseph Smith III published "The Last Testimony of Sister Emma"[181] shortly after her death, Joseph F. Smith responded to her testimony, suggesting that he did not necessarily believe it reflected honestly the answers she had given regarding plural marriage,[182] which Neville cites to make his case: "Although he focuses on the polygamy question, [Joseph F. Smith]'s

observations about the credibility of the 'Last Testimony' and unavailability for questioning [due to her death] apply to the entire document."[183] Neville also adds that there "is just no way to tell if the Last Testimony is authentic."[184]

However, his use of Joseph F. Smith in this instance is disingenuous and dishonest. Neville attempts to paint Joseph F. Smith as questioning the entire document — in reality, he specifically cites the questions that he has issue with and that he finds dubious. Joseph F. Smith did not call into question all aspects of the testimony, but it fits Neville's approach to reject anything that he does not find convenient for his theory, and so he rationalizes his rejection of Emma Smith by portraying Church leaders inaccurately.

Had any Church leader — any at all — seen the seer stone as a challenge to the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith and the doctrine and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we should expect to find at least a single source Neville can cite. However, in the cases he has presented thus far, we are met with silence in the historical record, because Church leaders simply did not find Emma or Martin's testimonies regarding the seer stone problematic.

Neville, however, has a simplistic method when using historical sources — either all or none. This is evident especially when he complains that "Those [Latter-day Saint] historians who *accept* Emma's 'Last Testimony' to support [the seer stone method of translation] also *reject* her testimony denying polygamy."[185] This method of historiography is exceptionally poor, although unsurprising given his use of sources throughout his book. Acceptance of one fact does not mean that you must accept the entire work. By Neville's own logic, because *Mormonism Unvailed* talks about the Nephite interpreters or "spectacles," does that mean that Neville accepts the entire book as authoritative? Unfortunately, this is a poor example — Neville has, after all, already shown that he accepts affidavits in *Mormonism Unvailed* regarding Joseph's dishonest character.[186] The point, however, stands — a witness may be convincing and accurate on one point, and unconvincing and mistaken on another. The job of the historian is to weigh all the evidence, and make these judgments. The key, however, is that the same standard and approach should be used with all the evidence — and it is on that issue that Neville recurrently fails so spectacularly.

In another strange turn, Neville describes how Emma is quoted as follows:

> [O]ne time while he was translating he stopped suddenly, pale as a sheet, and said, "Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?" When I answered "Yes," he replied "Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived." He had such limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls.[187]

This presents a detail that Neville has to redispose of given his arguments regarding Joseph Smith's literacy and knowledge with the Bible he presents in *Infinite Goodness*.[188] So, Neville instead rejects this source altogether, unable or unwilling to change his theories when presented with historical facts.

Neville's response to this claim, however, reflects his tendency to cherry-pick scriptures to make his point:

> Does the Bible say there were walls around Jerusalem when Lehi left Jerusalem? No. The Book of Mormon refers to "the first year of the reign of Zedekiah." This is in 2 Kings 24. There's nothing in the Bible about walls around Jerusalem in that year. Asking about walls around Jerusalem when Lehi left seems like a reasonable question to me…. I think it's a stretch to say Joseph didn't know the Bible because he didn't know if there were walls around Jerusalem when Lehi left the city.[189]

Neville cites two scriptures that postdate Lehi's departure as well to show that Joseph may have simply thought that the walls were built after Lehi and his family departed. Unfortunately, while Neville claims that the Bible does not mention walls around Jerusalem circa 600 BC, the Bible makes it clear that Jerusalem had walls much earlier than Zedekiah's reign. Jerusalem was ruled by the Jebusites, who managed to hold Jerusalem centuries after Joshua's conquest and into David's reign — a feat nothing short of miraculous had the city *not* been a walled or otherwise inaccessible area. The city is also called a "fort" and a "castle" (see 2 Samuel 5:9, 1 Chronicles 11:5) because of its defensive nature at the time of David's conquest. During Solomon's reign, Solomon is *expressly* said to have built (or expanded) "the wall of Jerusalem" at the same time as he was building the temple (1 Kings 3:1, cf. 1 Kings 9:15).

References to Jerusalem's walls continue throughout the narrative of the Old Testament preceding the fall of the city to Babylon. Hezekiah defends against the Assyrian army by rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and building additional walls for defense, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 32:5. In 2 Chronicles 33:14, Manasseh is said to have "built

a wall without the city of David … and raised it up a very great height," expanding upon the work of his father. Second Chronicles 36:19 also describes the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of its walls *in the same chapter* as Zedekiah becoming king, implying that those walls were still maintained during the beginning of Zedekiah's reign. This is further evident when one reads the Book of Jeremiah, who was a contemporary of Lehi according to the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 7:14).[190] Jeremiah explicitly mentions the "walls … round about" Jerusalem in Jeremiah 1:15 and again refers to them in Jeremiah 5:10, as well as describing the impending conquest where Jerusalem would be besieged "without the walls" (Jeremiah 21:4). Anyone with a knowledge of the Old Testament to the level that Neville claims Joseph must have had would be familiar with the walls surrounding Jerusalem. Joseph Smith, according to Lucy Mack Smith, had never read through the Bible in full,[191] and there is little reason to believe that both Lucy and Emma would lie on this matter. Emma's anecdote further strengthens the divine translation of the Book of Mormon, but it weakens Neville's theory, and so it must go.

Another interesting jab at Emma Smith comes in Neville's analysis of Joseph and Emma's writings. He claims that "Emma's own literacy was not exemplary, based on her 1839 two-page letter that is mostly one long continuous sentence."[192] Neville raises this point in an attempt to challenge her claim that Joseph Smith was relatively unlearned at the time he translated the Book of Mormon.[193] However, Neville uncritically cites Joseph Smith's 1832 history in full in an attempt to show how Jonathan Edwards influenced Joseph Smith, and Joseph's 1832 history is "mostly one long continuous sentence." If Neville will level that complaint against Emma's literacy, it must stand against Joseph's as well, but consistent principles of interpretation and historiography only apply when he needs them to.

Other Testators Misrepresented

A final area worth mentioning derives from Neville's misrepresentation of other sources. Lucy Mack Smith, who was a second-hand witness to the translation, is listed by Neville as a first-hand witness.[194] Neville also fails to take into account Lucy's late retellings of certain events, treating them as though her retelling was contemporaneous.[195]

Neville also cites various sections of the Doctrine and Covenants as evidence for his case. He especially makes use of the section headings that refer to the Urim and Thummim, attributing them to Joseph Smith's

authorship.[196] However, these sections are modern study aids that were not written by Joseph Smith, and so it is a misuse of his sources to state that they were. If he knows this, it represents dishonesty. If he does not, it speaks to his lack of competence in even basic historical matters.

Conclusion

The ideas presented in this book are troubling. Neville's Demonstration Hypothesis makes Joseph Smith a liar. He systematically tries to dismiss all sources and witnesses to the translation of the Book of Mormon that do not support his thesis, and Neville accepts and even defends the use of sources that stand in opposition to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Neville's claim that Joseph Smith recited Isaiah from memory is unsustainable in light of the Hebrew text and other manuscripts that have been transmitted to us today. Sources regarding Joseph Smith's seer stone are treated dishonestly, and Neville misrepresents the Church and its leaders's position regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon.

This book is not a book to turn to if you need answers to questions or want to study the history of the Church in greater detail. Neville's work is something that comes almost entirely out of his own imagination, punctuated by a few brief but fleeting contacts with actual evidence. More often than not, that evidence is deformed in the collision, only to have the story veer off into fantasy again.

History, on the other hand, is written through the careful analysis of documents in their context and against a wide array of evidence. Neville has not done his due diligence, and his theses reflect either a poor understanding and treatment of history or a ruthless willingness to distort the facts. This book, in short, should not be found in any serious Latter-day Saint's library, save as a cautionary tale.

[Author's Note: I would like to thank Mike Parker and Gregory L. Smith for reviewing an earlier draft of this review and offering helpful suggestions, as well as my other family and friends (especially my father) who helped edit and offer clarifying remarks. I would also like to thank the pseudonymous "Peter Pan" who offered encouragement as I wrote this review.]

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Endnotes

1 Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate: Joseph Smith and the Nephite Interpreters* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2020), 21.

2 Ibid., vii–viii.

3 Ibid., 22.

4 Ibid., 22, cf. ibid., 17, emphasis in original. Throughout Neville's two books, he constantly refers to Joseph's seer stone as a "peep stone," a derogatory term used primarily by critics of the Church.

5 Ibid., 56, cf. ibid., 345, emphasis in original.

6 E.g. ibid., vii.

7 Benjamin Winchester, "Testimony of Benjamin Winchester," interview by W. L. Crowe, November 27, 1900, quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate,* 87. Spelling in context.

8 David Whitmer, quoted in "The Book of Mormon," *Chicago Daily Tribune* XLV (December 17, 1885), 3, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Chicago_Daily_Tribune,_December_17,_1885. Though the detail of the seer stone being given by the angel is certainly a mistake on the reporter's part, this interview is evidence that the term *Urim and Thummim* had a more widespread use than Neville accepts.

9 Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: published by the author, 1887), 6, https://archive.org/details/addresstoallbeli00whit/page/n9/mode/2up.

10 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 130.

11 Wilford Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1841 – December 31, 1842)," 122, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/documents/a9d1a2cb-18fe-445d-a5e4-350caaf63442/page/18514a77-9924-4236-8538-7c348353ff09. Spelling in context.

12 Brigham Young, "History of Brigham Young," *Millennial Star* 26 (20 February 1864): 118–19, https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/27235.

13 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 336.

14 This was probably the white seer stone that Joseph had found near Lake Erie, as Oliver Cowdery was then in possession of the brown seer stone that he had found digging a well for Willard Chase. For a discussion on the white seer stone in light of these events, see Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, Joseph Smith's Seer Stones (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2016), 77–84.

15 Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses* (13 August 1853), 2:111. Paraphrased in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 336.

16 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 336–37.

17 In a journal entry dated 18 May 1888, Wilford Woodruff wrote, "Before leaving [Manti] I consecrated upon the altar [of the temple] the seer stone that Joseph Smith found by revelation some 30 feet under the earth [and] carried by him throughout life." Wilford Woodruff, Journal, 18 May 1888, Church History Library, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/8eee1db1-409c-43b2-ac32-1d344bc519c7/0/157. Incidentally, Joseph Fielding Smith once wrote about this event in terms of the Urim and Thummim: "The statement has been made that the Urim and Thummim was on the altar in the Manti Temple when the building was dedicated. *The Urim and Thummim so spoken of, however, was the seer stone which was in the possession of the Prophet Joseph Smith in early days.*" Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), 2:225, emphasis added. Although Joseph Fielding Smith did not believe Joseph Smith used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon and would erroneously describe eyewitness statements as "hearsay," this instance may show that he did view the white seer stone as a type of Urim and Thummim, albeit an inferior one. Heartlanders have often quoted Joseph Fielding Smith uncritically for stating his opinion that Joseph did not use a seer stone, using an appeal to authority, while (as will be shown) rejecting the teachings of modern apostles regarding the seer stone. See, for instance, Rian Nelson, "Nephite Interpreters," *Book of Mormon Evidence* (blog), 30 December 2020, https://bookofmormonevidence.org/the-truth-about-seer-

stones/. A quick search of Neville's many blogs shows that he similarly quotes Joseph Fielding Smith uncritically regarding the location of Cumorah, falling into many of the same logical traps described above. Joseph Fielding Smith was extremely faithful to the gospel and a wonderful apostle, but using his (or any other Church leader's) opinions uncritically is dangerous.

18 For a brief account of the brown seer stone from Joseph Smith's life and onward, see MacKay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*, 66–77.

19 Michael Hubbard Mackay and Nicholas J. Frederick have included an in-depth appendix in their book *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones* that is an appendix of references to the Urim and Thummim or Joseph Smith's other seer stones. David Whitmer includes many statements referring to the Urim and Thummim being taken from Joseph alone. See MacKay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*, 181–232.

20 Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses* (9 December 1887), 19:216, emphasis added.

21 Of the three Church leaders mentioned, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball were the only two of the original apostles who never rebelled against the Prophet Joseph Smith, underscoring their devotion to the gospel. Wilford Woodruff was later called to be an apostle but likewise never rebelled against the Prophet and remained true to the restored gospel throughout his life.

22 Another example of Neville attempting to force his definition upon leaders of the Church can be seen in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 87–88, where Neville attempts to paint Wilford Woodruff and Franklin D. Richards's use of the term Urim and Thummim as part of a "long history of Church leaders defending and reiterating what Joseph and Oliver claimed" but this observation forces his definition onto virtually every leader of the Church who has ever discussed the Urim and Thummim. This is bad practice and poor historiography on Neville's part, as I have demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs.

23 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 108.

24 See "Minutes, 25–26 October 1831," p. 10, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-25-26-october-1831/2.

25 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 22.

26 Ibid., 27–28, emphasis added. When Neville quotes from Ether 3:24, the entire quoted portion is in bold.

27 Wilford Woodruff, "Wilford Woodruff Journals, 1833–1898," 158, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/8eee1db1-409c-43b2-ac32-1d344bc519c7/0/157.

28 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 49, 342.

29 Ibid., 49–50, 366. Ironically, Neville is apparently willing to allow the term "director" to apply to a seer stone that we know nothing about but is unwilling to allow the term to apply to a seer stone that was verifiably in possession of and used by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

30 William W. McLellin, *The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ* 1 (March 1847): 2, quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 137, emphasis added

31 Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery, quoted in William W. McLellin, "My Dear Friends," manuscript, February 1870, Community of Christ Library and Archives, quoted in Neville, A Man That Can Translate, 294. Although this affidavit was given to William McLellin, who at that time had become antagonistic to the restored gospel, there is little reason to doubt that it is fraudulent in any way. More on Neville's treatment of Elizabeth Cowdery's testimony will be discussed below.

32 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 342, 365–66.

33 Stan Spencer, "Reflections of *Urim*: Hebrew Poetry Sheds Light on the Directors-Interpreters Mystery," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 188, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/reflections-of-urim-hebrew-poetry-sheds-light-on-the-directors-interpreters-mystery/.

34 Ibid., 194.

35 Ibid., 195.

36 Ibid., 187–88.

37 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 365.

38 Comments on Spencer, "Reflections of *Urim*," https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/comments-page/?id=6774.

39 Elder Russell M. Nelson, "A Treasured Testament," *Ensign* 23, no. 7 (July 1993), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1993/07/a-treasured-testament.

40 President Russell M. Nelson, "The Book of Mormon Is Tangible Evidence of the Restoration," video, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3:30, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/video/2020-05-0290-the-book-of-mormon-is-tangible-evidence-of-the-restoration. As President Nelson said these words, he demonstrated the position that Joseph would take by placing his own face in the hat. Neville has previously tried to claim that this video is evidence of President Nelson demonstrating the translation akin to Neville's Demonstration Hypothesis, but such an interpretation is a dishonest gloss on President Nelson's words. I have previously responded to this claim in Spencer Kraus, "A Response to Strange Theories Regarding the Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Latter-day Light and Truth* (blog), 15 May *2021, https://latterdaylightandtruth.blogspot.com/2021/05/a-response-to-strange-theories.html.*

41 Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf, 2016, *"Not long ago, the Church published photos and background information on seer stones." Facebook, 21 June 2016, https://www.facebook.com/dieterf.uchtdorf/photos/a.120510344786318/400421293461887/.*

42 Elder D. Todd Christofferson, *"Small and Simple Means," North America Northeast Member Devotional (Worchester, MA), 20 October 2019, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/multimedia/file/Elder-D.-Todd-Christofferson---"Small-and-Simple-Means"-Transcript.pdf.*

43 Elder Quentin L. Cook, "Foundations of Faith," *Ensign* 47, no. 5 (May 2017), 129, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2017/05/sunday-afternoon-session/foundations-of-faith.

44 George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), 56–57, https://archive.org/details/lifeofjosephsmit01cann/mode/2up.

45 See Jonathan Neville, "More on the fake Moroni/Mary Whitmer Story," *Saints Review* (blog), 12 October 2020, http://saintsreview.blogspot.com/2020/10/more-on-fake-moronimary-whitmer-story.html. This claim originated because Elder Gong referred to Mary Whitmer being shown the gold plates by the angel Moroni,

who Neville has long claimed should be understood as Nephi, one of the Three Nephites (although his claim that Nephi was one of the Three Nephites is nowhere backed up in the Book of Mormon, which instead keeps their names a sacred secret). I have responded to Neville's claim previously in Spencer Kraus, "Another Response to Jonathan Neville, Critic of the Church," *Latter-day Light and Truth* (blog), 9 December 2020, https://latterdaylightandtruth.blogspot.com/2020/12/another-response-to-jonathan-neville.html.

46 I recognize that I am not qualified to get involved in the discussion of the purported use of Early Modern English, and instead refer the reader to Skousen's own work on the matter. A brief introduction to some of Skousen's findings can be found here: Royal Skousen, "The Language of the Original Text of the Book of Mormon," *Brigham Young University Studies* 57, no. 3 (2018).

47 See, for instance, Jonathan Neville, "Skousen/Carmack and Early Modern English Translation (EMET)," *Moroni's America* (blog), 29 May 2020, http://www.moronisamerica.com/skousen-carmack-and-early-modern-english-theory-emet/.

48 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 22–23, 190–91.

49 Jonathan Neville, *Infinite Goodness: Joseph Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2021), 80. I will treat this book in more detail in a forthcoming review.

50 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 189–90. Although Neville claims that the use of the Urim and Thummim made the translation inspired, Neville fails to fully explain what its role was in the translation of the Book of Mormon should Joseph have translated the record in a scholarly manner.

51 Ibid., 29. Throughout Neville's book, he uses the acronyms "U&T" for "Urim and Thummim" and "SITH" for "stone-in-the-hat." I have respectfully expanded these acronyms throughout this review to faithfully describe the translation methods in a more complete context.

52 Ibid., 107.

53 Ibid., 237.

54 Ibid., 10.

55 Ibid., 237.

56 Ibid., 118. One verse that highlights the issues of writing on plates is Alma 24:19, with Mormon apparently correcting himself after saying that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies "buried their weapons of peace" to instead read "or they buried their weapons of war, for peace." While it is entirely possible that the error was introduced as Joseph translated the plates, Daniel H. Ludlow recognizes that this verse may reflect the challenges Mormon faced as he wrote on metal plates and would be unable to correct what he had previously written. See Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 210.

57 Ibid., 200.

58 Ibid., 200.

59 Ibid., 195.

60 Ibid., 331.

61 Ibid., 355.

62 Oliver Cowdery, quoted in Abram W. Benton, "Mormonites," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 2 (9 April 1831): 120, quoted in Neville, A Man That Can Translate, 263–64.

63 In Neville's repeated insistence that "translating characters isn't merely reading words off a stone in a hat," Neville finds himself in a position not too dissimilar from critics of the Church who, like Sterling McMurrin, are so entrenched in their own presuppositions that they adamantly declare, "You don't get books from angels and translate them by miracles; it's just that simple." Neville, *Infinite Goodness,* 153 and Blake Ostler, "An Interview with Sterling McMurrin," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no.1 (1984): 25. The primary difference is, of course, that Neville still believes the Book of Mormon to be ancient scripture, but the a priori argument presented by both McMurrin and Neville is grounded in similar logic — because they reject at least one method of translation, they of necessity must reject all of the evidence to the contrary of their belief, no matter how great the evidence might be.

64 David Whitmer, in "Questions asked of David Whitmer," 1885, Zenos Gurley Collection, Church History Library, quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 269.

65 David Whitmer, quoted in E. C. Briggs, "Letter to the Editor," *Saints' Herald* 31 (21 June 1884): 396–97, quoted in Neville, A Man That Can Translate, 297.

66 While some have speculated that Joseph Smith may have used scholarly means to attempt a translation of the Book of Abraham by using the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, Kerry Muhlestein has convincingly argued that such scholarly efforts were not connected to the revealed translation of the Book of Abraham by comparing the hieroglyphics that are found in the Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language to those found on the manuscripts to the Book of Abraham. See Kerry Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papers and the Translation of the Book of Abraham: What Careful Applications of the Evidence Can and Cannot Tell Us" (presention, FAIR Conference, August 2020), https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/2020-fairmormon-conference. He presents a similar argument in Kerry Muhlestein, Let's Talk About the Book of Abraham (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022), 52–66. Jeff Lindsay has also provided an excellent response in regards to Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Abraham to some who have made this claim (i.e. that Joseph offered a scholarly translation of the Egyptian hieroglyphics), pointing out that Joseph Smith is remembered as having immediately begun the work of translation by John Riggs, who stated that "the morning following" Joseph Smith's meeting with Michael Chandler, "Joseph came with the leaves he had translated." See Jeff Lindsay, "Book of Abraham Polemics: Dan Vogel's Broad Critique of the Defense of the Book of Abraham," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 107–50, https://interpreterfoundation.org/book-of-abraham-polemics-dan-vogels-broad-critique-of-the-defense-of-the-book-of-abraham/, with the Riggs quote from *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine* 3, no. 3 (July 1984): 283, as cited by Terryl Givens and Brian Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Most Controversial Scripture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), 120.

67 See, for instance Brant Gardner, *Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011); Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015); Matthew B. Brown, *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth* (American Fork, UT: Covenant

Communications, 2003); and MacKay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*, 45–64.

68 Cook, "Foundations of Faith." Although presented as a question, footnote 5 of his talk makes it clear that he believes that this is the case, citing Orson Pratt's observations of the translation of the New Testament that I cite below.

69 "Two Days' Meeting at Brigham City, June 27 and 28, 1874," *Millennial Star*, 11 August 1874, 498–99, https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/13925.

70 Philo Dibble, "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor* 27, no. 10 (May 15, 1892): 304, https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstruct2710geor/page/304/mode/2up.

71 Similar arguments have been made regarding the Joseph Smith papyri serving as a catalyst for revelation. It is possible that the constant presence of the plates served as a catalyst for the translation to occur during the instances when Joseph Smith used the seer stone in the hat. See Muhlestein, *Let's Talk About the Book of Abraham*, 52–66.

72 For a further discussion on the plates' presence during the translation of the Book of Mormon, see Book of Mormon Central, "Why Were the Plates Present During the Translation of the Book of Mormon? (Mosiah 1:6)," *KnoWhy* 366 (September 21, 2017), https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-were-the-plates-present-during-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon.

73 More will be discussed below on Neville's attempts to discredit the Book of Mormon witnesses and others who were familiar with the translation process below.

74 More on this will likewise be said in the discussion of Neville's treatment of the witnesses and *Mormonism Unvailed*.

75 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 45, 79–80.

76 Neville will further argue that other sources relating to the seer stone from the witnesses to the translation reflect a demonstration on various occasions, but those will be discussed below in his treatment of the witnesses to the translation, and his reading of a demonstration into those texts is largely dependent on how he reads the sources mentioned here.

77 William E. McLellin, "Some of the Reasons Why I Am Not a Mormon," in *The William E. McLellin Papers, 1854–1880,* ed. Stan Larson and Samuel J. Passey (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), 380. Spelling in context.

78 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, viii. Throughout Neville's book, published after President Nelson requested we reemphasize the name of the Church, he uses the terms "Mormon" or "LDS" to refer to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Neville mentions that these terms are "currently disfavored" by the Church but common in historical documents, but still uses them himself. Ibid., x. Because President Nelson has requested that we use the full name of the Church and no longer call ourselves by these titles, I have replaced Neville's use of them with the corresponding accurate titles in my citations, but have left historical documents unaltered.

79 An example of McLellin's opinions regarding Joseph Smith and the Church can be found here: Larry C. Porter, "William E. McLellan's Testimony of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1970): 485–87.

80 David Whitmer, quoted in Zenos H. Gurley, "The Book of Mormon," *Autumn Leaves* 5 (1892), quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 24.

81 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 24.

82 Edward Stevenson, "The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," *Millennial Star* 48 (12 July 1886): 436–38, https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/28246/rec/48. While the translation at the Whitmers' farm did not take eight months, David appears to be recounting how long the translation took after Joseph received the plates from Moroni following the loss of the manuscript entrusted to Martin Harris.

83 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 108.

84 Ibid., 94.

85 Given the strict command Joseph had received to keep the plates safe, it would be little wonder should he have requested that some sort of veil be hung as further protection of a sacred process of translation from those who might want to ridicule him. However, because other accounts suggest that no curtain was used and the plates were out of sight, the atypical nature of this event should

be read in light of other sources that refer to a more common and typical day of translation.

86 See above for my response to this claim.

87 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 108.

88 Ibid., 94.

89 See ibid., 50.

90 Ibid., 89.

91 Ibid., 94–95, emphasis in original.

92 Ibid., 109–11.

93 Ibid., 113.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., 114.

96 Ibid., 219.

97 See Royal Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 378–79 and Gardner, *Translating the Book of Mormon*, 303–307.

98 Several scholars have pointed out how the Book of Mormon's use of Isaiah is best understood as a translation of an ancient text, with many features that cannot be easily described as memorization errors. See, in addition to my discussion below on some of Neville's selected verses, Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Was Joseph Smith Smarter Than the Average Fourth Year Hebrew Student? Finding a Restoration-Significant Hebraism in Book of Mormon Isaiah," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 151–58, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/was-joseph-smith-smarter-than-the-average-fourth-year-hebrew-student-finding-a-restoration-significant-hebraism-in-book-of-mormon-isaiah/. Jeff Lindsay also offers excellent insights regarding other selections of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, particularly Isaiah 49:13 (1 Nephi 21:13), offering evidence that the inclusion of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is fitting for a divine translation. See Jeff Lindsay, "'Arise from the Dust': Insights from Dust-Related Themes in the Book of Mormon (Part 2: Enthronement, Resurrection, and Other Ancient Motifs from the 'Voice from

the Dust'),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016): 255–64, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/arise-from-the-dust-insights-from-dust-related-themes-in-the-book-of-mormon-part-2-enthronement-resurrection-and-other-ancient-motifs-from-the-voice-from-the-dust/.

99 In contrast to Neville's views regarding Nephi's use of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, see David Rolph Seely, “Nephi's Use of Isaiah 2–14 in 2 Nephi 12–30,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 151–70 for a discussion on how Nephi purposefully used and adapted the themes of Isaiah for his own people, thus arguing for their inclusion on the plates.

100 It appears that Neville also ignores previous variants of Isaiah as printed in earlier editions of the Book of Mormon and is entirely reliant on the 2013 edition published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He also failed to note several variants in the Isaiah text or created his own variants through bad typography and review of his work. I have included in my list some of Neville's mistakes, but have found his tables of Isaiah variants to be unreliable and the product of bad compiling and bad editing. Neville's tables are found in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 112–13, 306–308, although a much more rigorous and useful guide to Isaiah variants can be found in Ann N. Madsen and Shon D. Hopkin, *Opening Isaiah: A Harmony* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2018).

101 I plan on addressing all of the Isaiah quotations in a similar manner in a future paper. In order to allow this paper to focus more on Neville's hypotheses, I will limit my discussion to a handful of verses while demonstrating how his unfamiliarity with Hebrew has led him to unfounded claims in order to defend his idiosyncratic theories. For these comparisons, I am comparing the English translations of Isaiah with the Masoretic text (or referring to previous findings). While we cannot know what the brass plates of Isaiah looked like, the Masoretic text can provide a good starting point in determining the merits of the Isaiah translation found in 2 Nephi and the rest of the Book of Mormon.

102 John A. Tvedtnes, “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 170, https://

rsc.byu.edu/isaiah-prophets/isaiah-variants-book-mormon. For clarity, in further citations to this book, I have expanded his abbreviations for items such as the Masoretic Text and Book of Mormon.

103 Ibid., 171.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

107 See, for instance, the New International Version (NIV): "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

108 Other modern translations, such as the NRSV and New English Translation (NET), include a variation of the phrase "shall bear a son" as found in the Book of Mormon.

109 This reading is reflected in modern English translations as well, such as the Lexham English Bible (LEB).

110 Tvedtnes, "Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon," 171–72.

111 See ibid., 172.

112 1QIsa[a], cited in Madsen and Hopkin, *Opening Isaiah,* 34.

113 Tvedtnes, "Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon," 172.

114 In a 2 January 2020 blog post, Neville accused Elder LeGrand R. Curtis of publishing "revisionist Church history" and included a doctored photo with the title page to *Mormonism Unvailed* on the front of the Ensign. See Jonathan Neville, "January 2020 Ensign," *Book of Mormon Central America* (blog), 2 January 2020. http://www.bookofmormoncentralamerica.com/2020/01/january-2020-ensign.html. Neville has also claimed that these organizations "create a revisionist history to support the E.D. Howe version of events [as told in *Mormonism Unvailed*]." Jonathan Neville, "Witnesses Movie Review," *Moroni's America* (blog), 25 June 2021, http://www.moronisamerica.com/witnesses-movie-review/.

115 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 47. Cf. ibid., 23, 56; Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 314.

116 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 54–55.

117 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 319.

118 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 56–57; Eber D. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed (Painesville, OH: published by the author, 1834), 77, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Mormonism_Unvailed_Or_A_Faithful_Account/KXJNAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1, emphasis added.

119 Howe continues his assessment, in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 77, by asking what use the plates or Nephite interpreters had if they were not used in the way he imagines they must be used throughout the entire translation, a perspective shared by Neville and perhaps the source of his antipathy toward the seer stone. For responses to these concerns, see Neal Rappleye, "'Idle and Slothful Strange Stories': Book of Mormon Origins and the Historical Record," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 21–37, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/idle-and-slothful-strange-stories-book-of-mormon-origins-and-the-historical-record/; MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 86–89; and Daniel C. Peterson, "Tangible Restoration: The Witnesses and What They Experienced," (presentation, 2006 FairMormon Conference, Sandy, UT), 31–33, https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2006-Daniel-Peterson.pdf.

120 In Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 128, Howe ridicules both the seer stone and "silver spectacles" as revelatory devices with no mention of Joseph placing either in a hat. Earlier in ibid., 30, Howe says (in regard to the Book of Mormon), "We consider, and believe, the prophecies and doctrines of the Bible of divine origin, and any thing which contravenes its precepts, or its revelations, will be regarded by us as false." Spelling in context. Clearly, Howe did not just ridicule a translation method including a seer stone; he ridiculed the entire Restoration, seer stone notwithstanding.

121 Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 18.

122 See ibid., 30.

123 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 57–58.

124 Ibid., 82; Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 233–37.

125 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 83; Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 235–36.

126 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 83, emphasis added.

127 Ibid., 85.

128 Ibid., 373n393, emphasis added.

129 Eric Johnson, "Is Mormonism Research Ministry 'Anti-Mormon'?" Mormonism Research Ministry (website), https://www.mrm.org/is-mrm-anti-mormon.

130 For the article in question, see Elder LeGrand R. Curtis, Jr., "The Translation of the Book of Mormon: A Marvel and a Wonder," *Ensign* 50, no. 1 (January 2020), 38–41, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2020/01/the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon-a-marvel-and-a-wonder. For Neville' previous treatment of this article, see Neville, "January 2020 Ensign." It is worth noting that Elder Curtis is currently serving as the Assistant Church Historian.

131 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 38–39.

132 See Richard E. Turley Jr., Robin S. Jensen, Mark Ashurst-McGee, "Joseph the Seer," *Ensign* 45, no. 10 (October 2015), 49–55, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/10/joseph-the-seer. It is worth noting that at the time this article was written, Richard E. Turley was the Assistant Church Historian and Robin S. Jensen and Mark Ashurst-McGee were Church historians as well.

133 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 50n61.

134 See, for instance, Jonathan Neville, "Hoffman, Church history, Saints, and President Oaks" *Moroni's America* (blog), 5 March 2021, http://www.moronisamerica.com/hoffman-church-history-saints-and-president-oaks/.

135 Ibid., 42–43.

136 See Alma 37:21 and Ether 3:4, each discussing special stones prepared by the Lord that would shine by his power. Other instances of "darkness unto light" are explicitly connected to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon within the text itself.

137 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 41–42.

138 See ibid., 42.

139 See ibid., 43–44.

140 See Appendices 3 and 4 in ibid., 321–62.

141 Ibid., 334.

142 See ibid., 339–40.

143 I have discussed how Russell M. Nelson, George Q. Cannon, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, and D. Todd Christofferson have referred to the seer stone above and will revisit the topic below in Neville's treatment of the witnesses.

144 See Cook, "Foundations of Faith."

145 See Lynn G. Robbins, "The Righteous Judge," *Ensign* 46, no. 11 (November 2016), 97, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2016/11/sunday-morning-session/the-righteous-judge.

146 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 48–49.

147 Ibid., 239.

148 Ibid., 264.

149 Oliver Cowdery is the one exception, but Neville seriously misrepresents Oliver's history to force his own worldview and ideas onto Oliver.

150 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 61.

151 Ibid., 65.

152 Ibid., 63.

153 See ibid., 52. Neville claims that because Oliver used the term Urim and Thummim, he was expressly refuting the seer stone in the hat — and yet despite Oliver's willingness to call out problems when he saw them by name, such as the Spaulding theory, Oliver never once said "Joseph did not use his seer stone."

154 See ibid., 53–54; cf. ibid., 86.

155 See Stephen O. Smoot, "Seven Reasons Why Letter VII Is Not a Heartlander Silver Bullet," *Ploni Almoni: A Latter-day Saint Blog* (blog), 26 July 2018, https://www.plonialmonimormon.com/2018/07/seven-reasons-why-letter-vii-is-not-a-heartlander-silver-bullet.html.

156 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 24–26, 92.

157 "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [1], bk. 9," p. [11], bk. 8, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/103. Spelling in context.

158 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 26. Cf. Neville, Infinite Goodness, 318.

159 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 363, emphasis added.

160 Ibid., 43.

161 Ibid., 122.

162 See ibid., 128.

163 See ibid., 239, as discussed above.

164 See ibid., 243.

165 In ibid., 163–67, Neville effectively offers a brief expose regarding Martin Harris, quoting multiple Saints in England. At the time Martin was on a mission affiliated with James Strang.

166 See ibid., 266–73.

167 See ibid., 167–68.

168 Ibid., 174. This "singular event" is told in Edward Stevenson, "One of the Three Witnesses," *Millennial Star* 44 (30 Jan 1882):79, https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/5774.

169 Ronald W. Walker, "The Challenge and Craft of Mormon Biography," *Brigham Young University Studies* 22, no.2 (Spring 1982): 189.

170 Martin Harris, quoted in "A Witness to the Book of Mormon," *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, 28 August 1870, spelling in context.

171 See Martin Harris, quoted in "Mormonism — No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly* (June 1859): 163–70, quoted in MacKay and Frederick, Joseph Smith's *Seer Stones*, 193.

172 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 174–75.

173 Ibid., 181.

174 See ibid., 179–80.

175 Edward Stevenson, "One of the Three Witnesses," *Millennial Star* 44 (6 February 1882):86–87, https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/5774.

176 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 178.

177 Ibid., 179.

178 Ibid., 180–81.

179 Emma Smith would bear testimony to her son, Joseph III, shortly before her death regarding both Joseph's prophetic calling and the Book of Mormon's translation. I will discuss below how Neville dismisses Emma's testimony on superficial grounds.

180 See ibid., 152–53.

181 See "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saint's Herald* 26 (1 October 1879).

182 See Joseph F. Smith, "Joseph the Seer's Plural Marriages," *Deseret News* 38 (22 October 1879):12, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2663429.

183 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 147–48; cf. 162, 372.

184 Ibid., 161.

185 Ibid., 146.

186 See my discussion above relating to Neville's use of sources hostile to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

187 Edmund C. Briggs, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856," *Journal of History* 9 (October 1916): 454.

188 I respond to these claims in the second part of my review, forthcoming.

189 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 151.

190 While this scripture is found in the small plates' record and would have been translated at the end of Joseph Smith's translating efforts, it is likely that Jeremiah was mentioned in the lost manuscript as well because of his prominence in Jerusalem at the time. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Joseph Smith had likely learned early on that Lehi was a contemporary with Jeremiah. Had Joseph been intimately familiar with Jeremiah's writings he would have recognized that there was a wall surrounding Jerusalem before reading about it in the Book of Mormon translation.

191 See "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [1], bk. 4," p. [1], bk. 4, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/43.

192 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 175.

193 More on Joseph's literary abilities will be explored in the second part of my review.

194 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 245.

195 See ibid., 245–50.

196 Ibid, 249–50.

Jonathan Edwards's Unique Role in an Imagined Church History

Spencer Kraus

Review of Jonathan Neville, *Infinite Goodness: Joseph Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2021). 339 pages. $22.99 (paperback).

Abstract: *This is the second of two papers reviewing Jonathan Neville's latest books on the translation of the Book of Mormon. In* Infinite Goodness, *Neville claims that Joseph Smith's vocabulary and translation of the Book of Mormon were deeply influenced by the famous Protestant minister Jonathan Edwards. Neville cites various words or ideas that he believes originate with Edwards as the original source for the Book of Mormon's language. However, most of Neville's findings regarding Edwards and other non-biblical sources are superficial and weak, and many of his findings have a more plausible common source: the language used by the King James Bible. Neville attempts to make Joseph a literary prodigy, able to read and reformulate eight volumes of Edwards's sermons — with enough genius to do so, but not enough genius to learn the words without Edwards's help. This scenario contradicts the historical record, and Neville uses sources disingenuously to impose his idiosyncratic and wholly modern worldview onto Joseph Smith and his contemporaries.*

As I have demonstrated in my recent review of *A Man That Can Translate*,[1] Jonathan Neville consistently misuses and misquotes historical sources. He resorts to multiple double standards to force the historical narrative into the shape required by his theories. My previous review responded to his claims that (1) Joseph Smith memorized and recited Isaiah from memory rather than translate it from the Book of Mormon record; (2) Joseph Smith tricked his close friends and family, making them believe that he was translating the

aforementioned sections of the Book of Mormon; (3) many witnesses to the Book of Mormon are not to be believed; and (4) we should instead rely on sources hostile to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to properly understand Joseph's translation effort.

I will now respond to Neville's new hypothesis that Joseph Smith read and studied the teachings of Jonathan Edwards from an early age, ultimately incorporating Edwardsian language into his translation of the Book of Mormon.[2]

Neville's portrayal of Edwards and Joseph Smith, however, has much in common with the dubious claim that Joseph was influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg's ideas about heaven.[3] In both cases, the purported similarities are superficial, any connection was unremarked upon by contemporaries (even those who were well acquainted with both works), and more easily explained by a common source shared by both.

As with Swedenborg, Joseph's supposed reliance on Edwards was unnoticed until the modern era. Indeed, the lack of any early claim that Joseph was influenced by Edwards is significant for a couple of reasons. Edwards's works were, after all, available in the bookstore of Joseph's hometown, and they were widely published in the early American republic. The people who would have known Joseph certainly could have talked to those around him — and yet we don't have anyone claiming such influence, nor do any claim that he was well-versed in Edwards's writings. By Neville's own admission there is no "conclusive direct evidence" that he can provide to support any of the claims in his book.[4]

Instead, says Neville, there are just "probabilities" based on his own (mis)readings of historical sources and his own presuppositions.[5] In this review, I will demonstrate how this discussion is another modern manufacture, yet another specimen of the long line of pseudo-historical claims made by Jonathan Neville.[6]

Joseph's Literary Capabilities and Perusal of Theology

Central to Neville's thesis is the assumption that, despite all historical evidence to the contrary, Joseph Smith was well-versed and well-studied in early American Christian theology. However, the sources that Neville uses to substantiate this claim are misused and misunderstood.

Neville argues from a basis of presupposition, making his entire premise flawed when his presupposition is examined with even scant attention to accuracy. Neville repeatedly insists that Joseph *had* to be aware of and actively study early American theologians, because "it's difficult to believe" otherwise, and there is "no reason for him to *ignore*

such readily available resources."[7] This is an example of "the argument from personal incredulity" fallacy — the author cannot see how something could not be the case, and so it must have been the case.[8] The study of history is partly the process of using sources to expand our understanding of what could or could not be the case to avoid imposing our preconceptions on the past.

Neville often claims that Joseph's "intimate acquaintance" with Christian denominations in his day must have included a familiarity with Christian writings, claiming that evidence of theologians' works can be found in Joseph's writings, translations, and revelations.[9] However, such a "common sense" proposition could only make sense if it were to align with the historical record — which Neville fails to demonstrate.[10]

Neville's faulty premise begins with the assertion that "in [Joseph's] early years, due to the leg infection, he did have an unusual amount of free time to read about and contemplate religious topics."[11] This comment is centered around an offhand remark — provoked by Erastus Holmes's desire to learn more about the Church and its doctrine — from Joseph Smith. Joseph offered "a brief relation of my experience while in my juvenile years, say from 6, years old up to the time I received the first visitation of Angels which was when I was about 14, years old."[12] Neville believes that this statement is key to understanding a great deal about Joseph's life and upbringing by linking the leg surgery to his immersion in the writings of Edwards. However, an account of one's youth would be a natural place for anyone to begin a personal history — it is not necessary that this be a prelude to an immersion in Christian theology, or a sign that these events of youth are a key to all that came after.[13] (And if Edwards's works *were* so important to Joseph's history, this would be an excellent place to mention them — but he doesn't.)

Neville argues that in the aftermath of Joseph's leg surgery and during his stay with his uncle Jesse in Salem, Massachusetts, Joseph Smith was introduced to theological sermons by Samuel Deane geared toward young men. He concludes this based upon common terminology used by Latter-day Saint scripture and Deane. Although Neville notes that "this non-biblical terminology is not exclusive to Deane," he believes that a few solitary words taken out of context from at least fourteen verses throughout the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants are evidence that Joseph read Deane's work. However, just because a single word or phrase appears in multiple sources does not mean that one must have been influenced by the other. Take, for example, the words "enjoyment" or "preface" that appear in 2 Nephi 9:16

and D&C 1:6, respectively.[14] Neville links these two words to Deane's writings, but is it a safe assumption that these words were brought to Joseph's attention because of Deane's work? Any rational historian would argue not — using such a low bar for evidence, after all, would mean that virtually any book written in the English language could be considered a smoking gun for outside influence on the text of the Book of Mormon. Such a methodology is fundamentally flawed.

Neville continues to double down on this presupposition by incorporating additional hypotheticals likewise impossible to support. According to Neville, as Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith taught their children about God, "presumably they would provide reading material," leading to Joseph's "intimate acquaintance" with other denominations' teachings and writings.[15] He is unable to provide a single source to explain how Joseph Sr. and Lucy Smith (the latter of which had to pay in scraps of cloth to arrive in Palmyra when they moved) were able to afford such an expansive library of theological treatises, especially given Joseph Sr.'s distrust of organized religion and its ministers.[16]

Neville also erroneously believes that Joseph's lengthy recovery from his surgery "compromised [his] usefulness for farm work, leaving him more time to read" after returning to his family and moving to Palmyra.[17] Given the Smith's dire financial situation, however, it is hard to imagine in historical context that this would be a plausible hypothesis. There was plenty of work on a nineteenth-century farm for a young Joseph to engage in despite his disability around the house. Joseph was far more likely to be engaged in helping his family survive than read theological treatises in his supposedly endless spare time. His work in treasure digging and athletic nature, especially his affinity for wrestling, is also evidence that he was not as handicapped as Neville proposes and was accustomed to hard and physical toil.[18] This picture of Joseph matches what a twentieth-century child might have experienced, but not the son of poor nineteenth-century farmers — it is classic presentism.

Whatever Joseph's conditions in New York may have been, he was able to leave the house and perform some errands on his own. Neville cites Orsamus Turner, who recounted one memory of the young Joseph Smith on such an errand:

> He was lounging, idle; (not to say vicious,) and possessed of less than ordinary intellect. The author's own recollections of him are distinct ones. He used to come into the village of Palmyra with little jags of wood, from his backwoods home; sometimes patronizing a village grocery too freely; sometimes

> find an odd job to do about the store of Seymour Scovell; and once a week he would stroll into the office of the old Palmyra Register, for his father's paper. How impious, in us young "dare *Devils*" to once and a while blacken the face of the then meddling inquisitive lounger-but afterwards Prophet, with the old fashioned balls, when he used to put himself in the way of the working of the old fashioned Ramage press! The editor of the Cultivator, at Albany-esteemed as he may justly consider himself, for his subsequent enterprize and usefulness, may think of it, with contrition and repentance; that he once helped, thus to disfigure the face of a Prophet, and remotely, the founder of a State.[19]

Neville only cites a small portion of the above text dealing with Joseph's trips to the printing press and having his face blackened.[20] Neville attempts to link this incident to an eight-volume set of Jonathan Edwards's writings on sale in Palmyra at that time, allowing Neville to assert a "plausible" connection between Joseph Smith and the writings of Jonathan Edwards. However, when the statement is read in its full context, it is clear that the author was vehemently opposed to Joseph and the restoration and even believed Joseph to be of less than ordinary intellect. Joseph is similarly reported as "patronizing" a grocer, and he is specifically said to have gotten in the way of the staff running the Ramage press. It appears clear from the context that Orsamus Turner was not referring to Joseph lingering to read from the eight volumes of Jonathan Edwards.

To further cement Neville's poor analysis and historiography, one need only look at his treatment of Lucy Mack Smith's history. In Lucy's 1844 history, she remarks how Joseph "had never read the Bible through by course in his life for Joseph was less inclined to the study of books than any child we had but much more given to reflection and deep study."[21] This was changed slightly in her 1845 history to say Joseph "was much less inclined to the perusals of books" than any other Smith children.[22] Neville attempts to take advantage of this slight shift in wording by an appeal to the *modern* definition of "perusal." While Neville correctly asserts that perusal is defined in Webster's 1828 dictionary as "the act of reading," Neville also fails to mention how the 1828 dictionary also defines it as a "careful view or examination," acting as a synonym for the word "study."[23] Rather, Neville cites the modern *Merriam-Webster* dictionary to define perusal as a contranym, a word with a dual meaning. In the modern dictionary, perusal can mean either an intense study or

a light reading, which Neville uses to claim that Lucy Mack Smith never challenged the idea that Joseph was well-read as a young boy:

> This suggests she meant that the other children's perusals were more relaxed and informal than Joseph's "deep study." This connotation is consistent with her observation that Joseph hadn't "read the Bible through," because "meditation and deep study" requires more detailed examination of cross-references and commentaries than merely reading it through.[24]

The error in using a modern definition in a historical text should be obvious to any reader. This is another form of presentism that Neville incorporates to make his argument more credible, but presentism weakens any argument, no matter how well-crafted. If we want a clue as to Lucy's meaning, we have only to look at what her original 1844 text said — and it is obvious from that text that Joseph "was less inclined to the study of books." It is implausible that she meant to completely invert her meaning in 1845 by saying Joseph was really into studying books, but not into casually flipping through them.

Neville's argument is further weakened when he quotes Lucy saying she "perused the Bible and prayed incessantly" in her 1844 history, clearly meaning she studied the Bible intently.[25] Neville's arguments are weak, and his use of presentism and incompetent use of sources are fatal to his argument.

What, then, should be concluded regarding Joseph Smith's literacy? According to Emma Smith, Joseph was unable to write or even dictate a well-worded letter[26] — a claim Neville tries to dismiss by challenging Emma's literacy, as though that would make her analysis any less true: "Emma's own literacy was not exemplary" based on a letter she wrote in 1839 "that is mostly one long continuous sentence."[27] In contrast to Emma, Neville cites George A. Smith, the prophet's cousin, who recounted how a letter his family received from Joseph circa 1828 that recounted how Christendom was in a state of apostasy led his father to exclaim how Joseph "writes like a prophet."[28] However, one must ask what George A.'s father likely meant — did he believe a prophet should write fluently, precisely, and clearly, or was he more concerned with the theological message contained within the letter, no matter how flawed the spelling and grammar? Given that we have examples of Joseph's writing from earlier and later in his career — and none of his early work can be said to display great literate sophistication — George A.'s account is unlikely to mean what Neville needs it to say.

The best example close in time to the Book of Mormon is Joseph Smith's 1832 history (which Neville cites extensively in an appendix).[29] Whatever we think of the older Joseph's literary gifts, young Joseph's handwritten portion of the 1832 essay is certainly no better than Emma Smith's 1839 letter that is "mostly one long continuous sentence." Joseph even admits at the outset of his handwritten portion that he lacked many literary capabilities when he wrote that "as it required the~~ir~~ exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the Family therefore we were deprived of the bennifit of an education suffice it to say I was mearly instructtid in reading ~~and~~ writing and the ground <rules> of Arithmatic which const[it]uted my whole literary acquirements."[30] (Neville conveniently ignores this admission.) Joseph was not well-written in the early days of his ministry, nor was he an academic scholar.[31]

Edwards as a Proposed Elias Figure

A unique claim Neville makes is that Edwards was an Elias-like figure for the restoration,[32] preparing the way for Joseph to perform his work: "Edwards frequently encouraged his listeners and readers to look forward to, and even pray for, the coming prosperity of the Christian church. Again, when seen through young Joseph's eyes, Edwards suggested, if not foreshadowed, if not *predicted*, the Restoration."[33]

Edwards did indeed discuss how the Church would become great in the latter days, but he does not foreshadow or predict the restoration itself. Statements such as Edwards's, prophetic as they may seem, are not alone in the voices of his contemporaries who, upon breaking from the Church of England, often looked forward to a time when the Church would again have apostles and prophets. Others had often discussed and hoped for a return to New Testament Christianity and expressed this hope in more detail than Edwards. Neville also spends an entire chapter discussing how Edwards has been, in his view, misrepresented by Latter-day Saint scholars despite Edwards playing such an "essential role" in the restoration.[34] However, when analyzed critically, none of the citations that Neville uses demonstrate that Edwards played such an important role.

Neville repeatedly quotes Jonathan Edwards's use of the word "restoration" to show a "qualitative connection between Jonathan Edwards and Joseph Smith." Neville notes: "Some people have a different understanding of what Edwards had in mind when he used terms such as 'restoration.' In my view, it's less important what Edwards

thought or intended than what his readers have learned from his writing and how they have acted in response."[35]

We might first ask what is meant by a "qualitative connection" — is there some quality or characteristic that Edwards and Joseph share? But if so, why need Joseph depend upon Edwards for it? It would hardly be surprising if Joseph and Edwards — both interested in religious issues in the early United States — had some topics or concerns in common. They doubtless shared the quality of being concerned about grace, God, prayer, baptism, and salvation. But this only demonstrates that they were nineteenth century Christians. (And, arguably, such matters have been the preoccupation of most Christians for two millennia.)

When we read our own preoccupations or ideas into a text, scholars term it *eisegesis*. Neville, who prefers to read Edwards via eisegesis, sees only the broad similarities, not the differences. He fails to note, for example, that nowhere does Edwards hint or imply that he believed in a universal apostasy. The restoration he spoke of was not a restoration of the gospel. Neville points out the obvious when he notes how "Joseph Smith … definitely focused on the latter-day restoration" of lost doctrines and authority,[36] but he cannot provide us any connection to Edwards's teachings of "restoration" which match Joseph's ideas.

This degree of eisegesis is dangerous — there is certainly merit to the idea that readers have some freedom to respond to and interpret art or writing in ways the creator did not intend, and the resulting so-called reader-response criticism can take on a life of its own and be a subject worthy of study. But if the creator of a work cannot convey any kind of intended meaning, then they would have essentially worked in vain. The author's intent and content *as they understood it* is just as important, if not more so, than how we react to it. This is doubly so when doing history.

Neville also argues that Joseph's 1832 account of the First Vision was influenced by Jonathan Edwards's teachings regarding the glorious state of the Church.[37] However, Joseph Smith never taught about his experience in terms of Edwards's teachings, and instead recorded how, while he was more open towards Methodism, he generally found no church he could confidently join due to the apparent apostasy that was made evident around him.[38]

Placing Edwards as an Elias for Joseph Smith is also challenged by Joseph Smith's lack of direct referral to Edwards throughout his life.[39] Jesus Christ often spoke about John the Baptist, pointing out how John was sent to prepare the way, but no such mention appears from

Joseph regarding *any* early American theologian. In fact, the Lord *did* identify a forerunner to Joseph Smith and the Restoration of the Gospel in D&C 35:4 — Sidney Rigdon. Unlike Jonathan Edwards, Rigdon (a prominent Campbellite minister before his conversion) did believe there had been some apostasy and sought to reclaim New Testament Christianity. The Lord even compares Rigdon to John the Baptist and Elijah, and it is clear, based on the work Rigdon performed in Kirtland as a Campbellite preacher, that the people of the area were prepared to receive the Gospel, causing the Church to flourish once it was introduced to them.[40] While the Lord was preparing the world for His gospel before Sidney Rigdon, this fact does not necessitate Edwards as an Elias for Joseph Smith, and Neville is unable to offer any convincing evidence to support his point of view.

Proposed Theological Influences From Jonathan Edwards

Believing that Joseph was well versed in Edwards, Neville believes "there is even evidence Edwards may have influenced Joseph on topics ranging from Book of Mormon geography to the Urim and Thummim and the introduction of plural marriage."[41] This is not unlike other claims made since the publication of the Book of Mormon that attempt — either in good faith or bad — to place certain themes or phrases in a nineteenth century context. Like these other claims, Neville's hypothesis quickly manifests itself as implausible.[42] While I have shown in general terms that Joseph lacked the literary capabilities, means, and opportunity to read and reappropriate Edwards (or any direct evidence of his having done so), this is a lengthy argument and a substantial part of Neville's theory regarding Jonathan Edwards. Most of what he has to offer, however, is weak and inconclusive — indeed, after a close examination, it can be determined that *if* Joseph was affected by Jonathan Edwards's writings, he reacted in the complete opposite to what Neville proposes, countering many of the doctrines proposed by Edwards.

An example of the weak links that Neville draws to Edwards can be seen when Neville attempts to link the 1985 Church hymnbook with a hymnbook used by Edwards because nine of the modern Church's hymns also appeared in a hymnal compiled by Isaac Watts. Such a strained connection is a weak and untenable strand on which to hang a large role for Jonathan Edwards in the Restoration.[43] (Edwards and Joseph might even have sung the same Christmas carols, but that doesn't mean Joseph got the idea of Christmas from Edwards.) Here, I will focus

on various items of doctrinal importance that Neville attempts to link to Jonathan Edwards.

Prayer

Neville compares 2 Nephi 32:8 with Edwards's teachings that the natural man wants to avoid prayer, in an apparent attempt to link the doctrine of prayer to Edwards.[44] Jonathan Edwards, however, need not be the source for such a claim — a search on Google Books regarding the "natural man" and "prayer" will show that this same idea was discussed fairly often in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Book of Mormon here is reflecting a common theological belief of Joseph Smith's time.

The First Vision

Jonathan Neville quotes five separate sermons by Jonathan Edwards that he believes Joseph studied. Each of these sermons quotes from James 1:5, and Neville implies that reading these sermons led Joseph to pray in the sacred grove.[45] A much more likely scenario is the one described by William Smith: after hearing a preacher at a revival camp quote James 1:5, Joseph was so deeply moved that he studied it in his Bible as well. Joseph never mentioned Jonathan Edwards's work throughout his multiple retellings of his sacred theophany.[46] Neville also tries to link Joseph's accounts of the First Vision to Jonathan Edwards's conversion to Christ, although many of the details that Neville emphasizes constitute an amalgamation of separate accounts from Joseph (such as going to tell his father).[47] There are stronger analogies with many who sought salvation in Joseph's historical setting, and many scholars have discussed various aspects of these. If Neville must have parallels that instigated Joseph's spiritual quest, these are far more plausible than the one he offers.[48]

The Temple Endowment

Neville asserts that "The biblical 'god of this world' (2 Corinthians 4:4) is not explicitly connected with Satan in the Bible, but Edwards links the two [in a previously cited sermon]. Many Latter-day Saints are familiar with this connection as well."[49] Neville is referring to Latter-day Saints who have been through the temple and there made sacred covenants with God. Biblical language is used when making these covenants, including biblical titles, and Neville goes beyond the evidence in concluding that Edwards is the source for Latter-day Saints linking Satan with the "god of this world."

As we read further in the scriptural reference cited by Neville, Paul *does* expand on the role of the "god of this world" by stating that this figure deceives others into rejecting the Gospel. It is not a leap in logic to assume this can only be referring to Satan, and it is not a title Edwards was the first to connect with Satan — anyone who reads the verse would immediately recognize who Paul was describing. For example, Martin Luther said:

> *The devil* knows the thoughts of the ungodly, for he inspires them therewith. … And St Paul says: "*The god of this world* blindeth the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," etc. And Christ gives a reason how it comes to pass, … where he says: "*The devil* cometh, and taketh the Word out of their hearts, lest they should believe, and be saved." Therefore it is no marvel that the *devil*, through his prophets, declares what shall happen and come to pass. [50]

Again, Edwards is in theory a *possible* source for the idea, but the idea itself can hardly be evidence that Edwards *was* the source. Why not Luther? Or why not the most obvious person of all — Paul himself?

Christ Clothed in Glory

Neville states that the description of Christ clothed in glory in D&C 99 is a direct connection to Jonathan Edwards's description of Christ that combined multiple scriptures to create a single statement.[51] However, the idea of Christ being "clothed in glory" would be easily found in the Bible itself, and the phrase predates Joseph Smith's birth when applied to Christ.[52] D&C 99 does not necessitate that a single scripture or source — if any — be responsible for that exact description. This is another weak connection easily dismissed.

The Age of the Earth

Neville appears to take a literalist approach to D&C 77:6, stating that Bishop Usher's chronology (cited by Jonathan Edwards) that places the creation at 4000 BC is in agreement with the revelations of Joseph Smith.[53] However, it is possible that even Joseph Smith did not take a literalist approach. John S. Lewis points out how William W. Phelps believed the seven thousand years mentioned in D&C 77 to be referring to God's time, where a thousand earth years are a day to the Lord, as discussed in 1 Peter and the Book of Abraham.[54] The point is moot for our purposes

— as Neville demonstrates, the conception of a seven-thousand-year earth goes back to at least Bishop Usher (who died in 1656) and was a commonplace Christian notion by Joseph's era. Even if D&C 77 is to be interpreted literally, Joseph does not need Edwards for the idea.

Book of Mormon Geography

Neville quotes one instance of Edwards referring to a convergence of streams as the *head* of a river, believing this can be compared to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Neville asserts that the Mississippi River is the river Sidon, and so the head of the river Sidon cannot be the source of the river to fit it into his geography.[55] However, it is also important to consider how the Book of Mormon defines the head of a river: 1 Nephi 8:14 clearly describes the head of a river as its *source*. While it is not out of the question for other uses to intend *head* to mean a convergence of rivers, it is a stretch to say Edwards had any influence on Joseph's view of Book of Mormon geography.[56] Neville also erroneously links Oliver's mission to the Lamanites with a mission that Edwards took to the Native Americans, believing there to be a connection between the two without providing any substantial support for the idea.[57] Some European colonists had been preaching to the Native Americans since their arrival. Joseph did not need Edwards to come up with the notion.

The Urim and Thummim

Neville writes, "Perhaps Joseph was influenced by comments Jonathan Edwards made [regarding the biblical Urim and Thummim] of his ideas and insights that he drew upon for his sermons and treatises," but Edwards had nothing new to contribute to the discussion that could be found outside the Bible, simply pointing out that the Urim and Thummim were used by the High Priest to commune with God before it was lost.[58] Neville also tries to link this description to D&C 130 regarding a white stone and the earth becoming a Urim and Thummim — but there are no clear connections that can reasonably be drawn from Edwards in this regard.[59]

Plural Marriage

Neville attempts to connect the institution of plural marriage by Joseph Smith to some writings of Edwards. In addition to Joseph Smith's study and inspired revision of the Old Testament, Neville says,

> Another possible factor [that led to the revelation on plural marriage] could be the publication of a 10-volume collection

> of Edwards' works by his grandson, Sereno Edwards Dwight, in 1830. That collection included Edwards' thoughts about the polygamy as a type of the Church in the latter days. Whether that played a role or not is unknown at this point, but it's interesting to consider.[60]

We note Neville's method. He presents a possible link, admits there is no evidence and then declares it "interesting to consider." There are many things that are interesting to consider — including Middle Earth and the land of Oz. But our interest or consideration do not create evidence from thin air.

Neville then summarized Edwards's thoughts on the matter as follows, before citing selected writings:

> Jonathan Edwards saw Solomon's many wives as a type of Christ's church in the latter days, which would have a "multitude" of souls and nations "espoused" to Christ. He also suggested that Solomon was exempt from the law of Moses because the Lord sought to make him unlike other kings of his day.[61]

However, latter-day revelations received by Joseph contradicts what Edwards had proposed. Jacob 2 and D&C 132 make it clear that Solomon was *not* exempt from the Law of Moses and *broke* the law of the king recorded in Deuteronomy 17. Of the patriarchs and prophets spoken of in D&C 132, only David and Solomon are spoken of in a negative light for having multiplied wives to themselves (see Deuteronomy 17:17). Due to the significant contradictions between Edwards's writings and prophetic revelations, Edwards is an unlikely source for the institution of plural marriage in this dispensation. If mentioning an idea is enough to be credited as Joseph's source — even if Joseph concludes precisely the opposite of what the source says — then anyone and everyone could be a source.

The Fires of Hell

Neville argues that Joseph's ideas of hell being mental anguish are similar to Edwards's views, but Joseph's revelations and theology go in completely different directions. Just as with plural marriage, Joseph discusses a concept common to most Christians, and draws a conclusion diametrically opposed to Edwards — and yet we are told Edwards is the "likely source."[62] Joseph revealed a finite hell and a grand view of heaven

for all of God's children save the sons of perdition, something decidedly lacking in Edwards's sermons.

Neville even accuses Brigham Young of painting a caricature of many Christians for believing in an infinite hell, claiming, "no one claims everyone is going to hell forever," while he misreads Brigham Young's context of the *sinful* persons — for whom an eternal hell is a widely held belief in many Christian sects.[63] Neville continues by saying Brigham's "caricature" "clearly doesn't reflect the teachings of Jonathan Edwards, who emphasized repentance and faith in Christ as the deliverance from hell."[64]

In fact, not only did many teach an eternal hell[65] (which Neville denies, stating instead that Edwards saw the fires of hell as a sort of mental anguish) but Edwards himself did so in no uncertain terms. He was at pains to foreclose any suggestion that eternal punishment meant anything except an infinite suffering that continued forever with no relief. He also certainly does not confine the torments to the mental realm:

> The misery of the wicked in hell will be absolutely eternal. ... The other opinion which I mean to oppose is that though the punishment of the wicked shall consist in *sensible misery*, yet it shall not be absolutely eternal, but only of a very long continuance. ... As the future punishment of the wicked consists in *sensible misery*, so it shall not only continue for a very long time, *but shall be absolutely without end.* ...
>
> Do but consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever and ever: to suffer it day and night from one year to another, from one age to another, and from one thousand ages to another (and so adding age to age, and thousands to thousands), in pain, in wailing and lamenting, groaning and shrieking, and gnashing your teeth — with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazement, [and] *with your bodies and every member full of racking torture*; without any possibility of getting ease; without any possibility of moving God to pity by your cries; without any possibility of hiding yourselves from him; without any possibility of diverting your thoughts from your pain; without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation, or help, or change for the better.[66]

Edwards's teachings regarding hell clearly have but a tangential connection to Joseph's revelations of hell and heaven.[67] Neville does not

cite any instance of Edwards teaching that this faith and repentance could be exercised after death, whereas latter-day revelation clarifies and expands upon the principles of salvation for the dead mentioned briefly in the New Testament (making Joseph's revelations, in my mind, much more significant than anything Edwards had to say on the matter). In life, there is no question among most Christians that faith and repentance *do* save us from hell, but most believe that this must be done *before* one is sent to hell. There is little to convince the reader that Edwards maintained the near universalist view of salvation found in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Proposed Intertextuality Between Jonathan Edwards and the Book of Mormon

Neville proposes a heavy intertextuality between the Book of Mormon and the writings of Edwards, and includes a lengthy list of proposed non-biblical words and phrases in Appendices 2 and 3 that Neville traces back to Edwards.[68] Having looked through these lists, I have found numerous errors. I found over sixty words that have a biblical root in the first two pages alone, whether it is through a spelling variation (aught/ought) or a change in the tense of the verb. Neville previously listed various scriptures that he argues may have been influenced by Jonathan Edwards or James Hervey as well, although all of the connections he draws are superficial and do not necessitate any outside influence (for example, the use of the word "farewell" is unlikely to reflect any theologian's writings).[69]

Some words and phrases constitute a significant portion of Neville's argument, and so I will respond to some of these in more depth below. It becomes clear to the careful reader, however, that Neville fails to deliver any convincing argument for the intertextuality he proposes, while even misrepresenting his sources to create more "evidence." Since these are his strongest cases on which he spends the most effort, the reader is right to conclude the others are even worse.

Infinite Goodness

Neville derives the name of his book from King Benjamin's sermon in Mosiah 5, as well as from some remarks by Edwards. However, his approach is fatally flawed insofar as he will either allow this phrase to be either from an outside source *or* the Bible. Even if Joseph *had* taken this phrase from an outside source, Neville admits that Edwards "was not the only, and was not even the first, Christian author to use the phrase."[70] If

this is so, then the argument is useless — it cannot be anything but weak proof for his claim.[71]

Neville shows that even Edwards used it only 55 times in his writings.[72] It would be a stretch, even if Joseph *did* read the entire eight-volume set of Edwards's teachings, for the prophet to find and internalize these uses in the limited time he had to read (once a week at the Palmyra print shop while trying to dodge the face-blackening printers).

A far more likely outside influence, assuming such an influence exists, is instead the Christian ministers who preached at the revival meetings Joseph attended during his youth. Edwards was, after all, an influential American theologian, and his writings were widely published. Joseph, however, was not the one who would have read extensively from Edwards.

The Sin of the World

Here Neville has misused his sources to impose his own personal worldview on the scriptures. Citing a paper by Nicholas J. Frederick in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, Neville claims that Frederick misquotes scripture to fit his needs.

The citation Neville takes issue with is as follows:

> Wherefore I would that ye should remember that I have spoken unto you concerning that prophet which the Lord showed unto me that should baptize *the Lamb of God*, which should *take away the sin of the world*. (2 Nephi 31:4) The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold *the Lamb of God*, which *taketh away the sin of the world*. (John 1:29)[73]

As Frederick noted earlier in his paper,[74] he was citing Royal Skousen's *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text.* It tells us that 2 Nephi 31:4 differs from other printed editions of the Book of Mormon by pluralizing "sin" to "sins." Skousen notes in his analysis of textual variants:

> Here in 2 Nephi 31:4, the 1830 typesetter changed the singular *sin* to *sins*. Yet this passage is virtually identical to the language in John 1:29…The singular *sin* is appropriate here. The text underwent the same change from *sin* to *sins* earlier in 1 Nephi [10:10] … Oliver Cowdery is responsible for the change to *sins* in 1 Nephi 10:10; in the printer's manuscript, he added the *s* later with heavier ink flow. The original manuscript is extant for 1 Nephi 10:10 and it reads *sin*.[75]

However, despite Frederick's faithful representation of what the Book of Mormon's earliest text says, Neville ignores all this and naively claims that Frederick has misquoted the Book of Mormon:

> Frederick misquotes 2 Nephi 31:4. The verse actually reads "which should take away the **sins** of the world…"
>
> The distinction is significant. If we assume Joseph Smith was redacting the New Testament, we are left to speculate why Joseph would have essentially misquoted John throughout the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants…
>
> If we expand our study to non-biblical sources, we find possible sources for Joseph Smith's usage…
>
> Edwards also referred to "the **sins** of the world" several times.[76]

If Neville had read Frederick's references, he would have known that Frederick was not citing from the 1830, or even 2013, edition of the Book of Mormon, and he could have accessed Skousen's widely accessible work to confirm Frederick's reading. Even if the scripture had originally read "sins of the world," it would be strange to say that Joseph Smith could not make the phrase plural of his own accord without the use of Edwards as inspiration.

We here see Neville's method in full flower — he misunderstands the argument being made, does not engage with well-known scholarly tools and literature, becomes aggressive and dismissive to those who disagree with him, and ends by drawing an utterly unwarranted conclusion. This is the entire book, in miniature.

Redemption Cometh in and Through the Holy Messiah

Neville argues that Edwards talked about redemption being connected with the Messiah over 100 times, so the Book of Mormon must be reflecting this idea from Edwards.[77] However, *Messiah* is simply a title that means *Anointed One* and is the equivalent of *Christ* in Greek — so it is hardly novel that Joseph believed redemption came through Jesus the Messiah, nor would it be a stretch to believe that the Nephites believed the same thing. (Given that the Nephites predated Greek, the use of Messiah may more literally reflect their language.)

Moreover, the Old Testament clearly connects the Messiah with redemption and deliverance throughout the Psalms, even if the King James Version translates it as "anointed one." This is clearly

a biblical idea that in no way requires Edwards to be an influence on the text.

Wrestle Before God

Neville states that any idea of "wrestling with God" is a phrase that most likely originated with Edwards and David Brainerd, rather than the well-known use in Genesis 32. Neville claims biblical intertextuality is "not a good fit because Jacob was not wrestling with God."[78] Neville only cites Genesis 32:24's description of "a man" who wrestled with Jacob and ignores the rest of the chapter that *does* teach that this man was either the Lord or the angel of the Lord. Jacob goes so far as to name the place "Peniel" — "face of God" (Genesis 32:31). Genesis 32 thus *does* ultimately claim that the wrestle is with God, making it an appropriate scriptural story for Nephite prophets.

Neville also only mentions Alma 8:10, avoiding the well-known story in Enos who clearly did connect his wrestle before God with Jacob at Peniel before he received a remission of his sins.[79] Alma, then, would have had Jacob's *and* Enos's experiences to draw from in his own description of wrestling before God.

Endure to the End

Neville claims that "endure to the end" is a non-biblical phrase adopted from Edwards, contrasted with the biblical "endure unto the end" in Mark 13:13.[80] However, "endure to the end" is also a phrase employed in the New Testament, such as in Matthew 10:22, and is entirely synonymous with "endure unto the end" which makes this a poor argument for Neville to make from any standpoint. It is also a phrase that occurs extensively in Early Modern English texts, showing this phrase does not require Edwards's insertion to the text.[81]

The Natural Man Is an Enemy to God

Neville says that 1 Corinthian's 2:14's use of the "natural man" who "receives not the things of the Spirit" offers "little or no insight" to the phrase's use in the Book of Mormon. Because of this, Neville claims that "non-biblical textuality takes us to Jonathan Edwards and deeply enriches the text. By invoking Edwards, Joseph Smith provided us a key to a more profound and meaningful experience not just with the text, but with God."[82] However, while Neville simplistically links 1 Corinthians 2:14 strictly with knowledge, he fails to take the whole passage into context — knowledge of things of the Spirit. Paul's description fits perfectly

with King Benjamin's description of the natural man, making Edwards a forced and unnecessary addition to the text. Neville attempts to strengthen his connection to Edwards in Mosiah 3:19 by citing Edwards's list of various traits the spiritual man should have, but most of the traits listed do not appear in the Book of Mormon, making the connection weak and superficial.[83] Here we should ask, "If Joseph is cribbing from Edwards, why does he ignore such a useful list?" In assessing an author's influence on another, we must look at "unparallels" as well as supposed "parallels."[84]

Neville also claims that James 4:4's use of "enemy of God" is completely different from the phrase "enemy to God" found in the Book of Mormon.[85] However, the context suggests that it is an objective genitive, which means that "enemy to God" is an appropriate translation of the Greek. The ideas are identical. James and Benjamin were discussing the same idea, being an enemy *to* God, and Edwards is a forced addition to the text. A brief look through Google Books will also show that Edwards was not the only person to connect the natural man with an enemy to God, further demonstrating Neville's forced insertion of Edwards into the text.

Forever and Ever

Neville claims that the phrase "forever and ever" is a phrase distinct from the Bible's "for ever and ever." Edwards, however, used both, so he may have influenced the text of the Book of Mormon.[86] However, the phrases are identical in meaning and would simply reflect scribal/translator preference. There is no reason to suppose any outside source was needed for the Book of Mormon.

Preparatory State

Neville argues that the theology of a preparatory state comes from Edwards, but Edwards's "preparatory state" is his description of the period from the Fall of Adam and Eve to the birth of Christ.[87] The Book of Mormon, however, speaks of a *mortal* probation for us to prepare ourselves to meet God. The two have a superficial connection, but the theology of Edwards and the Book of Mormon diverge drastically upon closer examination.

Broken Heart and Contrite Spirit

Neville argues that the phrase "a broken heart and contrite spirit" comes from Edwards, but both the Bible and latter-day revelations refer to both

the heart and the spirit with both adjectives.[88] A broken heart is a contrite heart, and a contrite spirit is a broken spirit. Those who know the bible as well as Neville claims that young Joseph did know that Psalms 34:18 includes both in clear parallel: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of *a broken heart*; and saveth such as be of *a contrite spirit*." The phrase "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" was used before 1620,[89] including twice by John Bunyan in 1691 under a revealing title: *The Acceptable Sacrifice: or the Excellency of a Broken Heart: Shewing the Nature, Signs, and Proper Effects of a Contrite Spirit*.[90] The Book of Mormon's "broken heart and contrite spirit" dates to at least 1615.[91] It was likely a common expression in Joseph's time, which is why Edwards and Joseph used it.[92]

Come Unto Christ

Jesus says "come unto me" (Matthew 11:28), but when Moroni talks about it in the third person as a command "come unto Christ," Neville argues Joseph must have received the phrase from Edwards.[93] This is a poor argument since both verses offer the same doctrine, just told in different voices. The phrase is also used in dozens of works found in a quick Google Books search between the dates of 1800–1820. The University of Michigan's free EEBO database for Early Modern English likewise shows hundreds of occurrences of this phrase being used, showing it was not unique to Edwards or Joseph.[94] In fact, one such usage has "invite them, together with us, to come unto Christ."[95]

Clear as the Moon

Neville argues that Joseph Smith did not quote the Song of Solomon in the Doctrine and Covenants — he quoted Edwards quoting the Song of Solomon.[96] Joseph Smith, however, was likely aware of the contents of the Song of Solomon by 1836 as he learned Hebrew — he would later quote from the Song of Solomon in the 1840s,[97] and the name Nauvoo is based on a rare word in the Hebrew Bible that appears only once in Isaiah and the Song of Solomon. It is doubtful that Joseph truly was dependent on Edwards for these inclusions. Once again, the story changes to support Neville's claims — Joseph must know the Bible extremely well, except when it would be better for the theory if Jonathan Edwards knew it.

Son of Righteousness

Neville believes that "Son of Righteousness" in 3 Nephi 25:2 is the correct spelling (rather than "sun," as it appears in Malachi 4:2) and that Joseph Smith saw this as an error in the Bible and was referring to

sermons by Edwards.[98] However, there is no indication that Joseph ever attempted to alter this verse in his inspired revision, and a scribal error is more likely. It would be easy to hear "sun" but write "son." Joseph likely saw no need to correct this in later editions of the Book of Mormon because "Son of Righteousness" and "Sun of Righteousness" are each adequate titles for Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God and the light of the world. In any case, Joseph hardly needs Edwards to point out that "sun" and "son" sound identical.[99]

Arise from the Dust

Neville argues that the phrase "arise from the dust," a quotation from Isaiah, is more likely from Edwards.[100] However, it is clear for serious readers of the Book of Mormon that the Nephite prophets clearly adopt this language from Isaiah, and all use it in the same way, reflecting a thorough knowledge of the ancient Old World understanding of rising from the dust as a symbol of enthronement/empowerment and covenant keeping. The Book of Mormon uses this language in profound ways when modern biblical scholarship is considered, showing a level of depth and sophistication far beyond what one could have gained from consulting Jonathan Edwards.[101] Once more, Joseph's biblical knowledge flags just when Neville needs it to.

Gathered Together in One

Neville argues that "gathered together in one" is a non-biblical phrase, even though "gather together in one" is biblical (Ephesians 1:10).[102] Neville is apparently willing to allow Edwards to use a verb in multiple tenses but unwilling to allow Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon prophets the same freedom.

Father of Lies

Neville argues that the title "father of lies" is Edwardsian, although it is an entirely biblical concept that does not require Edwards.[103] John 8:44 states that Satan is a "liar, and the father of it [i.e., lies]." It is not a leap in logic to believe a prophet could adopt that title and clarify the meaning. This is evident by Martin Luther, who called the devil the father of all lies long before Jonathan Edwards:

> When that envious, poisoned spirit, *the devil*, plagues and torments us, as is his custom, by reason of our sins, intending to lead us into despair, me must meet him in this manner: "thou deceitful and wicked spirit! How darest thou

> to presume to persuade me to such things? Knowest thou not that Christ Jesus, my Lord and Savior, who crushed thy head, has forbidden me to believe thee, yea, even when thou speakest the truth, in that he names thee a murderer, a liar, *and the father of lies.*"[104]

Zion

Neville claims the New Testament never mentions Zion, but the Greek form "Sion" is used repeatedly. He attempts to link this to Edwards's teachings that "mount Zion is a type (or symbol) of the Church of Christ."[105] However, this concept is not necessarily drawn from Edwards, as Hebrews 12:22–23 speaks of Zion as entering the company of angels and the "church of the firstborn." Christians in the Early Modern English era likewise used Mount Zion as a symbol much like Edwards did, basing their arguments out of the Bible.[106] *Zion* and its Greek form *Sion* are easily connected.

Hebraism, or Edwards?

Neville writes,

> Another well-known feature of the Book of Mormon is parallelism, including chiasmus and other forms of repetition. Edwards effectively used such parallel structures to convey his messages because much of his work was written for public speaking. …
>
> While interesting and relevant, an in-depth comparison between Edwards' literary techniques and the Book of Mormon is beyond the scope of this book.[107]

Neville appears to believe that Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon, including some of the most common Hebraic forms of poetry, are not in the Book of Mormon because it is a text from a Hebrew people who fled Jerusalem, but because Edwards purportedly used similar methods while preaching. (Neville offers no evidence to support this claim, however.) This is a dangerously incorrect assumption that shoehorns Edwards into the text and risks clouding the nature of an inherently Hebraic text.

Other Wrongly Attributed Phrases

A few other phrases or words Neville wrongly attributes to Edwards's influence stand out as worthy of mention.

For example, Neville attempts to draw a distinction between "towards" in place of "toward," even though they are synonymous. Neville even demonstrates through his citations of Edwards that Edwards used both words synonymously, and there is little reason to believe Joseph's choice was influenced by Edwards.[108]

Neville similarly includes "having had" as a verb form found in Edwards and minimally in the Bible, assuming that Joseph Smith could only learn this conjugation of the verb from him.[109] He also argues that verbs such as "grasped" come from Edwards's reading of a Hebrew phrase, unaware that the *hiphil* form of *hzk* in Hebrew is translated as "grasp" and would not require Edwards's reading to appear in the Book of Mormon.[110] (It also seems a stretch to insist that Joseph — who knew English at least as well as he knew the Bible — was incapable of using a common English verb in a variety of tenses.)

Neville similarly argues that phrases such as "strait and narrow" or "straight and narrow" originate from Edwards's writings, even though it is a biblical phrase that may have been misspelled by Joseph's scribes.[111] Neville also claims the phrase "sandy foundation" originated with Edwards, even though it reflects a biblical idea (e.g., Matthew 7:26) and Edwards was not the first to use this paraphrase.[112] One prominent example is from William Penn, a Quaker and the namesake of the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania, who was confined to the tower of London in 1668 for writing a religious pamphlet called *The Sandy Foundation Shaken*. This work was repeatedly republished in nineteenth-century America.[113]

The Proposed Use of Additional Outside Sources in the Translation

In addition to Edwards, Neville proposes that Joseph relied on other books for his translation of the Book of Mormon. Many critics of the Church have appealed to these books as putative sources for the Book of Mormon, in an attempt to discredit the Book of Mormon and the restored gospel. Incredibly, Neville even asserts that "faithful scholars rejected the very evidence developed by the skeptics that supports Joseph's claim that he translated the plates. Instead, they have adopted a theory that Joseph was merely reading words that appeared on the [Urim and Thummim] or seer stone."[114] As with his supposed connections to Edwards, however, Neville offers only superficial evidence that cannot be taken seriously.

For example, he argues that among the sources Joseph had read and drew upon, he was intimately familiar with *The Late War*, *The First Book of Napoleon*, *The American Revolution*, and *The First Book*

of the American Chronicles of the Times. Neville claims these sources were used for military terms found in the Book of Mormon, but most are single common words such as "surrounded" or "rehearsed."[115] Single words such as these cannot be seriously linked to any outside source, as it would presume Joseph was incapable of hearing or learning them in any other way.

Perhaps the weakest argument Neville could make regarding *The Late War* and the Book of Mormon is that "In both cases, we have a Title Page, a Copyright Page, and a Preface."[116] Because both books have these features, including the eleven witnesses, which he compares to scholarly endorsements for *The Late War*, Neville sees a connection between the two that is entirely imagined. If he is so desperate for parallels that these will do, it says much about even the author's assessment of how convincing his case really is.[117]

Neville similarly argues that Lucy Mack Smith's late retelling of Joseph Sr.'s dream influenced Joseph's language, but the reverse may also be true — that is, she adapted language from the Book of Mormon in her retelling of Joseph Sr.'s dream years after it had occurred.[118] This scenario is much more likely.[119] Although Joseph's family doubtless influenced his language, this example cannot bear the load that Neville places upon it.

Conclusion

While Joseph Smith surely was influenced by the language of his time — after all, "the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3) — Neville makes far too many unsubstantiated claims and bases his arguments on far too many implausible suppositions to be taken seriously. Even his best suggestions are weak — they consist of phrases common in the religious literature and discourses of three centuries.[120] There is no clear evidence linking distinctive language in the Book of Mormon to books written or published around Joseph Smith's time, nor can Neville demonstrate a clear connection to Edwards's writings. And, lest we forget, this entire shaky edifice is constructed on a sandy foundation — Neville has provided only a just-so story to convince us that Joseph even had contact with Edwards's in-depth theological treaties to begin with.

Infinite Goodness is a poor book to add to any Latter-day Saint's library because of its many historical inaccuracies. It is further weakened by its continued insistence on his Demonstration Hypothesis, which claims that Joseph Smith merely feigned translation by reciting Isaiah from

memory, despite the textual and historical evidence to the contrary.[121] It also serves as a poor model of how to do history, how to argue honesty, and even the use of logic. It is a pseudo-historical work that gives undue credence to many attacks originally formulated by critics of the Church regarding the origins of the Book of Mormon, and its arguments can be devastating to faith for unprepared members of the Church who do not know beforehand the claims made within. We can only debate whether its effect on the reader will be worse because of the false ideas it teaches, or because of the dreadful example that it sets.

[Author's Note: I would like to thank Mike Parker and Gregory L. Smith for reviewing an earlier draft of this review and offering helpful suggestions, as well as my other family and friends (especially my father) who helped edit and offer clarifying remarks. I would also like to thank the pseudonymous "Peter Pan" who offered encouragement as I wrote this review.]

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Endnotes

1 Spencer Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach to Joseph Smith's Translation of Ancient Scripture," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 1–62, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/an-unfortunate-approach-to-joseph-smiths-translation-of-ancient-scripture/.

2 I have previously responded to some of Neville's claims regarding Jonathan Edwards made in an interview on YouTube. This review deals with his more complete claims made in print, although some of his claims made in his interview can also clarify his book's claims. For my earlier response, see Spencer Kraus, "Jonathan Edwards's Purported Influence on Joseph Smith: A Response to Jonathan Neville's Latest Interview (Part Two)," *Latter-day Light*

and Truth (blog), 18 October 2021, https://latterdaylightandtruth.blogspot.com/2021/05/a-response-to-strange-theories.html.

3 The argument that Swedenborg influenced Joseph's view of heaven can be found in Mary Ann Meyers, "Death in Swedenborgian and Mormon Eschatology," *Dialogue* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 58–64 and D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 217–19. A rebuttal to this claim, arguing that Joseph Smith and Swedenborg drew from the Bible in different ways, can be found in J. B. Haws, "Joseph Smith, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Section 76: Importance of the Bible in Latter-day Revelation," in *The Doctrine and Covenants, Revelations in Context*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2008), 142–67.

4 Jonathan Neville, *Infinite Goodness: Joseph Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2021), 79.

5 Ibid.

6 See Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," which deals extensively with pseudo-historical claims made by Neville regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon, including the claims that Joseph Smith memorized and recited Isaiah and lied to the Whitmers regarding his use of a seer stone during the translation.

7 Neville, *Infinite Goodness,* 79.

8 Thomas W. Manninen, "Appeal to Personal Incredulity," *Bad Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Fallacies in Western Philosophy* (Wiley Online Library, 9 Mary 2018), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781119165811.ch17.

9 See Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate: Joseph Smith and the Nephite Interpreters* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2020), 215–16.

10 Lucy Mack Smith and Emma Smith (two family members with no inclination to lie about their beloved Joseph) each testified that Joseph Smith was not well-read, as will be discussed below. See also Book of Mormon Central, "Why Would God Choose an Uneducated Man to Translate the Book of Mormon? (2 Nephi 27:19)," *KnoWhy* 397 (January 9, 2018), https://knowhy.

bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-would-god-choose-an-uneducated-man-to-translate-the-book-of-mormon.

11 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 3. Cf. Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 212–13.

12 "Journal, 1835–1836," p. 36–37, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/37.

13 It is quite telling that Joseph rarely went into detail regarding his youth and his leg surgery in most of his other histories, and in one of his histories the leg surgery incident is included without any mention of leading Joseph to read and ponder on the teachings of any prominent Christian theologian. Neville's claim is purely imaginative and out of place in the historical record. See "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30, August 1834]," p. 131, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/137.

14 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 164–67.

15 Ibid., 177–78.

16 Lucy Mack Smith once recorded that her husband "would not subscribe to any particular system of faith, but contended for the ancient order, as established by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and his Apostles." After spiritual dreams he "seemed more confirmed than ever in the opinion: that there were no order or class of religionists who knew any more concerning the Kingdom of God, than those of the world; or such as made no profession of religion whatever." See "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845," pp. 52–53, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/59. Given Joseph Smith Sr.'s ties to Universalism, it would especially be doubtful that he gave his children Jonathan Edwards's sermons, one of which I will cite below that is antithetical to the Universalist model.

17 Neville, *Infinite Goodness,*167. Neville specifically mentions how Christian theological works were widely published in New York, so I conclude that Neville believes this would have continued into their stay in Palmyra.

18 For Joseph Smith's athletic capabilities, see Alexander L. Baugh, "Joseph Smith's Athletic Nature," in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 137–50.

19 Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1852), 213–14, https://www.google.com/books/edition/History_of_the_Pioneer_Settlement_of_Phe/VlIWAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

20 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, xiii. Cf., 79.

21 "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [1], bk. 4," p. [1], bk. 4, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/43. It should be noted that the context of this account makes it clear that Lucy Mack Smith was explaining how her son's achievements were remarkable given that he was not a heavily educated bookworm.

22 "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845," p. 86, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/93.

23 *Webster's Dictionary 1828* (online), s.v. "perusal," https://websterdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Perusal.

24 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 214. Cf. Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 178–79.

25 "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [2], bk. 2," p. [2], bk. 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/20.

26 See "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saint's Herald* 26 (1 October 1879).

27 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 175. For further discussion, see Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 43.

28 George A. Smith, "Joseph Smith's Family – Details of George A. Smith's Own Experience, etc.," in *Journal of Discourses* (2 August 1857), 5:102–103, https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/2275/rec/5.

29 See Neville, *Infinite Goodness,* 283–300.

30 "History, circa Summer 1832," p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/1, spelling in context.

31 Neville also discusses Joseph's early interactions with the angel Moroni, who quoted from several biblical passages in 1824 during his initial visits. Neville claims that the content of Moroni's speech — which included biblical citations — reveals Joseph's biblical sophistication. I discuss Joseph's purported biblical knowledge in Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 19–20.

32 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 210.

33 Ibid., 7.

34 See ibid., 26.

35 Ibid., 92.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 82–88.

38 For example, "my intimate acquaintance with those of differant denominations led me to marvel excedingly for I discovered that they did not adorn their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred depository this was a grief to my Soul … I found that mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament" ("History, circa Summer 1832," p. 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/2).

39 For example, in his 1832 account Joseph discussed "searching the **scriptures** believeing as I was taught, that they contained the **word of God** thus applying myself to **them** … there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the **new testament** … I learned in the **scriptures** that God was the same yesterday to day and forever that he was no respecter to persons." He repeatedly mentions the scriptures, but says nothing about reading anything else. One is struck by Joseph's isolation — he has only scripture, himself, and his thoughts ("History, circa Summer 1832," 2, emphasis added).

40 See Matthias F. Cowley, *Cowley's Talks on Doctrine* (Chattanooga, TN: Ben E. Rich, 1902), 160–61, https://archive.org/details/cowleystalksondo00cowl/page/n3/mode/2up.

41 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 6.

42 A recent example of this can be seen in Kent P. Jackson, "Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 40 (2020): 15–60, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/some-notes-on-joseph-smith-and-adam-clarke/. While Thomas Wayment's hypothesis of Adam Clarke's influence on the Joseph Smith Translation originally showed promise, and even showed more promise than Neville's hypothesis presented in *Infinite Goodness*, it, too, failed to deliver any substantial evidence for outside influence on one of Joseph Smith's translations. Other failed "smoking guns" will be discussed below, as Neville reuses many critics' arguments regarding books such as *The Late War.*

43 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 147.

44 Ibid., 102.

45 Ibid., 39–40.

46 The detail regarding the preacher is found in "Wm. B. Smith's Last Statement," *Zion's Ensign,* Jan. 13, 1894, 6. All of the extant accounts of the First Vision can be read online at the Joseph Smith Papers project.

47 See Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 203–205.

48 See Alexander L. Baugh, et al, eds., *Joseph Smith and his First Vision: Context, Place, and Meaning* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2021) for excellent studies regarding the historical context of the First Vision.

49 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 86.

50 "The Devil and His Works," in *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, trans. William Hazlitt (London: HG Bohn, 1857), entry DXCIV, 255, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.92926/page/n361/mode/2up?.

51 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 56–61.

52 For one example among many: "Him hath God the Father highly exalted, and set him down at his Right-Hand, clothed in Glory,

and exalted Majesty" [Thomas Bouston, *The Mystery of Christ in the Form of a Servant* (Glasgow: William Gray, 1742), v].

53 Ibid., 36.

54 See John S. Lewis, "The Scale of Creation in Space and Time," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 8 (2014): 71–80, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-scale-of-creation-in-space-and-time/.

55 Neville maintains that Zarahemla must be in Iowa based on a misreading of D&C 125:3, forcing the Mississippi to be the Sidon River. Because the Book of Mormon describes the head of the river Sidon being south of Zarahemla, Neville must argue that the head of the river is different than the source of the river. He offers a brief summary of his argument in Jonathan Neville, "The name of Zarahemla," *Moroni's America* (blog), 9 December 2021, http://www.moronisamerica.com/the-name-of-zarahemla/.

56 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 148–50.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., 157–58.

59 Ibid., 158–59.

60 Ibid., 160, spelling in context.

61 Ibid., 161.

62 Ibid., 113–28.

63 Ibid., 114–15.

64 Ibid., 115.

65 For an accessible quick review of various Christian attitudes toward hell, see Edwin Woodruff Tait et al, *A History of Hell: A brief survey and resource guide* (Worchester, PA: Christian History, 2011), https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/6836552/the-history-of-hell-christian-history-magazine. Those who taught an eternal, unending hell for some included Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, Ansalem of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Isaac Watts, John Wesley, and EB Pusey. Even a consideration of Dante's *Inferno* makes it clear that many Christians taught an eternal, never-ending hell. For example, from the year of Joseph's First Vision, see John Reed, letter to Rev. Hosea Ballou, "Correspondence," *Universalist*

Magazine (5 February 1820): 126, https://archive.org/details/sim_universalist_1820-02-05_1_32/page/n1/mode/2up. ("If these, and many similar expressions in the sacred volume, will not prove the eternity of hell's torments then language ... means any thing or nothing.")

66 Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon XI: The Eternity of Hell's Torments," in *Sermons on the Following Subjects ... By the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards* (Hartford: Husdon and Goodwin, 1780), 172, 183, 197, https://archive.org/details/sermonsonfollowi00edwa/page/170/mode/2up?, emphasis added. Neville argues (*Infinite Goodness,* 21–34) that Latter-day Saint scholars such as Steven C. Harper and Terryl Givens are wrong to focus on Edwards's teachings on hell as found in his infamous "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God," yet a wider examination of what Edwards had to say on the matter shows that Steven C. Harper and Terryl Givens do portray what Edwards believed about the fires and torments of hell accurately. While Edwards may have had room for a slightly more compassionate God than as described in that sermon, it pales in comparison to the loving and merciful God revealed to Joseph Smith who had prepared an infinite *escape from* hell rather than an infinite *prosecution into* hell.

67 A more potent argument for Neville would have been that the Book of Mormon's view of "hell" is closer to Edwards's view than Joseph's later theology. However, Neville focuses almost entirely on the Doctrine and Covenants conception of hell while only tangentially using language from the Book of Mormon, making this argument easily dismissible.

68 See Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 217–79.

69 Ibid., 63–70. The word "farewell" is listed as Edwardsian on page 70.

70 Ibid., 15.

71 A search through Google Books will show that the term "infinite goodness" is far from exclusive to Jonathan Edwards, and the EEBO database for Early Modern English, https://quod.lib.umich.edu, similarly includes countless examples of this phrase being used. A viable explanation for its inclusion in the Book of Mormon is simply that it was a part of the theological vocabulary of the day. While some scholars believe they have found evidence of

Early Modern English in the Book of Mormon, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. The purpose in referencing this time period is not to argue for or against Early Modern English in the Book of Mormon, but rather to show that these phrases identified by Neville predate Jonathan Edwards and had become common theological phrases in the centuries leading up to the Restoration.

72 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 14.

73 Nicholas J. Frederick, "The Book of Mormon and Its Redaction of the King James New Testament: A Further Evaluation of the Interaction between the New Testament and the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 27 (2018): 51.

74 Ibid., 48n8.

75 Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Two: 2 Nephi 11 – Mosiah 16* (Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2014): 907–908.

76 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 48–49.

77 Ibid., 51.

78 Ibid., 74.

79 See Matthew L. Bowen, "'And There Wrestled a Man with Him' (Genesis 32:24): Enos's Adaptations of the Onomastic Wordplay of Genesis," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 151–60, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/and-there-wrestled-a-man-with-him-genesis-3224-enoss-adaptations-of-the-onomastic-wordplay-of-genesis/.

80 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 230–31.

81 The EEBO database for Early Modern English, https://quod.lib.umich.edu, similarly includes countless examples of this phrase being used. Google Ngram similarly shows that the phrase "endure to the end" was used from the Early Modern English era through Joseph Smith's day more frequently than the more archaic "endure unto the end."

82 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 93. Cf. Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 379–81.

83 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 99.

84 Benjamin McGuire has offered many insights into this topic. See Benjamin L. McGuire, "The Late War Against the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): 323–55, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-late-war-against-the-book-of-mormon/; Benjamin L. McGuire, "Finding Parallels: Some Cautions and Criticisms, Part One," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 1–59, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/finding-parallels-some-cautions-and-criticisms-part-one/; and Benjamin L. McGuire, "Finding Parallels: Some Cautions and Criticisms, Part Two, *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 61–104, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/finding-parallels-some-cautions-and-criticisms-part-two/.

85 See Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 96.

86 See ibid., 98.

87 See ibid., 129–34.

88 See ibid., 77.

89 *The Workes of Mr. Sam. Hieron late Pastor of Modbury in Deuon*, Vol. 2 (London: Wi Stansby, 1620), 58, 368, https://books.google.ca/books?id=MgQ8v_FYrGwC&pg=PA368; George Willington, "*Cor concuffum & Contritum*: or, A Present for Jehova," (London: Thomas Milbourn, 1670), 8, 12, https://books.google.ca/books?id=_0dnAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA8.

90 Bunyan is better known as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress.* See John Bunyan, *The Acceptable Sacrifice: or the Excellency of a Broken Heart: Shewing the Nature, Signs, and Proper Effects of a Contrite Spirit* (London: Elizabeth Smith, 1691), 19, 168, https://books.google.ca/books?id=WYRnAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA168, emphasis added.

91 Thomas Howes, A Christian Enchiridion (C.L., 1615), 182, https://books.google.ca/books?id=alrL_2x3DGIC&pg=PA182.

92 A quick search of Google Books between the years 1800–1820 finds more than twenty examples of the Book of Mormon's version alone. The EEBO database for Early Modern English, https://quod.lib.umich.edu, similarly includes countless examples of this phrase being used. For more information regarding this phrase in the Book of Mormon text, see Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did Jesus Tell All People to Sacrifice a Broken Heart and a Contrite

Spirit? (3 Nephi 9:19–20)," *KnoWhy* 198 (September 29, 2016), https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-did-jesus-tell-all-people-to-sacrifice-a-broken-heart-and-a-contrite-spirit.

93 See Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 77.

94 The EEBO database for Early Modern English, https://quod.lib.umich.edu.

95 Iacopo Aconcio, *Satan's Stratagems* (London: John Maddock, 1648), author's preface.

96 See Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 135–40. Neville bases this argument off of the remark that appears in the Joseph Smith Translation that the Song of Solomon is "not inspired writings," but Neville approaches the matter simplistically, as if Joseph would never read the Song of Solomon under any other circumstances than provided by Jonathan Edwards. See the Church's Bible Dictionary, c.v. "Song of Solomon," http://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bd/song-of-solomon.

97 References to the Song of Solomon, including those made by Joseph Smith and other early Church leaders, can be found at https://scriptures.byu.edu.

98 See Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 84–85.

99 Royal Skousen has considered this case and provides good reasons for favoring "sun" here. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants in the Book of Mormon*, 830–33.

100 See Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 89.

101 See Jeff Lindsay, "'Arise from the Dust': Insights from Dust-Related Themes in the Book of Mormon (Part 1: Tracks from the Book of Moses)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016): 179–232, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/arise-from-the-dust-insights-from-dust-related-themes-in-the-book-of-mormon-part-1-tracks-from-the-book-of-moses/ and especially Lindsay, "'Arise from the Dust': Insights from Dust-Related Themes in the Book of Mormon (Part 2: Enthronement, Resurrection, and Other Ancient Motifs from the 'Voice from the Dust')," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016): 233–77, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/arise-from-the-dust-insights-from-dust-related-themes-in-the-book-of-mormon-

part-2-enthronement-resurrection-and-other-ancient-motifs-from-the-voice-from-the-dust/.

102 See Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 89.

103 Ibid., 78.

104 "The Devil and His Works," entry DC, 258, emphasis added.

105 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 43–44.

106 The EEBO database for Early Modern English, https://quod.lib.umich.edu, where many of these examples are readily available.

107 Neville, *Infinite Goodness,* 19.

108 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 222–25.

109 Ibid., 384–85.

110 Neville, *Infinite Goodness,* 75–76.

111 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 225–28.

112 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 78.

113 Rosemary Moore, *George Whitehead and the Establishment of Quakerism* (Leiden, NL: Koninklijke Brill, 2022), 32.

114 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 190. I have respectfully inserted the term Urim and Thummim into the quotation where Neville used his acronym "U&T." For a response to the claim that scholars have "adopted" the "theory" that Joseph read words off of his translation instruments, see Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 13, to see why this is historically accurate and likely the method originally described by Joseph Smith himself.

115 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 234–35. Cf. Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 193–98.

116 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 190. See also 191–93.

117 Neville also fails to recognize the scholarship detailing whether or not Joseph Smith was influenced by these works that show that not only was it highly unlikely that Joseph actually had access to these sources, but there are no meaningful connections that can be drawn from them. See, for example, Stanford Carmack, "Is the Book of Mormon a Pseudo-Archaic Text?" *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 28 (2018): 177–232, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/is-the-book-of-mormon-a-pseudo-archaic-text/; Stanford Carmack, "Personal Relative Pronoun

Usage in the Book of Mormon: An Important Authorship Diagnostic," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 49 (2021): 5–36, https://interpreterfoundation.org/personal-relative-pronoun-usage-in-the-book-of-mormon-an-important-authorship-diagnostic/; and McGuire, "The Late War Against the Book of Mormon."

118 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 235–36.

119 For a more thorough analysis, see Book of Mormon Central, "Why Are There So Many Similarities between the Dreams of Lehi and Joseph Smith, Sr.? (1 Nephi 8:4)," *KnoWhy* 474 (October 9 2018), https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-are-there-so-many-similarities-between-the-dreams-of-lehi-and-joseph-smith-sr.

120 Brant Gardner also mentions how revivalist language was used in the book of Mormon precisely because it was so common in Joseph Smith's day (and as such it would not be required that Joseph Smith was well versed in any theological treatise). See Brant Gardner, *Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 308.

121 Neville offers a brief review of his Demonstration Hypothesis in Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 315–17. For my review of this hypothesis, see Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 1–62.

Plural Marriage: Beauty for Ashes

Julie A. Russell

Abstract: *When Eliza R. Snow agreed to become one of Joseph Smith's plural wives, she feared she would never be looked upon as a decent woman. Nevertheless, she accepted Joseph Smith's proposal and eventually became a strong advocate of the practice. Reading about her understanding of plural marriage and the many testimonies of others who practiced it, I have realized that plural marriage teaches us much about humility, keeping God's commandments, and following His prophets. In nineteenth-century America, it provided a way for women and men to set aside self and embark on a soul-refining journey filled with trials and obstacles that parallel many of the trials and obstacles of our day.*

You could argue that the practice of plural marriage (or polygamy, as some refer to it) is as controversial now as it was in the nineteenth century. In the mid-1800s, Joseph Smith and other members of the leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ practiced it in the shadows — fearful that mainstream society would misunderstand their intentions in taking multiple wives.[1]

In modern times, the subject, unavoidable every fourth year in Sunday school, can still blow through a classroom of practicing Latter-day Saints like a bad smell no one wants to acknowledge. But plural marriage is an integral part of the Church's history. Women and men rallied to maintain the practice in the mid-1800s when the U.S. Government threatened to incarcerate its practitioners. Despite their great efforts, however, plural marriage was abolished in 1890, leaving some women and children to fend for themselves as their husbands

1. See Matthew J. Grow et. al., eds., *Saints: The Standard of Truth* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018), 1:291.

resumed a monogamous marriage with their first wives.[2] Nevertheless, I find the practice to be a profound example of the refiner's fire, in which we can find beauty for ashes, holiness for misery, and the keys to persevering in a world that regularly throws proverbial stones at us for holding firm to doctrine that challenges the cultural ideas of the day. It teaches us that living the commandments, controversial or not, does not preclude us from unanticipated fallout even while in the very act of sacrificing self to do what God has asked.

For several months I scoured the pages of Relief Society, Primary, Young Women's, and Young Men's minute books from 1869 to 1888 as part of research for a project at the Church History Department. I scanned one page after another of handwritten pages ranging from perfect penmanship and spelling to indecipherable lettering and broken English. On occasion, my eyes slowed enough to catch familiar themes that repeated from one ward's minute book to the next. Salvation and unity were the most prominent among those themes, but, as you might guess, so is the topic of plural marriage.

Many women during that time expressed in Relief Society meetings their heartfelt testimonies of the sanctity and blessings of the practice of plural marriage.[3] Nevertheless, it is clear that some members of the various congregations — both men and women[4] — struggled at one point or another to accept it as a godly practice,[5] which is something most

2. See Matthew J. Grow et. al., eds., *Saints: No Unhallowed Hand* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020), 2:612–15, 623–30.

3. See also Elizabeth Ann Whitney's and Newel K. Whitney's reaction to "this new and strange doctrine." They both prayed and received a miraculous vision in answer to their questions about plural marriage. Elizabeth Ann Smith Whitney, "A Leaf from an Autobiography," *Woman's Exponent*, December 15, 1878, 7:105. https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/6548/; and "Revelation, 27 July 1842," p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-27-july-1842/1.

4. Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Heber C. Kimball, all of whom eventually had tens of wives, expressed their initial reluctance and disbelief of the practice. Brigham wished to die, and Heber "shed bushels of tears" over the doctrine of plural marriage. See Brian C. Hales and Laura Harris Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, "Other Mormon Leaders Practice Polygamy," https://josephsmithspolygamy.org/history/mormon-leaders-polygamy/.

5. See, for example, Eliza R. Snow (discourse, West Porterville Relief Society, 19 Aug. 1878), *The Discourses of Eliza R. Snow* (website), https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/eliza-r-snow/1870s/1878/08/1878-08-19-b; Eliza R. Snow (discourse, Croydon Relief Society, 26 October 1878), *The Discourses of Eliza R. Snow*, https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/

twenty-first century Latter-day Saints can relate to. But Eliza R. Snow, plural wife to two prophets of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, had an especially unique view of the purposes of plural marriage. Her often scathing review of the world's opinion of "polygamy" pointed out the hypocrisy of immoral, adulterous, and worldly people who passed judgment upon God's laws when they themselves were not acquainted with nor obedient to them. She believed that plural marriage elevated the spirituality of women, fostered independence in women, and emboldened the voice of women. Helen Mar Kimball, another of Joseph Smith's plural wives, also noted the significance of the sacrifice of plural marriage in that it prepared her and her sister wife, Sarah Ann Whitney, for receiving "everlasting glory and exaltation."[6]

I believe that these women understood better than most the primary purposes of such an imposing and overbearing practice. For me, plural marriage stands as a symbol of our early separation from a corrupt and immoral world that made no attempt to know God or his will for his creations. Surely the aphorism "I can do hard things" carried them through the challenges of plural marriage as much as it propelled them across the plains.

A History of Paradoxes

Since the beginning of time God has asked humans to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of humanity. Our whole purpose is to align our will with the will of God. Adam and Eve were set in a beautiful garden with the conflicting commandments to multiply and replenish the earth and not eat the fruit that would allow them to do that. They had to sacrifice one commandment to fulfill the other.

Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his only child — a miracle child — unto the Lord. We can imagine not only the anguish Abraham would have felt but the confusion at being asked to do something that was A) contrary to the commandment not to murder and B) counterintuitive to the blessings and sacrosanctity of family. Yet, most Christian faiths see in Abraham and Isaac's story a direct correlation with Christ's

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eliza-r-snow/1870s/1878/10/1878-10-26; Eliza R. Snow (discourse, Goshen Primary, 17 November 1879), *The Discourses of Eliza R. Snow*, https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/eliza-r-snow/1870s/1879/11/1879-11-17-a.

6. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, "Scenes in Nauvoo after the Martyrdom," *Woman's Exponent*, 1 March 1883, 11:146, https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/10292/rec/261.

relationship with His Father in that it represents a type of the Atonement and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

When the children of Israel finally reached the promised land, they were commanded to commit genocide, killing every man, woman, child, ox, and ass from the land of Canaan. They showed no mercy to *children* because God commanded it. Never mind that "of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). The premortal Jesus taught the children of Israel to separate themselves from Gentile nations and abstain from sharing the Gospel with them. The earthly Jesus taught the children of Israel to share the gospel with people of all nations. The former establishing a rule that was reasonably challenged by the latter. And of course, who could forget God's commandment to Nephi to remove Laban's head from his body in order to fulfill God's purposes?

What each of these stories shares is that they challenge the reason and intuition humans develop through earthly experience. But we are fallible creatures with a very limited view of eternity (if we have any view of eternity at all), and earthly experience does not always speak to the truths of eternity. God reminds us that our thoughts are not His thoughts, neither are our ways His ways (Isaiah 55:8).

What Plural Marriage Teaches

Personal revelation is crucial to living the commandments of God. Are there not now, in the twenty-first century, doctrines or policies that challenge the logic and hearts of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

In the nineteenth century, Emily Partridge heard rumors about the practice of plural marriage while living in Nauvoo. The idea of it worried her, even more so when Joseph Smith asked to speak to her privately. In anticipation of the conversation, Emily went to her knees and not to any other source. After *months* of prayer and contemplation, Emily finally received "divine confirmation that she should listen to what Joseph had to say to her — even if it had to do with plural marriage."[7] In other words, her Father in Heaven confirmed to Emily that He endorsed the practice.

We sometimes forget that divine confirmation of a doctrine or practice does not preclude the loyal or humble practitioner from intense opposition or affliction while involved in the practice. In other words, entering into a plural marriage with Joseph Smith did not guarantee Emily a house full of beautiful children, a stable home, or a long,

7. Grow, *Saints*, 1:483.

uncontentious marriage. Emily did not bear any of Joseph Smith's children. Emma Smith clearly didn't support the relationship given that "she often made things very unpleasant" for Emily.[8] And, eventually, Emily became a widow with no legal right to any of Joseph's property. The outcome does not necessarily define the purpose.

Entrusting our lives into God's hands is vital to trusting God's commandments. This world wants us to feel the way it thinks we should feel. It wants us to find offense where it tells us to find offense. It wants to define us with its arbitrary and fluid standards.

Eliza R. Snow often shared her story of conversion to plural marriage. When she entered the practice, she thought she "never would be looked upon as a decent woman again."[9] Her culture's rejection of plural marriage would require Snow to use a different set of standards to recognize and define the value of her contributions to her own community, which was then for her as it is now for us a significant part of God's Kingdom. She would need to realign her principles away from the culture of her time and place and towards God's desire for her. She would have to ignore those that would label her "oppressed" and "subjugated," just as today we must "'heed not' the many ... taunts, and diversions in our fallen world."[10] She was not immoral and unchaste, nor are we modern Saints intolerant and hateful as some of the taunts might suggest. She was just as many of us Latter-day Saints are today — devoted and humble, living according to the doctrine as we understand it and in the best way we can.

Flipping the Binary

Snow understood that the doctrine of man couldn't compare to that of God. She was able to separate herself so completely from the world's expectations that she could turn on its head the anti-feminism label placed upon plural marriage. She taught the young women that they were blessed in that they never needed to compromise their standards for a worthy husband because one righteous man could support and bless "seven or eight" righteous women.[11] She went on to say that the young

8. Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippets Avery, *Mormon Enigma* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 145.

9. Eliza R. Snow (discourse, Smithfield Relief Society, 28 October 1877), *The Discourses of Eliza R. Snow*, https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/eliza-r-snow/1870s/1877/10/1877-10-28-b.

10. David A. Bednar, "But We Heeded Them Not," *Liahona* 46, no. 5 (May 2022): 14, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2022/05/14bednar.

11. Eliza R. Snow (discourse, Richmond Young Ladies, 11 May 1878), *The Discourses of Eliza R. Snow*, https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/

men had better get themselves right with the Lord or else no righteous woman would ever marry them, and they would be relegated to the corrupt and evil world to find female companionship. She flipped the binary. She moved plural marriage from a station of diminished women's rights to a platform for women's choices. To the people of the world who bemoaned Eliza's and her contemporaries' "plight," who labeled them oppressed, degraded, heartbroken, and stupid, she said, "[If] love and respect for those who are pure, upright, and honorable — if the privilege for choosing husbands — if to be loved, honored, and respected as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters by good men, is degrading them, then the women of Utah are degraded."[12]

Immovable

The world should not and cannot truly define us. Only God has that privilege. It is up to us to understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ enough that we can keep His commandments with confidence. It's up to us to flip the binary of double talk that rules social media and political conversations. The world will not always understand the laws of God and will not often respect them, but we can. We are called upon in this day as much as in Eliza's to shun the world's version of righteousness and kindness, to lay aside what we think we know, to faithfully follow the commandments of God. To find within ourselves the courage to pursue and understand the why. To set aside the standards the world uses to define kindness, love, and righteousness and redefine those virtues according to the teachings of the prophets who have preached of such since our first parents left the Garden until Christ's Second Coming. There will likely be times when we may not understand in this life, but we must press forward anyway, believing that we will be blessed for our willingness to obey God's instruction. And when we lean into that faith, trusting that God's cause is just, we should "never [have] cause to regret" our obedience.[13]

Vilate Kimball, Heber C. Kimball's first wife, knew that plural marriage was a true doctrine that God ordained. Nevertheless, she

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eliza-r-snow/1870s/1878/05/1878-05-11.

12. Eliza R. Snow, "Degradation of Woman in Utah," *Deseret News* 19, no. 12 (27 April 1870): 140, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2605413.

13. Eliza R. Snow, "Sketch of My Life," quoted in Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, ed., *The Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2000), 16–17, https://josephsmithspolygamy.org/plural-wives-overview/eliza-r-snow/#link_ajs-fn-id_2-5614.

struggled "emotionally with polygamy for the rest of her life."[14] In this day, we yearn for the kind of life where we can define our struggles — where our struggles begin and end in a timely manner, within a defined space and with a defined lesson at the end. In reality, our struggles aren't so finite nor are their lessons always so clear. And for some of us, like living out the rest of our days in polygamy, our own challenges can last a lifetime.

As further evidence of the need for adversity, consider the great heroes of scripture: the Apostle Paul, the father and son duo Mormon and Moroni, John the Revelator, and Moses. Their stories teach of unending struggle; it *never* ended. But "behold, we count them happy which endure" (James 5:11). Giving our lives over to God's will requires an emotional resilience that is found only in the faithful yoking of the human soul to Christ and his atoning power and in the hope that however long the journey and however tiring the battle, after a time, we will be counted among the happy — a "happy" that will endure through eternity. Clearly, Vilate took upon her Christ's yoke, and we can be sure that she is counted among the happy.

The plural wives of the nineteenth century are heroes to me not because they endured an undesirable marital status, but because through faith they found refinement in it. They willingly put aside self to do what God asked them to do, to be who God wanted them to be. They taught us the importance of sacrificing acceptance and conformity and of enduring worldly pressures and ridicule and persecution. They taught us that faith in Christ must drive our actions, even when we can't use our own reason and logic to explain the "why" behind them. They showed us what it looks like to draw closer to God, to bear one's cross, and to find one's self through the process of losing one's self. They are a reminder to me that I can find hope and peace in keeping all of God's commandments, that though the world may mock me, stone me (and don't they stone us daily on social media?), and decry my "oppressed" and "sad" state, I have an obligation to the Kingdom of God to remain immovable, to take up "the cross Jesus said we would have to ... in order to follow Him."[15] I can willingly sacrifice the "gifts" this world tries to give me — acceptance, popularity, fame — in order to stand united and

14. Brian C. Hales, "Other Church Leaders Practice Polygamy," *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, https://josephsmithspolygamy.org/history/mormon-leaders-polygamy/.

15. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Fear Not: Believe Only!" *Liahona* 46, no. 5 (May 2022): 35, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2022/05/23holland.

speak with the other Saints "not only … because we have the right, but justice and humanity demand that we should."[16]

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16. Eliza R. Snow, "Minutes of 'Great Indignation Meeting,'" 13 January 1870, *The Fifty First Years of Relief Society*, https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/the-first-fifty-years-of-relief-society/part-3/3-13.

Modern Near East Archaeology and the Brass Plates

Noel B. Reynolds

Abstract: *Contemporary Palestinian archaeology has produced two major threats to traditional interpretations of the history of ancient Israel. The first threat, which derives from scientific discomfort with the exodus story as an explanation for the sudden population expansion in southern Palestine at the beginning of the Iron Age (c. 1200 BCE), has led to a wide variety of theories about how these Israelites could have been drawn from existing populations in the general area. This challenge is answerable in ways that preserve the exodus account, which is fundamental to the Book of Mormon as well as the Bible. The second threat is the glaring mismatch between the biblical glorification of David and Solomon's "empire" and disparagement of the northern kingdom combined with the archaeological finding that the cities of the northern kingdom were far larger and more advanced than Jerusalem and the south. This discrepancy between archaeology and the biblical record provided support for the widely embraced theory that everything from Genesis through Kings had been revised to promote the political and religious preeminence of Judah above the other tribes. This second challenge does fit the archaeology and contemporary textual interpretations. But it also provides stronger grounding for the hypothesis that Nephi's Brass Plates could have been produced by an ancient Manassite scribal school of which he and his father were highly trained members, and which may have been out of sync with the Jewish scribal schools and the elders of Jerusalem.*

In previous papers I have argued that, in the historical and cultural context of late seventh-century BCE Jerusalem, Lehi and Nephi would have been seen as highly trained scribes belonging to a Manassite scribal school,[1] and that the Brass Plates could have been understood as a recent project designed to preserve the Abrahamic/Manassite tradition of

history and scripture in the Egyptian language in the face of the newly undertaken Judahite version (that would eventually result in the Hebrew Bible).[2] Those three papers incorporated numerous relevant findings from modern archaeology, while largely ignoring an important dimension of contemporary archaeological interpretations that would flatly dismiss the Book of Mormon account of the history of ancient Israel. While modern archaeology has not produced a clearly documented or even unified alternative history to the traditional biblical version, it has staked out important claims about the origins of the ethnic people of Israel that directly challenge the perspectives that are fundamental to both the biblical and the Book of Mormon accounts. But all such claims are based on interpretations of artifacts. In this paper I will first discuss those interpretations and their alternatives to demonstrate the continuing plausibility of the Book of Mormon's account of Nephi's Brass Plates. Secondly, I will explore archaeological discoveries in the northern kingdom that possibly support or give helpful insight to my hypothesized Manassite scribal school.

The Archaeological and Historical Perspective on the Twelve Tribes and the Settlement of Israel in the Early Iron Age

The dramatic expansion of archaeological exploration and sophistication over the last two centuries has led to radical rewriting of the history of early Israel that had long been grounded almost exclusively in the biblical text itself. The resulting changed narrative based primarily on archaeological findings has raised deep doubts and even routine denials about the historicity of Abraham and the patriarchs, the centuries of Israelite captivity in Egypt, the exodus, the settlement of Palestine by the twelve tribes of Israel, the dates of the first Israelite monarchy, the priority of the southern kingdom over the northern kingdom, and the ethnic and geographic origins of the people of Israel. These new theories challenge the traditional history and have implications for the formulation of an account of a Manassite scribal tradition connecting Lehi and Nephi with Abraham.[3]

The archaeology of ancient Israel has passed through multiple stages as the methods and sophistication of archaeological science have advanced and matured. William F. Albright had enormous influence in the middle decades of the twentieth century with an approach that exploited the Hebrew Bible as a reliable historical guide to ancient Israel and related polities.[4] But as the discipline became more professionalized and its methods more tested and regularized, Palestinian archaeologists

who focus on ancient Israel were less and less inclined to rely on the Bible for guidance in their historical interpretations. As information from the large numbers of excavations accumulated, archaeologists recognized the importance of starting with the data — the findings of the professionally planned and executed excavations. The histories of Israel being proposed in recent decades take the archaeological findings as the facts that need to be explained as various hypothetical scenarios are advanced to make sense of those facts. Some scholars are more willing than others to look for connections in the Hebrew Bible.

There seems to be an emerging consensus among leading archaeologists and historians that the biblical stories of the patriarchs, the four-century sojourn in Egypt, the exodus, and the settlement of Palestine by the twelve Israelite tribes are not historically reliable but are late (post-exilic) backstories written by creative post-exilic scribes in the late sixth century or even later. Ann Killebrew offered the following as a description of the consensus on the origins of the Israelite people that she thought was developing at the beginning of the twenty-first century:

> Ancient Israel during the Iron I period should be defined as constituted by largely indigenous, tribal, and kinship-based groups, with the additional influx of smaller numbers of members of external groups, whose genealogical affiliations together comprised a "mixed multitude" of peoples. This "mixed multitude" is defined as the inhabitants of the rural Iron I hill country and Transjordanian highland villages and countryside, a population that has been identified by some as the premonarchic "Israelites" or "Proto-Israelites."[5]

The chief vulnerability of the traditional biblical history as understood from studies of the history of the Hebrew language and writing is that at best the biblical texts came from oral traditions that were not written down until sometime after the establishment of a national Hebrew script around 800 BCE. Competing versions of Israel's history and literature emerged from these transcriptions, which in turn were harmonized and edited — again by anonymous scribes — over the next two or three centuries. But no modern scholars claim to have an authoritative written account that goes back to Abraham, or even to Moses. The centuries-long tradition of transcription, editing, and even rewriting of ancient oral traditions provides modern historians with much to be skeptical of. Such late writing or rewriting is notorious for serving the contemporary agendas of the scribes who do that writing.

While the Hebrew Bible still provides a background of historical claims that archaeologists are constantly testing, the accumulating contradictions between biblical history and modern archaeological findings has led many to conclude that the Hebrew Bible is of relatively late composition and cannot be taken as objective history that can explain pre-exilic Palestinian archaeology accurately. Most biblical archaeologists and historians today believe that the Old Testament writers were centuries removed from the hypothesized oral traditions they were relating. Because historical epigraphers today generally believe that the earliest Hebrew script developed after 800 BCE, these same scholars conclude that the Israelites had no documentary connection to those earlier times. As one 2017 summary of archaeological findings begins, "Once the biblical text is eliminated as having little to tell us about the second millennium BCE, we are mainly dependent on archaeology" in reconstructing the history of that period.[6] From this perspective, the peoples and stories from Genesis to David and Solomon are reduced to myths. These oral traditions were transcribed sometime after 800 BCE by anonymous scribes, and the eventual composition of the Hebrew Bible is largely attributed by historians to hypothesized schools of pre- or post-exilic Jewish scribes.[7] As I have explained at length in a companion paper, the 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon, an independent account of pre-exilic Israel claiming a written tradition going all the way back to Abraham, provides a comprehensive resolution to the questions being raised by modern scholars while providing support for a somewhat different version of the biblical history of ancient Israel.[8]

The Restoration to the Rescue

The revelation given to Nephi (1 Nephi 11–14) emphasized how the Nephite record launched by him would provide a much-needed second witness of the New Testament account of Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles in the last days. However, it seems he was also told that it would provide a witness of the Old Testament prophets and their writings: "And . . . I beheld other books which came forth by the power of the Lamb . . . unto the convincing of the Gentiles . . . and . . . the Jews that *the records of the prophets* and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true" (1 Nephi 13:39).

The Book of Mormon provides that witness of the Hebrew Bible in two important ways. First, its own record begins with Lehi, one of the unnamed Old Testament prophets who warned Jerusalem of its impending destruction by Babylon, echoing and extending many

of the prophecies and teachings of the Old Testament. Second, that same Nephite record quotes repeatedly from the Brass Plates, another independent Israelite record written in Egyptian and going back to Abraham himself that includes and documents with contemporary accounts the very history and prophecies that are doubted by so many scholars today.[9]

As described by Nephi and his successors, the records in the Brass Plates address the root cause of modern scholarly skepticism directly. The Brass Plates version of Israelite history and prophecies does not depend on an undocumented process wherein oral traditions across many centuries were gradually transcribed and edited as we have in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the Brass Plates of Nephi contained a collection of written prophecies and histories created and maintained by Abraham himself and his posterity in a Josephite/Manassite scribal school across a full millennium using Egyptian language and script.

While much of that record was unique, it did include important Old Testament prophecies and histories that witnessed the authenticity, if not the exact wording, of Old Testament traditions. It specifically contained its own version of the five books of Moses, the writings and prophecies of Joseph (not included in the Hebrew Bible), the prophecies of Isaiah, and other prophecies and histories. Importantly, it was written principally in Egyptian, a language and script that was fully available to Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. Further, it was preserved intact in final written form across all those centuries in which the other tribes of Israel are said to have relied on oral Hebrew-language traditions that had to be transcribed and harmonized in the seventh century or even later in Jerusalem.[10]

Additional Support for a Traditional Reading

Noted Old Testament scholar D. N. Freedman notably hypothesized the existence of an authoritative source tradition from which the various versions that were reconciled in the seventh-century scribal schools would have been derived originally, thereby explaining the high levels of coherence between those original accounts. On this theory, that original source would have

> dealt in connected fashion with the principal themes of Israel's early history and prehistory: including the primeval history, patriarchal sagas, the exodus and wanderings, and presumably the settlement in the Promised Land. [It] is no

> longer extant, but what remains of its contents is scattered through the books from Genesis to Joshua.[11]

Nephi's Brass Plates claim a Manassite tradition recorded in Egyptian that seems to fit Freedman's hypothesized original source and that could go a long way to explain the high levels of coherence and credibility that many find in the Hebrew Bible — despite its many recognized problems. This hypothesized Manassite scribal school did not live in a vacuum. Their vernacular language throughout the Iron Age would have been the current version of Hebrew. Though likely a small group living with some social separation from the main Israelite society, they may very well have been sharing oral Hebrew versions of their written Egyptian records with their countrymen over a long period of time. From that perspective, we might see the transcriptions of those oral traditions in seventh-century Jerusalem being only one or two transmission generations away from original written records going back at least to Abraham and much less corrupted in their oral stage than is often claimed.

The Israelite Settlement of Palestine

Once the patriarchs, the sojourn in Egypt, and the exodus had been dismissed as archaeologically and historically indefensible traditions or myths, much of the scholarly world turned to the task of inventing a backstory. That backstory would need to explain the rise of a united nation of Israel in Iron Age Palestine attached to a unique and powerful religious tradition featuring the Yahwism of the Israelite prophets and the origins narrative beginning with Adam and including the patriarchs. While many contemporary historians and archaeologists have engaged themselves in this project, the wide variety of hypothesized histories they have produced emphasize different interpretations of the artifacts and inscriptions available. From my reading of this literature, a consensus theory on the details would still seem to be a distant goal.

The Limitations of Archaeological Science

Fortunately, archaeologists are increasingly cognizant of the limitations of both the methods and the data they use. Initial tendencies to separate into armed camps battling over questions of biblical historicity have mostly been overcome as contemporary conferences usually provide podia for both the conservative and the progressive perspectives.[12] Collaborative approaches seem to be increasing in both frequency and influence, but it must be admitted that the conservatives may have given up more ground than others. At the conclusion of one such conference,

Andrew Sherratt, a prominent British archaeologist, was invited to provide a closing summary:

> I continue to be impressed by how the attempt to provide a detailed timescale for the events of the early first millennium BCE — a period which is illuminated both by written texts but also by a growing archaeological record — is evoking a new sophistication in the way in which we excavate and evaluate the results. Both archaeologists and radiocarbon specialists have been forced to look at the limitations of their methods and find ways of overcoming them. The result is a new sophistication in thinking about procedures, and a new realism which seeks to find explanations for anomalies. It is truly the testing-ground for a new generation of techniques and approaches, which require a sustained attempt to understand the logic of what we do.[13]

Philosophical Reflections on Archaeology and History

Some archaeologists are more philosophically reflective than others and are more able to articulate the limitations of the science and its contributions to history. Some of the most difficult disagreements derive from studies in which archaeologists have thought of their *interpretations of artifacts* as *facts* that refute traditional factual claims. This kind of positivism has led to needless bloodshed in the academic wars and has been appropriately criticized and instructed by a cadre of more thoughtful and philosophically informed archaeologists who understand the philosophy and history of science with its strengths and limitations. What is beyond question in these debates is that the artifacts harvested in archaeological excavations do not explain themselves. They require interpretation. They can only be understood in terms of theories about dating, ancient ethnic groups, and their original purposes or functions in the minds of people from a distant land and time. When such interpretations are misconstrued as facts, all the appropriate tentativeness and uncertainty of the scientific enterprise evaporates.[14]

In my experience, the majority of Palestinian archaeologists today find themselves in a middle ground that appreciates the importance of accepting archaeological evidence and uses it to correct and reinterpret biblical claims, rather than to throw them out altogether. This situation is strengthened given that the pre-exilic seventh century is widely

regarded as the period in which most texts in the Hebrew Bible reached their current forms.

By the 1990s, archaeologists and epigraphers had largely taken over the leadership in the great project of reconstructing the history of Israel and its people, and reliance on biblical histories was pushed aside except in cases where new discoveries seemed to connect with the text in some insightful way. It was not clear how much of the motivation for these developments was based on beliefs about good science and how much stemmed from a determination to eliminate the divine from historical explanation. Modern science had found the principle of naturalism to be an essential methodological rule — scientific explanations cannot appeal to supernatural causes.

This methodological rule has worked well enough in the natural sciences, but in biblical history it has been particularly problematic and divisive. A large share of the scholarly work in biblical history and archaeology has always been motivated and funded because of belief in the Bible as an account of God's covenant people — both on the part of Christians and Jews. In fact, the basic theme of the Old Testament focuses on the Abrahamic Covenant, which exposes to all the world how Yahweh blesses and disciplines his covenant people as appropriate in their joint quest to make that people good — as we see the Lord doing in the New Testament and in the restored Church of Jesus Christ.[15] In the history reported in the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh is the principal actor from beginning to end. The Bible quotes his words, includes messages sent by his prophets, and tells how he chose and nurtured his people with blessings and with punishments. But if methodological naturalism requires a discounting of Yahweh, Father Abraham, Joseph and the Egyptian captivity, Moses and the Exodus, and Joshua and the settlement of the promised land, believers in the Bible have much less to work with in their research efforts. Those were the stories from the origin myth that explained the existence of Israel as a people, as kindred sharing a common devotion to the true God. But now the biggest question confronting the new history effort was how to account for the people that became Israel in historical times. Who were they and where did they come from at the beginning of the Iron Age? How was their ethnic identity formed?

The Transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age and the Rise of Israel

While some historians of the ancient near east and eastern Mediterranean region have tended to see these centuries as a dark age caused by unrecorded but widespread natural disasters, prominent archaeologist William Dever — and many others following his lead — have argued that it can better be understood as a period of social and economic transition. While the Israelite and Phoenician peoples did contribute to the collapse of the old Bronze Age Canaanite culture and economy, the eventual result was a significant cultural advance which we benefit from to this day. After summarizing the characteristic features and artifacts archaeologists find in these settlements, Dever goes on to explain "that between the late 13th century B.C. and sometime in the mid-11th century B.C., there had occurred such far-reaching socio-economic, technological, and cultural changes in central Palestine that the millennia-old Bronze Age may be said to have given way to a new order, the Iron Age."[16] The northern kingdom of Israel dominated that period.[17]

There has been a lot of academic skepticism about the linkage of these new settlers in the Manasseh hill country to the biblical account of the tribes of Israel coming out of forty years of wandering in the wilderness. For example, against the increasingly influential theorists like Dever who characterize them as derived entirely from already existing populations, Anson Rainey has built on references in that time frame to the *Shashu* to argue for a pastoral people moving in from the southeast Levant, and already speaking Hebrew. Rainey has assembled an argument grounded principally in historical and linguistic evidence.[18] But the matter is far from settled among scholars whose work touches on the question of Israel's origins.

The Missing Egyptian Perspective

We should note with James Hoffmeier that "the 'origins of Israel debate' … has, by and large, been an intramural exercise with biblical historians and biblical/Syro-Palestinian archaeologists leading the way." He further laments that so little attention has been given in this debate to Egyptian materials and acknowledges that "neither have Egyptologists over the last fifty years shown much interest in the Hebraic connection to the Nile Valley."[19] He offers an earlier explanation by Ronald Williams for the absence of Egyptologist involvement:

> By the very nature of their training, Old Testament scholars are more likely to have acquired a first-hand knowledge of the Canaanite and cuneiform sources than they are to have mastered the hieroglyphic and hieratic materials of Egypt. For this reason they have had to depend to a greater degree on secondary sources for the latter. It is not surprising, then, that Israel's heritage from Western Asia … has been more thoroughly investigated. Yet Egypt's legacy is by no means negligible.[20]

The academic battles fought over these questions are far too numerous and complicated to be reviewed here. A 1993 summary and critique of then-current theories is instructive. In his own contribution to this debate, Dever mentioned a half dozen different approaches favorably and then listed or mentioned nine competing theories about the origins of the Israelites, showed their fatal errors or otherwise dismissed them, and offered his own explanation.[21] Dever's theory is worth quoting at length because it underlies so many of the approaches archaeologists and historians are taking to this question today:

> A far more satisfactory explanation of Israelite origins would derive the first generation of frontier homesteaders from the fringes of Late Bronze Age urban Canaanite society (which includes, of course, the Jordan Valley, and even a few known LB II sites on the Transjordanian plateau). Among these people would have been former urbanites and 'Apiru-like people from the countryside but also many farmers and stockbreeders from rural areas who were long familiar with the poor soils, fractured terrain, and unreliable rains of Palestine — in short, experienced agriculturalists. Only by positing such a composite but largely *local* Canaanite background can we account for the unique blend of cultural traits, the "assemblage" that we actually find in the Iron I highland villages. As we stressed above, what is diagnostic is the unique *combination* of traditional LB II characteristics, like typical pottery forms with innovative (though not necessarily exclusive) features like the 'four-room' courtyard house and collar-rim storejars. Not only is the combination of traits in the material culture distinctive, but it is almost perfectly adapted to hill-country agriculture and to the overall conditions of life there. These newcomers to the Central Hills are, then, our 'Proto-Israelites', the ancestors of later Israel.[22]

Dever's respect for Israel Finkelstein as a leading archaeologist is evident in his emphasis in this section of his paper on a refutation of Finkelstein's theory. We learn several things from Dever's overview. First, the common denominator of the current theories was a rejection of the biblical account of twelve Israelite tribes coming out of the wilderness to populate the southern Levant. Second, the explanations offered by the various scholars for the eventual emergence of Israel as a people were widely varied. Third, the general assumption of almost all these Palestinian archaeologist/historians was that the ethnicity of the Israelites could be detected by differences in cultural artifacts — principally pottery and buildings — unearthed, analyzed, and dated by archaeologists. They assumed this despite the classical warnings by ethnologists Fredrik Barth and Karl Knutsson, who explained in 1969:

> Any concept of ethnic group defined on the basis of cultural content… will not suffice as a tool for the analysis of ethnicity in its various interactional contexts. Only when ethnic distinction, stratification, or dichotomization are part of the individual's or group's strategies for preserving or increasing control of resources, social status, or other values is a meaningful interpretation feasible.
>
> Hence ethnicity becomes not one single universally applicable term but rather the representation of a wide range of inter-relations in which the dominant reference is to an ethnic status ascribed on the basis of birth, language, and socialization.[23]

Unfortunately, archaeologists do not have the luxury of interviewing the people they labor to understand, making judgments of ethnicity almost impossible according to contemporary ethnologists. As their studies demonstrate, clearly distinct ethnic groups can inhabit the same geography and share the same basic material culture. Recognizing that "identifying ethnic groups in the archaeological record is notoriously difficult," Avraham Faust mounted a major study in which he proposed several ways that distinctive ancient Israelite ethnicity should be recognized by archaeologists and historians such as pig avoidance, leaving pottery undecorated, avoiding imported pottery, simplicity and egalitarianism in pottery assemblages, the four-room house layout, circumcision of males, and an egalitarian social ethos.[24] We can note in the foregoing quotation from Dever that he compromises the explanation by citing both. The uniformity of the material culture being unearthed is

described as a perfect adaptation to the environment and as a distinctive combination of imported ethnic traits in the same sentence.

In 1997 Israel Finkelstein responded to Dever's 1993 analysis and critique with a more technically developed and thorough treatment of the growing number of proposed explanations for the rise of the people of Israel. Finkelstein also displays a well-informed concern for the problem of determining ethnicity with material cultural markers. His analysis led him to conclude that "the material culture of Palestine in the Iron I is not rich enough to allow the drawing of clear ethnic boundaries. The … only … possible indicator of ethnicity at that period is foodways. … In the case of early Israel, most 'ethnic' features in the material culture … were introduced by the monarchy."[25] Accounting for the ideology and religion that defined Israelite ethnicity continues to be a major stumbling block for all approaches to the writing of Israelite history that begin by rejecting the exodus story.[26]

The strongest extra-biblical case for the early existence of an Israelite identity is based on the Merneptah Stela, an Egyptian inscription that names Israel (presumably as a conquered people) and is dated to c. 1200 BCE. It is hard to see how a pharaoh's scribes could have thought of Israel as a people of any kind two or three centuries before Israel rose out of a far-away indigenous population in Palestine. As one recent scholar cautiously observes, this stela does make it possible to use the designation *Israel* "as long as we remember that it means a group of people and not necessarily an 'ethnie' and that it is difficult to identify this group with specific sites and cultures."[27] Kletter provides an excellent review of the evidence for and against the existence of an ethnic Israel in earlier times.[28]

A quarter of a century later, it is still the case that there is no hard evidence that disproves the traditional biblical account that traces the rise of ethnic Israel to twelve related tribes that returned to Palestine after several centuries in Egyptian captivity. In the next section I will mention here four good reasons why it makes sense for Bible believers to hold on to that traditional account.

Historical Evidence and Restoration-Scripture Support for the Traditional Account of the Origin of the Twelve Tribes of Israel

It cannot be over-emphasized that modern theories of Israelite history that reject the exodus and the settlement of Israel by the twelve tribes are grounded in highly speculative theories that try to make sense of a very limited set of artifacts and that exclude, on methodological principle, any

explanation that relies on divine intervention. I would like to address, in the following sections, four reasons for resisting those theories. The list of reasons could have been longer, but these four suffice for my purposes.

1. Strong Cultural Memories Should not be Discarded Lightly in Scientific Efforts to Explain the Rise of Enduring Ethnic Groups

It is obviously impossible for secular scholarship to treat the exodus account as a genuine historical event — an account that rests on repeated and constant divine intervention — without abandoning the principle of naturalism, an indispensable plank in the approach of modern science. But it is not a light matter to dismiss the cultural memory of an ethnic people that has held so intensely to its origin myth that is replete with cultural, historical, and geographical detail. It is even more problematic to try to replace that origin myth with others for which there is no hard scientific evidence or even clear and detailed agreement among the scientists promoting these alternatives. The casual assertions that later scribes could have made up this myth and sold it so successfully to the Jewish people is not supported with any documented studies or histories of similar scribal achievements. The practical necessity that promotes the methodological naturalistic principle for modern scientific investigations is misunderstood when used as proof that supernatural explanations cannot be correct at the metaphysical level.

2. Not All Competent Scholars Reject the Exodus Account

Scientific attacks on the exodus account have not bothered to respond to the mountains of corroborating evidence for that account that have been assembled by equally competent scholars. The fact that so many of the cultural, historical, and geographical facts that are part of the exodus account have been plausibly documented should reassure believers that the exodus is every bit as reasonable an explanation for the rise of Israel as are the weakly documented alternatives. Two that stand out in this crowded field are the publications of Kenneth A. Kitchen of the University of Liverpool and James K. Hoffmeier of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Kitchen's *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* takes a serious and expert look at thousands of scriptural claims that have been too casually doubted about the exodus specifically and about other historical or textual issues.[29] Hoffmeier brings his training as an Egyptologist and ancient near east specialist to bear on the exodus explicitly and in great detail in his *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* and in the more recent *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The*

Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition.[30] Hoffmeier and like-minded associates organized a 2014 conference of other recognized scholars who for a variety of reasons share strong reservations about the new model of ancient Israel as an emergent and primarily indigenous population. Fourteen papers were published providing a wide range of reasons to reconsider the new model.[31] In a similar vein, Joshua Berman has taken up the defense of Genesis and Deuteronomy from the perspective of Orthodox Judaism in a way that will provide important insight to Christians as well.[32]

3. One Major Archaeological Discovery may Directly Support the Biblical Account

One very significant archaeological discovery of the 1980s is thought by many to be the very altar that Moses had instructed Joshua to build on Mt. Ebal for the purpose of putting all Israel under covenant as they entered the Promised Land.[33] Because it seems to fit the biblical passages and the known characteristics of such an Israelite sacrificial altar, it has become a pilgrimage site for Jews and Christians — and a bone of contention and aggravation for a scholarly world that determinedly avoids drawing confirming connections between archaeological finds and biblical text.

Haifa University archaeologist Adam Zertal first encountered the Mt. Ebal site during his widely appreciated Manasseh Hill Country survey and came back later to begin excavation. Over several seasons of work, a realization swept first over the workers, and then Zertal, that the correlation of the structure and artifacts they had uncovered with the biblical account of Joshua's altar was extraordinary. The excited claims of many to that effect had instant and extensive impact in the archaeological community and its publics and convinced Zertal to provide a popular account of the discovery before publishing that report in a professional venue.[34]

Zertal's preliminary scholarly version followed a year later in an academic journal.[35] While there have been several brief reviews — mostly skeptical or dismissive — in academic journals, the only comprehensive academic treatment of this discovery has been available since 2012 in the sympathetic and revised Andrews University dissertation of Ralph Hawkins.[36]

Reviewing the 28 professional archaeologists who had written anything about the Mt. Ebal site, Hawkins found that 21 were willing publicly to call it a cultic site while seven held out for other possibilities — but without serious, detailed consideration of all the evidence. With

over two decades of perspective, Hawkins reviewed and analyzed the range of scholarly responses.[37]

The Mt. Ebal site was unique in several ways that provoked questions and doubts for some. When first discovered, the entire site was covered and preserved under a blanket of large stones. That ancient preservation strategy had worked well.[38] The main structure and the surrounding plaza were intact, including numerous artifacts that helped to date and identify cultural types. A voluminous collection of pottery shards fit uniformly into a 13th–12th-century context. And two Egyptian scarabs led to a dating around 1200 BCE. Enormous deposits of ash and animal bones made the sacrificial context undeniable. The placement of an enormous and specially designed altar directly above a much smaller, rustic altar that dated a few decades older, suggested that the small altar could correspond to Joshua's initial effort and that the large altar which appears to share the design of the altar described for Solomon's temple may have been built later to accommodate annual covenant-renewal ceremonies for large assemblies. The entire complex was ritually preserved with the stone blanket about a hundred years after its initial installation when Israel's second cultic center was established at Shiloh.[39]

Skeptical archaeologists do not seem to have taken a close look at this site or the published reports; rather, they have relied on their own reputations in pronouncing dismissive alternative theories. For example, Israel Finkelstein devoted four pages of his 1988 comprehensive study of early Israel to Zertal's account of the Mt. Ebal site.[40] But his history of northern Israel written a quarter century later does not mention Mt. Ebal and presents Shiloh as Israel's earliest cultic site, projecting an interpretive attitude that is widely shared by today's leading archaeologists.[41] But Zertal's connecting of this undisturbed and unique site with the biblical account of Joshua's altar is easily believed by the streams of tourists that visit it each year. It stands as an enduring obstacle to all efforts to disconnect the biblical accounts from the history of Israel and is consistently dismissed or ignored by most of the archaeological community.

After this article was submitted, a potentially significant confirmation of Zertal's interpretation of the Mount Ebal site has appeared in the news but will not be reported in the scientific literature until later in 2022. On March 24, 2022, the Jerusalem Post[42] and other media announced the laboratory assessment of a small, folded lead tablet that was retrieved in a re-sifting of the dirt piles produced during Zertal's excavations almost four decades previously. When examined with x-ray

tomography, a 40-letter text could be read as inscribed on the inside surfaces of the folded lead tablet. The inscription has been translated into 23 English words as a curse text that corresponds to the instruction in Deuteronomy 27:9–26 that the curses should be read from Mount Ebal.

The text elements noted by the team reporting this new discovery can be displayed in chiastic format as follows:

A	Cursed, cursed, cursed
B	Cursed by the God YWHW
C	You will die
D	Cursed
D*	Cursed
C*	You will surely die
B*	Cursed by YWHW
A*	Cursed, cursed, cursed

The analysis of the chemical composition of the lead tablet also confirms Zertal's site dating as it matches the lead being mined in the Aegean area in the 13th–12th-century. The archaic Hebrew lettering challenges the generally accepted conclusion that the Israelites did not have a script for Hebrew writing until around 800 BCE. And the skillfully produced inscriptions on lead render the Book of Mormon accounts of brass plates and other metallic records plausible. A millennium later, the burial of similar curse tablets (*defixiones*) would become a common practice in Greco-Roman cultures.[43]

The archaeological team also reported that approximately 70% of Zertal's original excavated dirt piles remain to be resifted using wet-sifting methods. Further confirmation of Zertal's interpretation of the Mount Ebal site could come as rectangular slabs of plaster found at the site are examined for possible traces of the ancient writing Joshua was commanded to paint on the plastered altar as described in Deuteronomy 27:2–8.

Possibly the most significant implication of the lead tablet reported in the news was its inclusion of two mentions of Yahweh, Israel's God. If confirmed by other epigraphers, this will push datable inscriptional references to Yahweh in Israelite territory back several centuries, dramatically undermining established theories in the history of religion that portray biblical religion as a much later invention.

4. The Brass Plates Emphasized the Exodus Account of God's Deliverance of His Covenant People from Their Enemies and of Moses's Inspired Leadership

Relying on the Brass Plates as their scriptures, Nephite prophets repeatedly invoked the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian captivity as proof of *the goodness of God* who is powerful and faithful to his covenant with his people.[44] Nephi used that ancient story, which even his wicked brothers could not deny, to motivate them powerfully to lend him their labor to build their ship.[45] Centuries later, another prophet Nephi used the same story to remind his people of the great power God gave to Moses at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds and the healing with the brazen serpent.[46] But most of the 75 direct references to Moses in the Nephite record cite either the law of Moses or prophecies given by Moses about the future coming of Christ or other future events — none of which appears in today's Old Testament. A similar account could be given of the numerous references to Joseph of Egypt and his prophecies that can only come from the Brass Plates.

The Nephite prophets' commitment to the Brass Plates account of Moses and his role in delivering captive Israel from Egypt, leading Israel through forty years in the wilderness to their promised land, and in receiving God's law for the Israelites constitutes a systematic and embedded stratum in the Book of Mormon text that goes well beyond the textual references to Moses mentioned to this point. Nephi's Small Plates set the pattern. Following the model of earlier (and later) Israelite prophets who are presented in the Bible as Moses-like in some respects as a way of certifying their prophetic *bona fides*, Nephi presents both his father Lehi and himself implicitly as Moses figures, leading their chosen people to a promised land.[47]

The Book of Mormon and the Origins of the People of Israel

The four points listed above are not meant to provide an exhaustive exposition of the ways in which the exodus account in the Bible and necessarily in the Brass Plates is woven into the text of the Book of Mormon. Much more could be said about that. But it should be clear at this point that possibly even more strongly than the Bible, the Book of Mormon writers were committed to the exodus account — which for them came from the Brass Plates and its continuous Egyptian-language record that went back not only to Moses, but also to Joseph and his great grandfather Abraham.

But the Nephite record is not equally committed to the version of Israel's history after the exodus that is presented in the Hebrew Bible. David and Solomon are not glorified the way they are in the Hebrew Bible but are mentioned principally to make the point that their practice of maintaining "many wives and concubines" was "abominable before [the Lord]" (Jacob 2:24). Having grown up in Jerusalem, Solomon's temple provided the pattern Nephi used in building the first Nephite temple — "save it were not built of so many precious things" (2 Nephi 5:16). But other principal themes of the historical books in the Hebrew Bible that promote the political and religious claims of the Judahites do not appear to be part of the Nephite prophetic tradition that draws on the Brass Plates.

Archaeology and Biblical History of the Two Kingdoms

It must also be noted that one of the major developments in archaeological interpretations of the history of Israel and its people strengthens the grounding for the hypothesis of a distinct Manassite scribal school in the north that eventually produced the Brass Plates that played such a critical role in the Book of Mormon.

The Emerging Focus of Archaeologists on Ancient Manasseh

Notwithstanding the fact that Joshua's original allocation of lands to the twelve tribes blatantly favored Manasseh and Ephraim with the largest and most central region and with the custody and guardianship of the principal sacred shrines associated with the patriarchs, the historical books of the Hebrew Bible largely ignore the Josephites and feature a Judahite account focused principally on David, Solomon, and Jerusalem.[48] This way of reading the Old Testament was introduced principally by Martin Noth and by mid-twentieth century became the consensus interpretation — labeling Genesis through 2 Kings as the Deuteronomistic History.[49]

This southern bias in the Hebrew Bible had its effect on the first generations of archaeologists. 1 Kings 16:23–24 reports that Omri, a war leader chosen by the northern tribes to be king of Israel, ruled for six years from Tirzah before moving his capital to the stone hilltop in nearby Samaria. This new city became the permanent capital of the northern kingdom (Israel) throughout the time of the Omride dynasty and its successors until its destruction by the Assyrians. The early Harvard excavations of Samaria, the ancient capital of the northern kingdom, had unexpectedly uncovered a city dominated by a temple

and palace complex that exceeded by far anything found in Jerusalem, the famed capital of David and Solomon and their United Kingdom and of the Judahite kings that followed in their stead after their kingdoms separated.[50]

It was almost 1980 when Israeli archaeologist Adam Zertal recognized that very little serious archaeological survey of the countryside of ancient Manasseh had been done. He assembled a team that would produce a detailed survey of that entire area over the next two decades.[51] Combined with the earlier work at Samaria, Zertal's work has provided an invaluable foundation for all subsequent efforts to understand the history of ancient Manasseh. The settlement pattern found in Zertal's survey of the Manasseh hill country was widely interpreted to support the biblical account of Israelite occupation. Centuries of declining population were dramatically reversed, and small agricultural settlements pushed up from the lowlands into the hill country, a large share of which located on virgin soil. These settlements persisted in smaller or larger groupings of the "four-room houses" associated with the Israelite settlement until the rise of the United Monarchy and the shift toward urbanization — also marking the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age c. 1200 BCE. Using Zertal's survey findings and other studies, Finkelstein estimated that a third of all settlement sites in the new Land of Israel were in the Manasseh area and that it contained half of the national population.[52]

The Lost Kingdom

The great puzzle that emerged in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Palestinian archaeology was the mismatch between the biblical account of the United Kingdom established by David and Solomon and the archaeological findings. The field work showed that neither Jerusalem nor the land and cities of Judah were more than small rural places in the tenth and ninth centuries. Archaeology could not back up the stories of Solomonic empire and splendor.

Meanwhile, the northern kingdom *did* take off in the ninth century and became both an economic and political regional power throughout the reign of the Omride kings, who received no positive press in the Bible. King Omri, who some speculate may even have been a Philistine, established his new capital named Samaria just northwest of Shechem, and it became the greatest city in all of Israel. His dynasty is known in the Bible for its Baal worship and the marriage of his son and successor Ahab to the Phoenician Baal worshiper Jezebel — all of which attracted appropriate censure from northern prophets. But the archaeologists and

historians began to wonder how the biblical stories of empire and glory got switched from Manasseh to Judah.

The Deuteronomistic History

Much of textual biblical studies in the twentieth century was influenced by the additional discovery that the biblical history itself had been reworked by one or more late seventh- and possibly sixth-century editors as propaganda for Josiah as restorer of the ancient Davidic dynasty. These "Deuteronomists" have been discussed in more detail in a previous article.[53] But this reading of Israelite history clicked for leading Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein in the 1990s as a possible explanation for the disconnect archaeologists were finding between the Bible and the data from their excavations. The marriage of the Deuteronomistic History and Palestinian archaeology that he published with coauthor Neil Silberman in 2001 introduced the basic paradigm now used by most Palestinian archaeologists and historians today.[54]

Archaeological Revisions of Biblical Chronology

Finkelstein soon realized that the biblical account and its correlation with the archaeological record would make more sense if the story of the United Monarchy traditionally believed to belong to the late eleventh century BCE were moved down to the early ninth century. "From this point of view, the northern kingdom of Israel would emerge as the first real, full blown state in Iron Age Palestine."[55] He proposed this "low chronology," and it has since been adopted by most Palestinian archaeologists.[56] Lester Grabbe's monumental work on the chronology of ancient Israel applauds this move and sees it solving many problems as it "changes the entire understanding of the emergence of the Israelite state."[57] It shifts the big change and the rise of the United Monarchy from 1000 to 900 BCE or later. In the north "this transformation brought significant growth in the number and size of sites and expansion into new frontiers and niches." But "the southern highlands were only sparsely settled."[58] While the north was thriving, "the kingdom of David and Solomon would have been a chiefdom or early state but without monumental construction or advanced administration."[59] As Finkelstein sums up,

> from the archaeological perspective, the line between the Iron I and the Iron II, characterized by the appearance of monumental building activity, growing evidence for writing, a shift to mass production of pottery, and a growing wave of

> settlement in the highlands, should be put in the early ninth century rather than c. 1000 BCE.[60]

In a 2005 update on the new dating paradigm, Finkelstein listed nine long-standing contradictions between archaeology and biblical history that his new chronology had solved and concluded:

> The only disadvantage of the Low Chronology — at least for some — is that it pulls the carpet from under the biblical image of a great Solomonic United Monarchy and puts the spotlight on Northern Kingdom of the Omride Dynasty [ninth century] as the real first prosperous state of early Israel.[61]

Finkelstein's Low Chronology has facilitated a productive reconciliation of Palestinian archaeology with the generally accepted view of Bible scholars that the Deuteronomistic History (Genesis through 2 Kings) may not be a fully accurate account of the history of Israel and that it may be substantially distorted by the redactors' determination to exalt Judah over Ephraim and Manasseh. Even more recently, Finkelstein has filled in a detailed account of the rise of polities in the north from the end of the twelfth century that culminated in the mid-ninth century Omride Dynasty, which provide the best candidates for the original united kingdom that would have born the name of Israel.[62]

It should be noted that there are many distinguished historians and archaeologists that are not yet ready to adopt the revisionist interpretations of the archaeology advanced by Finkelstein and others.[63] While Finkelstein's model does not threaten the backstory proposed for the Brass Plates, it has caused deep concern for scholars who take a less flexible approach in their defense of the exact wording of the Old Testament histories. For example, Steven Ortiz of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has published a detailed study of the pottery and dating theories for a selection of archaeological sites that may call Finkelstein's chronology into question.[64]

Josephite Scribes Relocated to Jerusalem

The Assyrian conquest of Israel in 722 BCE had driven thousands of refugees of Manasseh, Ephraim, and other northern tribes south to Jerusalem. The second invasion by Sennacherib after 701 drove additional elites from the Judean hill country towns into the capital during the late eighth and early seventh centuries. The city's estimated population of 1000 exploded to about 15,000.[65] It is generally assumed that these refugee groups consisted mostly of elites possessed of wealth

or valuable skills, who would have been prime targets for deportation — and not the peasants who could be safely ignored by the invaders. The excavations of the 1970s proved that dramatic urban expansion was occurring in Jerusalem before the end of the eighth century on the southwestern hill and that it continued in the seventh century — leading to the construction of a new defensive wall.[66]

Finkelstein provides a succinct summary of the archaeological and historical findings that support his radically new interpretation explaining why Judah only became a full-blown state in the mid-eighth century BCE:

> Within a few decades in the ninth century, Jerusalem in particular and Judah in general went through a significant transformation, from an Amarna-type dimorphic entity to the first steps toward full statehood. This transitional phase in the history of Judah, the missing link that I was looking for, was achieved under Omride dominance. According to this scenario, Judah as an early state is an outcome of Omride political and economic ambitions. In the period of the dynasty of Jehu, especially in the days of Joash and Jeroboam II, Judah continued to live in the shadow of Israel. But it now had the necessary infrastructure to make the big leap forward in the second half of the eighth century BCE. This last step to full statehood came with the destruction of Israel and the incorporation of Judah into the Assyrian world system.[67]

Lehi's Family in Jerusalem

Presumably, Lehi's immediate ancestors would have been part of that first flight of refugees that settled the west ridge of an expanding Jerusalem.[68] In that way, educated and wealthy elites from Samaria were able to avoid deportation to Mesopotamia. Jerusalem and Samaria (modern Nablus) are only about 40 miles apart. As Finkelstein concluded:

> The results of the archaeological surveys and information about the places where the Assyrians settled deportees from Mesopotamia seem to indicate that the Israelite refugees who settled in Judah originated mainly from southern Samaria.[69]

Rethinking Israelite History with a Dominant Northern Kingdom

Archaeologists have speculated on how our understanding of the period of the so-called "divided monarchy" might be much different had the

northern kingdom's own history survived to enable a comparison of that perspective with the obviously biased view that comes from the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles in our Hebrew Bible:

> It is only natural to assume that there were northern prophets … who were closer to the royal institutions in Samaria. … Had Israel survived, we might have received a parallel, competing, and very different history. But with the Assyrian destruction of Samaria and the dismantling of its institutions of royal power, any such competing histories were silenced. Though prophets and priests from the north very likely joined the flow of refugees to find shelter in the cities and towns of Judah, biblical history would henceforth be written by the winners — or at least the survivors — and it would be fashioned exclusively according to the late Judahite Deuteronomistic beliefs.[70]

The Brass Plates are described in such a way by the Nephites that they could easily preserve the northern traditions of prophecy and history that Finkelstein was hypothesizing.

Conclusions

The evolution of Palestinian archeology and history has produced two major thrusts that are of key relevance for the hypothesis describing how the Brass Plates could have been produced by a Manassite scribal school before the end of the seventh century in Jerusalem. On the one hand, the methodological naturalism shared by all modern sciences has pushed most leading archaeologists to replace the biblical account, which describes the twelve tribes of Israel coming out of the wilderness as an already formed ethnic entity and settling what would become ancient Israel. That move is still lacking in solid evidence and has been plausibly challenged on multiple grounds. On the other hand, the discovery that the northern kingdom was always dominant and more economically and culturally developed than Judah helps explain how it could have provided a safe haven over centuries for a highly developed Manassite scribal school descended from Joseph and effective down to the time of Lehi and Nephi, who were among its most accomplished members.

In addition, this paper offers four different kinds of evidence or arguments showing why it is too soon for believers in the biblical account of the Exodus from Egypt and the subsequent settlement of Israel in its promised land to be losing confidence in this Israelite origin

myth. First, a large contingent of qualified scholars have identified extensive corroborating evidence for biblical descriptions of the Exodus and the settlement. Second, skeptical scholars have not come to any real consensus on an alternative theory. Third, those skeptics have not undertaken as yet a serious discussion of the massive and intact Mt. Ebal altar site that seems to correlate so easily to the biblical account. Finally, Restoration scripture repeatedly invokes the Exodus story from its Manassite record, the Brass Plates, to teach the Nephites the importance of relying always on the Lord and their covenant relationship with him.

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Endnotes

1 See Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 161–215, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/lehi-and-nephi-as-trained-manassite-scribes/.

2 See Noel B. Reynolds, "A Backstory for the Brass Plates," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, forthcoming; and Noel B. Reynolds, "An Everlasting Witness: Ancient Writings on Metal" (working paper, *BYU Faculty Publications*, August 17, 2021, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/5379/).

3 Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1–7, provides a helpful account of the continuing evolution of scholarly approaches to Israel's history through the twentieth century. See also Rolf Rendtorff, "The Paradigm is Changing: Hopes—and Fears," *Biblical Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (1993): 34–53, for the analysis of a pre-eminent European insider on these developments. A more recent documentation and review of this evolving debate about the origins of ancient Israel can be found in Ann E. Killebrew, "The Emergence of Ancient Israel: The Social Boundaries of a 'Mixed Multitude' in Canaan,"

in *"I Will Speak the Riddle of Ancient Times": Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Aren M. Maeir and Pierre de Miroschedji (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 2: 555–72.

4 William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1957).

5 Killebrew, "Emergence of Ancient Israel," 556–57.

6 Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, revised ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 70. See Siegfried Herrmann, "The Devaluation of the Old Testament as a Historical Source: Notes on a Problem in the History of Ideas," in *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography*, ed. V. Philips Long (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 346–55, for a strong response to the idea that the Hebrew Bible itself can be ignored in any historical approach.

7 One of the most complete and straightforward statements of this perspective, framed as a critique of more traditional approaches to biblical history, can be found in Philip R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel": A Study in Biblical Origins*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1992). For one strong response, see Avi Hurvitz, "The Historical Quest For 'Ancient Israel' and the Linguistic Evidence of the Hebrew Bible: Some Methodological Observations," *Vetus Testamentum* 47, no. 3 (July 1997): 301–15. For a recent, wide-ranging compilation of theories and evidences for and against the historicity of the Israelite exodus from Egypt, see Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H. C. Propp, eds., *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience* (New York: Springer Cham, 2015). See especially chapter 2: Manfred Bietak, "On the Historicity of the Exodus: What Egyptology Today Can Contribute to Assessing the Biblical Account of the Sojourn in Egypt," 17–38. A recent comprehensive study of the date of the exodus concludes with a minor modification of the Albright/Kitchen theory—1267 BCE plus or minus 15 years makes the biblical account consistent with 150 synchronisms, which are dates that have been drawn from letters and treaties from the ancient near east. See also David A. Falk, "Computer Analytics in Chronology

Testing and Its Implications for the Date of the Exodus," in *"An Excellent Fortress for His Armies, a Refuge for the People": Egyptological, Archaeological, and Biblical Studies in Honor of James K. Hoffmeier*, ed. Richard E. Averbeck and K. Lawson Younger Jr. (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 99–111. A potential challenge to the consensus around a ninth century formulation of the alphabetic Hebrew script has now been reported in the news as described below in the discussion of historical evidence. It consists of an inscription on lead in archaic Hebrew that is firmly dated to the 13th–12th centuries that was found buried in a cultic site on Mount Ebal near Shechem.

8 Reynolds, "Backstory for the Brass Plates."

9 See the argument presented in Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi," and Reynolds, "Backstory for the Brass Plates."

10 These descriptive facts and hypotheses about the Brass Plates are presented and explained in Reynolds, "Backstory for the Brass Plates."

11 David Noel Freedman, *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation: Selected Writings of David Noel Freedman*, vol. 1: *History and Religion*, ed. John R. Huddleston (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 103–104.

12 In today's world, it is an unfortunate possibility to see the usage of terms such as "conservative" and "progressive" or "liberal" as purely political in nature. In biblical studies, the difference between "conservative" and "progressive" approaches is not political so much as it is ideological. Those who see the Bible as a secular and purely human document (a "progressive" perspective) have historically been at odds with those who value it as a record with divine value (a "conservative" perspective). The conflict between the two paradigms is widely recognized and acknowledged in academia.

13 The quotation is taken from the concluding remarks offered by Andrew Sherratt, "The View from Mount Nebo," in *The Bible and Radiocarbon Dating: Archaeology, Text and Science*, ed. Thomas E. Levy and Thomas Higham (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 444, and extends the concerns about interpretations of the Israelite record in its first centuries down to the time of the

exile. For a well-informed and comprehensive review of these developments over time see Grabbe, *Ancient Israel,* 3–38.

14 Good discussions of these issues were published in the 1990s. For example, see Diana Vikander Edelman, ed., *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel's Past* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1991), in which the editor has both challenged and invited responses from a range of archaeologists. Another excellent and seasoned response comes from University of Edinburgh's Iain W. Provan in his essay "Ideologies, Literary and Critical: Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 4 (1995): 585–606. See also Provan's more systematic treatment of the issue and response to his critics in his "In the Stable with the Dwarves: Testimony, Interpretation, Faith, and the History of Israel," in *Windows Into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel*," ed. V. Philips Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 161–97.

15 This way of reading the Hebrew Bible was successfully established among textual scholars by Walther Eichrodt with the English translation of the sixth edition of his magnum opus. See Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1961 and 1967).

16 William G. Dever, "The Late Bronze—Early Iron I Horizon in Syria-Palestine: Egyptians, Canaanites, 'Sea Peoples,' and Proto-Israelites," in *The Crisis Years: The 12th Century B.C.: From Beyond the Danube to the Tigris*, ed. William A. Ward and Martha Sharp Joukowsky (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1992), 104.

17 For a helpful and brief summary of these developments in the larger historical context see Dever, "The Late Bronze—Early Iron I." The universal four-room architecture in these settlements is analyzed in depth by Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Early Israel," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 260 (1985): 1–35.

18 See Anson F. Rainey, "Whence Came the Israelites and Their Language" *Israel Exploration Journal* 57, no. 1 (2007): 41–64; Anson F. Rainey, "Redefining Hebrew–A Transjordanian Language," *Maarav* 14, no. 2 (2007): 67–81; and Anson F. Rainey, "The Northwest Semitic Literary Repertoire and Its Acquaintance by Judean Writers," *Maarav* 15, no. 2 (2008): 193–205.

19 James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), viii.

20 R. J. Williams, "'A People Come Out of Egypt': An Egyptologist Looks at the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 28 (1975): 231–32.

21 See William G. Dever, "Cultural Continuity, Ethnicity in the Archaeological Record, and the Question of Israelite Origins," *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* (1993): 26–31.

22 Dever, "Cultural Continuity," 31. A more recent attempt to interpret the limited available evidence with a similar developmental approach can be found in Robert B. Coote and Keith W. Whitelam, *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010). These authors also argue that the accumulating archaeological evidence undermines the decades-long practice echoed above by Dever of linking certain pottery and house styles to one ethnic group such as Israelites or proto-Israelites. See pp. 125–27.

23 See Karl Eric Knutsson, "Dichotomization and Integration: Aspects of inter-ethnic relations in Southern Ethiopia," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1969), 99.

24 See Avraham Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2014), 33-107.

25 Israel Finkelstein, "Pots and People Revisited: Ethnic Boundaries in the Iron Age I," in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, ed. Neil Asher Silberman and David Small (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 230.

26 See Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel ca. 1300–1100 B.C.E.* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), especially 184–85, and Killebrew, "Emergence of Ancient Israel."

27 Raz Kletter, "Can a Proto-Israelite Please Stand Up: Notes on the Ethnicity of Iron Age Israel and Judah," in *"I Will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times: Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. A.

M. Maeir and P. de Miroschedji (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 2: 581–82. Kletter builds on the earlier work of Edelman and others. See Diana Edelman, "Ethnicity and Early Israel," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1996), 39–53.

28 See Kletter, "Proto-Israelite," 573–86.

29 See K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003). Also see Kitchen's two-page treatment of "The Exodus of the Hebrews," and the seamless way in which he integrates the biblical account of the exodus into his outstanding history of the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II. See K. A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of Ramesses II, King of Egypt* (Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 70–71.

30 Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, and James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

31 James K. Hoffmeier, Alan R. Millard, and Gary A. Rendsburg, eds., *"Did I Not Bring Israel out of Egypt?": Biblical, Archaeological, and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narratives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016).

32 See Joshua Berman, *Ani Maamin: Biblical Criticism, Historical Truth, and the Thirteen Principles of Faith* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2020).

33 See Deuteronomy 26:16–27:8 and Joshua 8:30–35.

34 The public discussion soon led to a preliminary popular account in BAR, a step which annoyed the professional archaeological brotherhood immensely and which Zertal reportedly came to regret having shared. See Adam Zertal, "Has Joshua's Altar Been Found on Mt. Ebal?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11, no. 1 (1985): 26–43. Zvi Koenigsberg, a member of Zertal's excavation team, has published a detailed account of the discovery and the reasons why the most reasonable explanation is to identify it as Joshua's altar. See Zvi Koenigsberg, *The Lost Temple of Israel* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015).

35 Adam Zertal, "An Early Iron Age Cultic Site on Mount Ebal: Excavation Seasons 1982–1987: Preliminary Report," *Tel Aviv* 13–14, no. 2 (1986–1987): 105–65. Zertal eventually (2000) published his own personal Hebrew-language account of the

entire experience from start to finish. Since his passing in 2015, that monograph has been translated into English by Jonathan Liberzon and published in a second edition as A. Zertal, *A Nation is Born: The Altar on Mount Ebal and the Birth of Israel* (Haifa: The Samaria and Jordan Rift Valley Survey Association, 2018).

36 See Ralph K. Hawkins, *The Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal: Excavation and Interpretation* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012).

37 Hawkins, *Iron Age I Structure*, 193–99.

38 Zertal found support for this interpretation of the stone blanket layer as a ritual burial of the site in David Ussishkin, "The Syro-Hittite Ritual Burial of Monuments," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29, no. 2 (April 1970): 124–28.

39 See Zertal, "Cultic Site on Mount Ebal," 154–58. A dominant view of Bible scholars has recognized an annual covenant renewal festival at Shechem in the earliest period, then at some point at Gilgal and Bethel, but "for most of the amphictyonic period . . . the central sanctuary seems to have been located at Shiloh" until it was broken up by the Philistines in 1050 BCE. See E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1967), 60–61.

40 Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988), 82–85. This is the published version of his dissertation and brings together a broad survey of the archaeological evidence for the chronology and extent of the original settlement. His later publications incorporate additional evidence from more recent excavations, but this first book laid down the pattern of the approach that has characterized his illustrious career.

41 Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

42 Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz, "'Curse' Text on Ancient Amulet Could Change Way Scholars Read Bible," *Jerusalem Post*, March 24, 2022 (updated March 25, 2022), https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-702243.

43 Wikipedia, s.v. "Curse tablet," last modified April 19, 2022, 11:18 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curse_tablet.

44 This is not a trite truism in the Nephite text (or in the Hebrew Bible) but is rather a fundamental principle of Nephite theology. This is explained in Noel B. Reynolds, "The 'Goodness of God' and his Children as a Fundamental Theological Concept in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 46 (2021): 131–56, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-goodness-of-god-and-his-children-as-a-fundamental-theological-concept-in-the-book-of-mormon/.

45 1 Nephi 17:23–34. Cf. 1 Nephi 5:14–15, 1 Nephi 19:10, 2 Nephi 3:4, 2 Nephi 9–10, 2 Nephi 25:20, Mosiah 7:19, and Mosiah 12:34.

46 Helaman 8: 11–15. Cf. Alma 36:28.

47 This interpretation is developed in detail in Noel B. Reynolds, "The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2005): 5–23. For a documentation and exposition of this biblical pattern see Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), especially 23–90.

48 This thesis was introduced powerfully in Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001). See evidence for the early preeminence of the Josephite tribes in Kristin Weingart, "'All These are the Twelve Tribes of Israel': The Origins of Israel's Kinship Identity," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82, no. 1 (2019): 24–31.

49 The third German edition of Noth's 1943 original is now widely available in an English translation as Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1981). The huge literature on this subject was well summarized by Steven L. McKenzie in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Deuteronomistic History" (New York: Doubleday, 1992): 2:160–68.

50 See George Andrew Reisner, Clarence Stanley Fisher, and David Gordon Lyon, "The Israelite Period," in *Harvard Excavations at Samaria, 1908–1910*, vol. 1, *Text* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 91–122.

51 See the preface in Adam Zertal, *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey,* vol. 1, *The Shechem Syncline* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004) for

a background description of this massive project. First published in Hebrew, it is now available in the comprehensive, five-volume, English-language version.

52 Finkelstein, *Israelite Settlement*, 332–33.

53 See Reynolds, "Backstory for the Brass Plates."

54 Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*. Finkelstein used this new paradigm to gather and present all the archaeological data on the northern kingdom in a more technical book: Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom*. For an excellent summary, review, and critique of Finkelstein's challenging new paradigm for the early history of the kingdom of Israel, see Daniel Pioske, "Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*," *Review of Biblical Literature* 10 (February 2014).

55 Israel Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the United Monarchy: An Alternative View," *Levant* 28 (1996): 185. This article presents the basic archaeological discoveries and reasoning that support Finkelstein's "low chronology."

56 In Ze'ev Herzog and Lily Singer-Avitz, "Redefining the Centre: The Emergence of State in Judah," *Tel Aviv* 31, no. 2 (2004): 209–44, we see "hard archaeological data" used to demonstrate that "the process of state formation in Judah was not a unidirectional evolution from tribal community to state society" (p. 236) in support of the low chronology.

57 Grabbe, *Ancient Israel*, 83.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., 84. No trace of Solomon's temple has been found, and political conditions prevent any excavation at the presumed location. Nephi clearly refers to that temple as a model for his first temple in the City of Nephi (2 Nephi 5:16). Growing skepticism among contemporary archaeologists about the existence of a Solomonic temple in early Jerusalem has been partially addressed by the discovery of other Israelite temples from that time frame. See Yosef Garfinkel and Madeleine Mumcuoglu, "The Temple of Solomon in Iron Age Context," *Religions* 10, no. 3 (March 2019): 198, https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/3/198.

60 Finkelstein, "United Monarchy," 185.

61 Israel Finkelstein, "A Low Chronology Update: Archaeology, History and Bible," in *The Bible and Radiocarbon Dating: Archaeology, Text and Science*, ed. Thomas E. Levy and Thomas Higham (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2014), 39.

62 Israel Finkelstein, "First Israel, Core Israel, United (Northern) Israel," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82, no. 1 (2019): 9–12.

63 A good review, summary, and defense of the traditional interpretation in light of current archaeological finds is available in Amihai Mazar, "Jerusalem in the 10th Century B.C.E.: The Glass Half Full," in *Essays on Ancient Israel in its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman*, ed. Yairah Amit, Ehud Ben Zvi, Israel Finkelstein, and Oded Lipschits (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 255–72.

64 See Steven M. Ortiz, "Does the 'Low Chronology' Work? A Case Study of Tell Qasile X, Tel Gezer X, and Lachish V," in *'I Will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times': Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 2: 587–611.

65 Archaeologists now believe that Jerusalem and Judea were quite small in population and not yet well developed in governmental institutions before receiving waves of refugees from Samaria about the time of the Assyrian conquest in 722 BCE. Jerusalem's population increased exponentially and began from that point to develop more advanced social, political, and religious institutions. See the summary descriptions offered by Finkelstein and Silberman in *The Bible Unearthed*, 243ff. These updated numbers are much higher than the original archaeologist's estimates of a fourfold expansion as reported in Magen Broshi, "The Expansion of Jerusalem in the Reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh," *Israel Exploration Journal* 24 (1974): 21–26. Nadav Na'aman attacked Finkelstein and Silberman's account in "When and How Did Jerusalem Become a Great City? The Rise of Jerusalem as Judah's Premier City in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries B.C.E.," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 347 (2007): 21–56. Na'aman's attack, in which he relied primarily on the biblical text, was answered immediately by Finkelstein using archaeological evidence. See Israel Finkelstein, "The Settlement History of Jerusalem in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BC," *Revue Biblique* 115, no. 4 (October 2008): 499–515. See the earlier and meticulously detailed summary of this history

that integrates all the archaeological and textual evidence available in Baruch Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century BCE: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability," in *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Deborah W. Hobson (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991): 11–107.

66 See the detailed and beautifully illustrated account of the Jerusalem excavations by Broshi's colleague: Nahman Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 31.

67 Israel Finkelstein, "The Rise of Jerusalem and Judah: The Missing Link," *Levant* 33, no. 1 (2001): 111.

68 See the extensive background provided by Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Lehi's House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance," in John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, eds., *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 81–130. An alternative interpretation of the refugee flight from the north argues that they came to Bethel and that Bethel was incorporated into Judah with Assyrian approval because of the Judahite monarchy's support for Assyria in the seventh century. See Ernst Axel Knauf, "Bethel: The Israelite Impact on Judean Language and Literature," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, edited by Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006), 291–349.

69 Finkelstein, "Settlement History of Jerusalem," 515.

70 Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 223.

"This Great Mystery": Gathering Still Other Sheep through the New Covenant of Peace

Matthew Scott Stenson

Abstract: *The Book of Mormon sheds light on a "great mystery" located in John 10:16 (D&C 10:64). In this paper, using a comparative method that traces intersecting pastoral imagery, I argue that John 10:16–18 (as opposed to merely John 10:16) not only refers to Jesus's visit to the Lehites in Bountiful and the lost tribes of Israel (the standard LDS view), but that it has a scripturally warranted covenant-connection to the emergence and dissemination of the Nephite record. Specifically, the Book of Mormon, according to the Good Shepherd (3 Nephi 15:12–16:20), effectively serves as his recognizable voice to the inhabitants of the earth across time and space. The Nephite record has come forth so that the Lord's sheep (those who hear his voice in and through that record in the final dispensation) may be safely gathered into the fold before he comes in glory to reign as a second King David. The Nephite record's coming forth to eventually establish peace on earth was foretold by prophets such as Isaiah (Isaiah 52:7–10), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 34:23–25; 37:15–26), and Nephi (1 Nephi 13:34–37, 40–14:2; 1 Nephi 22:16–28). The value of this comparative approach is to recast our understanding of various passages of scripture, even as additional value is assigned to the Nephite record as the covenant of peace.*

> "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." (John 10:16)

Jesus Christ's reference to his "other sheep" in John 10:16 is perhaps not well understood. Latter-day Saint scholars generally view the reference as pointing to the Lehites that Jesus addresses in 3 Nephi and those of the lost tribes of the house of Israel whom he subsequently visits,

of whom we have no present account. Among non-Latter-day Saint scholars, there appear to be several perspectives on the "other sheep," but one predominates: the other-sheep phrase refers to those who would hear the Good Shepherd's voice among the early Gentiles.[1] On one hand, though, a little learning is a dangerous thing insofar as it diminishes the expectation of discovery due to received assumptions; on the other hand, where there is no exegetical inheritance, scholarly speculations tend to multiply. Some scholars have posited in the concise and elusive passage in John 10:16 an assurance that others would yet hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in future generations, that his voice would eventually be unto all across time and place. The Good Shepherd's voice, for these scholars, would be unto all the "children of God, both Jews and Gentiles."[2] Nevertheless, what is precisely evoked when examining John 10:16 appears to remain a relative mystery. This paper, therefore, seeks to explain not only *who* the other sheep are, but more significantly, *when* and especially *how* they are to be brought into the fold according to the eschatological prophecies that employ pastoral imagery. Implicit in this approach is an affirmation that the gathering and numbering of the sheep requires meeting the conditions of the gospel covenant of peace as articulated in the Book of Mormon and elsewhere in scripture.

Symbolic imagery in the ancient scriptures can be lost on modern believers. This is because references, even those once considered ordinary, cannot be fully appreciated without cultural context. Reading scripture is a risk that requires a mutual interest in the text and in the exegete's experience.[3] Historically distant times and places and the emergence of more modern concerns and questions naturally place limitations on our ability to fully comprehend. Fortunately, some scriptural imagery has been explained to us more frequently by those trained in such things[4] (or used in our influential literature and iconography)[5] and therefore the interpretive gap has been minimized, if not entirely eliminated. One example of this more familiar visual material common to scriptural teaching is that of the shepherd and his sheep. Most understand that the shepherd in certain societies cared for and protected his sheep. He numbered them, knew them (and they knew him), and protected them with his life against predators. The sheep were gathered into an enclosure, and the shepherd guarded them by night and led them out to feed in the best pastures by day. To graze them, the shepherd would call them from their pen where they were gathered with others' flocks. He could do this because they recognized his particular voice. The sheep and their lambs were the shepherd's livelihood and thus of great importance to

him. If one sheep became separated or lost, he would seek it out and bring it back to the fold. King David famously was a shepherd called from tending the animals in his flock to eventually become king. To this day, Jesus Christ, in King David's lineage, is referenced by the name-title the *Good Shepherd*. The sheep of the Good Shepherd are those persons who hear his voice and follow him. They become his disciples and by covenant are gathered into his fold. Most of this is rather familiar to the average church-going, Bible-believing person.

This pastoral motif of the caring shepherd and his responsive sheep common to the word of the Lord can have interesting iterations and appropriations in scripture.[6] For instance, Ezekiel reproves the leaders of the Lord's people because they fail to shepherd the flock. Speaking for the Lord, Ezekiel accuses them of ruling the sheep "with force and with cruelty" (Ezekiel 34:4).[7] Due to the wickedness of the Lord's shepherds, the Lord says, "my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them" (Ezekiel 34:6). The Lord even suggests through Ezekiel that the shepherds have attempted to feed on their own hungry sheep: "I will deliver my flock from their [the shepherds'] mouth, that they [my sheep, cattle, rams, and goats] may not be meat for them" (Ezekiel 34:10). This promise of deliverance and, implicitly, of gathering in, according to the exiled prophet, will occur in a future "cloudy and dark day" (v. 12) and will occur through the zeal of the Lord himself. After the flock is scattered to all places, the Lord promises, "therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David. … And I the Lord will be their God. … And I will make with them a covenant of peace" (Ezekiel 34:22–25). This same imagery and these same promises, including the assurance that the Lord "will make a covenant of peace," are reminiscent of Ezekiel 37. There, we learn that the Lord's sheep will be gathered and that there will be one fold and "one shepherd" over all the earth when the "stick of Joseph" and "of Judah" become "one in mine hand" (Ezekiel 37:19–28). In this way, Israel will be restored before the final stages of the first resurrection through the Book of Mormon.

The Good Shepherd imagery of Ezekiel — including its imagery of the scattering and gathering of the sheep of the house of Israel — is also found outside the Old Testament, and it tends to be employed in similar ways. For example, both $\text{Alma}_{1,}$ and his son, Alma_2, use it when regulating the Nephite church (see Mosiah 26:17–32 and Alma 5:37–42, 57–62).[8] Ezekiel's treatment of the pastoral imagery clearly influences

John 10:1–30, which in turn directly impacts the Lord's use of the motif in 3 Nephi 15:12–16:20 and D&C 10:57–64. These relevant scriptures harmonize the pastoral imagery and language.

So what is the nature of this project? First, using a comparative method, this paper provides in context a new and comprehensive reading for each of three related pastoral passages found in scripture (D&C 10:59–64, John 10:16–18, and 3 Nephi 15:12–16:20). Second, an attempt is made to harmonize these scattered passages, gathering them together into one eschatological meaning with implications for our safety and salvation. Accordingly, I argue that there is a teleology in the imagery that for many remains a "great mystery" (D&C 10:64).[9] Third, I show that the Book of Mormon builds up (D&C 10:52, 62) the biblical record. The new covenant, a covenant of gospel peace, establishes the truth of the Old Testament and New Testaments. "This great mystery" (what Jesus meant when he said, "other sheep I have, which are not of this fold") examined here clarifies, amplifies, explains, and adapts a current prophetic teaching: that we are to hear him (John 10:16) in and through the Book of Mormon.

As indicated, I consider three strongly related texts in turn and venture an interpretation having to do with their sum, a harmonious sum greater than their individual parts. The value of this approach is to bring to light some potential understandings that until now have been overlooked and to suggest that they point toward the new covenant of the Book of Mormon as the fulfillment of the promised covenant of peace. Then, the Good Shepherd will gather his sheep before the danger of night closes in and consumes.

Pastoral Text #1 (D&C 10:59–64)

D&C 10 is one of many early revelations about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (see D&C 3, 5, 8–10, 18, 20). The scholars who have worked on D&C 10 (1828) have largely concentrated on its historical context.[10] The section records the Lord's words to Joseph Smith and Martin Harris after they lost the hundred and sixteen pages that Joseph Smith translated from the Book of Lehi.[11] The designing persons who planned to alter the 116 pages, if translated again, apparently erroneously assumed that they were doing God a service in opposing the work of someone they considered a deceiver (see D&C 10:28–29). However, the Lord, according to the revelation, had long in advance made abundant provision for the loss of the manuscript by having Mormon include the small plates of Nephi (Words of Mormon 1:3) during his abridgment process. Thus, the Lord in his providence prepared a way to thwart the work of the devil by bringing

forth a record that would "throw greater views on [His] gospel" than those found in the earlier lost translation. The complete record's emergence as the Book of Mormon would be unto the fulfilling of the prayers of the righteous who had inhabited the Americas. Indeed, it would make the Lord's doctrine freely available to "other nations," to "whosoever should believe in this gospel," of "whatsoever nation, kindred, tongue, or people they may be" (D&C 10:46–52). The mention of these "other nations" that would gather to the Americas in the day of the Gentiles is, though admittedly subtle, an instance of the pastoral teachings of the past. It is yet another way to understand the Lord's reference to his "other sheep" and his promised covenant of peace.[12]

The Lord's obviously intentional comparison between D&C 10 and John 10 is confirmed when he introduces himself in the same revelation indirectly addressed to the modern Gentiles, announcing, "Behold, I am Jesus Christ … I am he who said — Other sheep have I which are not of this fold" (D&C 10:57, 59). The second half of D&C 10, unlike its first half, then suggests that the newly constituted record (the Book of Mormon) would, in consequence of the promises, come forth, according to the prayers of the faithful, unto all nations, including unto those gathered to this land. This eventuality would provide another fulfillment of Jesus's mysterious statement about his other sheep in John's gospel and would confirm the Lord's explanation of it in 3 Nephi 15–16.[13] Moreover, in D&C 10, Jesus, introducing himself, describes the type of reception the Nephite record would have. Its poor reception would mirror his own first-century reception. Thus he draws a comparison between himself (the Light) and the sacred book he inspired and kept and preserved for a wise purpose. In the following verses, Jesus explains that as he came unto the Jews and was not received because of darkness, so also will the Nephite record have its naysayers, detractors, and enemies who are agents of the darkness (D&C 84:43–60). Jesus clarifies that as he taught his gospel and performed heavenly miracles among the Jews, so also would the Book of Mormon powerfully articulate his doctrine and document the divine miracles he effected while among his ancient American sheep. Notice that the cross-dispensational comparison hinges on the familiar Johannine imagery of darkness and light and the Johannine motif of the other sheep. I have divided up the inverted comparison into its two parts for easier access:.

Part 1:

> Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I came unto mine own, and mine own received me not.
>
> I am the *light* which shineth in *darkness* and the darkness comprehendeth it not.
>
> I am he who said — *Other sheep* have I which are not of this fold — unto my disciples,[14] and many there were that understood me not. (D&C 10:57–59)

Part 2:

> And I will show unto this people that I had *other sheep*, and they were a branch of the house of Jacob;
>
> And I will bring to *light* their marvelous works, which they did in my name;
>
> Yea, and I will also bring to *light* my gospel which was ministered unto them, and, behold, they [Nephite writings] shall not deny that which you have received, but they shall build it up, and shall bring to *light* the true points of my doctrine, yea, and the only doctrine which is in me.
>
> And this I do that I may establish my gospel, that there may not be so much contention; yea, Satan doth stir up the hearts of the people to contention concerning the points of my doctrine; and in these things they do err,[15] for they do wrest the scriptures and do not understand them.
>
> Therefore, I will unfold unto them this great mystery. (D&C 10:60–62)[16]

Using this comparative method, I attempt to demonstrate that Jesus figuratively associates himself with the Nephite record, a record that testifies relentlessly of him and his mission.[17] This comparison is signaled by the patterned use of the word *light* as he discusses the historic (and future) reception of both himself among the Jews and the Nephite record among the Gentiles. Each term in the comparison — Jesus and the Nephite record — shines as a light in darkness only to encounter opposition and those who fight against him/it. In the first passage above, Jesus promises to explain his enigmatic reference to the "other sheep" and to bring to light his gospel in such a way as to lay down contentions and establish peace (2 Nephi 3:12). It is of similar interest that the Gentiles in the second passage above are said to have received the Bible, but not the additional

light offered them in the Book of Mormon, much as the Jews had the light of the Law of Moses, but would not receive more light when Christ came among them as fulfillment of the law. Many of the first-century Jews clung to the old covenant when the new covenant was manifest to them like a light in a dark place. Accordingly, Jesus promises in this revelation to explain in the forthcoming Book of Mormon what he meant when he announced that he would bring other sheep not of his fold. This gesture would be one of many calculated to establish peace among disputing believers. Before turning to Jesus's explanation in the Nephite record, let us examine the original context for the statement in John 10:16.

Pastoral Text # 2 (John 10:16)

When contextualized, Jesus's statement in John 10:16 becomes interesting and suggestive. To remind my reader, Jesus explains in this verse, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." This enigmatic statement has been interpreted in various ways, as mentioned. The "other sheep" have been identified by scholars with such groups as these: the non-Christian Jews and non-Christians,[18] the non-Johannine Christians (see footnote 5), and even more generally the "children of God." However, the "broad scholarly consensus" remains that the declaration in John 10:16 prefigures "the future mission of the exalted Lord through His disciples" whom he soon would send to the "Gentiles."[19] In contrast, Latter-day Saints, having the helpful 3 Nephi account, understandably may assume that they have in mind the whole picture. The other sheep for them are the Lehites and lost tribes as Jesus explains in 3 Nephi 15:21 and 16:1–3.[20] That said, here I would like to argue that John 9 and 10 are best understood when seen as "complementary scenes"[21] — as physical miracle (John 9) and spiritual teaching (John 10)[22] — and that John 10:16 really cannot be appreciated as much as it might be, unless we read verse 16 in context with its surrounding verses, particularly those which follow it.[23] The Gospel of John, comparable to 3 Nephi (itself Johannine in character), has been divided in two. S.A. Cummins calls it a "two-act divine drama." The first part treats the saving words spoken by Jesus (see John 1–12) and the second part treats the final acts of redemption performed by Jesus (John 13–21). John's gospel is famously not as straightforward as it seems. Thus, according to Cummins, it has variously been described by scholars in such terms as "exhaust[s] all human interpretation," "profound theology," "sublime,"

"distinctive," a book of "depth and substance," and "Hellenistic [philosophical]."[24]

Further, like D&C 10, the Gospel of John (see also 1 John and D&C 93) relies heavily on the imagery of light and dark and other figures and tropes to convey spiritual understanding and oneness between Father, Son, and disciples. As for John 9, it contains the narrative of the man born blind. John 10 is the continuation of John 9. In it, John's Jesus shares with the Jews the sermon on the Good Shepherd and Sheep and some about his and our divine identity. As we have it, John 9 seemingly depicts the man born blind in messianic terms. This should be unsurprising, since the text says that the man was born blind not because of sin but "that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3; see also John 10:25).[25] Accordingly, I propose that John's blind man is a type of the Messiah, such that several aspects of the life and works of Christ are manifested through his story.

To establish the messianic identity of the blind man will require reading the text in a literary, or, if preferred, in an untechnical, typological way.[26] The man born blind indirectly resembles the Messiah in each of the following ten ways:

> 1) the man seems to be an only son and is delivered over for an informal trial by the Jewish leaders after being assumed sinful (John 9:1–2, 13–24);
>
> 2) the man is "anointed" by one who has authority to work the "works of God" (John 9:3–4, 6);
>
> 3) the man is to wash in water (John 9:7) (not unlike Jesus's baptism);
>
> 4) the man is sent to wash (John 9:7);
>
> 5) the man's identity is disputed among even his neighbors; his confession that "*I am* he" is not believed (John 9:8–9, 18)[27];
>
> 6) the man is apparently the son of parents who confirm his identity, but let him, or insist that he "speak for himself," since he has come of age (John 9:18–23)[28];
>
> 7) the man acts as a bold teacher, even testifying of the one who sent him to wash more than once, but the testimony was not understood or received by the Jews (John 9:17, 24–27, 31–34);

> 8) the man is "reviled," denounced, and "cast out" (John 9:28–29, 34);
>
> 9) the man mocks his judges (an unexpected reversal in the messianic pattern) (John 9:27, 30); and
>
> 10) the man is visited a second time by the Messiah, believes and, it is pointed out, has undergone a kind of intermediate judgment, the result of which confirms that the blind see, and the seeing walk blind (John 9:35–39).

John 9 at several points confuses nouns and pronouns, so that it is left unclear (at least in the KJV) which man — the blind man or Jesus — is referenced, ostensibly to establish their intended similitude and oneness in the reader's mind (see John 9:16, 17, 40). I have given grounds for this messianic parallel because of what it may suggest about how one is to read the ensuing "symbolic discourse."[29] To put a finer point on it, because the words of the man born blind were not regarded (and were even disputed) by the Jews, neither will those who are not the sheep of the Good Shepherd believe him on hearing his voice.

John's intended connection between John 9 and 10 is underscored when, near the end of the Good Shepherd discourse in John 10, he records the nature of the disputation that follows it: "There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings [of Jesus]. And many of them [Jews] said [to other Jews],[30] He [Jesus] hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" (John 10:21). This last question — "Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" — clearly returns John's reader to the previous chapter's material, since the phrase "open the eyes of the blind" (or a variant of it) occurs no fewer than six times in John 9 (vv. 14, 17, 21, 26, 30, 32). In addition, much is made in John 9 of the fact that many of the Jews would not hear the words of the man born blind, although he was emphatically plain unto them, even repeating himself for their benefit. As John 9's dialogue will only become more important as we go forward, here is the relevant language which suggests that the problem of seeing is actually more a problem of hearing and understanding:

> Then again called they [the Pharisees] the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man [Jesus] is a sinner. …
>
> Then said they to him again, what did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes?

> He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not *hear*: wherefore would ye *hear* it again? will ye also be his disciples?[31] (John 9:24, 26–27)

The man born blind at this point is reviled; and then, enlightened by the Spirit, he somewhat mockingly teaches his self-pious interrogators about how one who serves God is to be identified:

> Now we know that God *heareth* not sinners: but if any man be a worshiper of God, and doeth his will, him he *heareth*.
>
> Since the world began was it not *heard* that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.[32]
>
> If this man [Jesus] were not of God, he could do nothing. (John 9: 31–32)

The above passages demonstrate that one manifestation of the messianic likeness or persona of the man born blind is reflected by his inspired teaching and testimony that those who become disciples of Jesus must learn to hear and believe in him. Those who become Jesus's disciples hear his voice and respond to it. In fact, to end John 9, it appears that some Pharisees, upon seeing and hearing the blind man's inspired witness and teachings, sincerely ask, "Are we blind also?" Jesus's Good Shepherd teaching, which begins in John 10, is probably his answer to their interesting follow-up question. For Jesus explains to them, "If ye were [only] blind [like this man], ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see [but are as yet spiritually blind]; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 10:40–41). This somewhat speculative reading suggests diversity among the Jews; and that the other sheep discourse was specifically intended for a subset of potentially honest Jews. At least these Jews received a greater portion of the word.

Because John's discourse on the shepherd and sheep is well known among the Latter-day Saints, I will deal with it only briefly here.[33] First, though, the Good Shepherd's discourse should be summarized, John 10:1–15 recounts that the Good Shepherd cares for his sheep so much that he protects them and even is willing, unlike the "hireling," to lay down his life for the sheep by combating those animals of prey (or persons) who have and will seek to "steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:7–10). The sheep know their shepherd and are known of him. They hear his voice and follow him and are not strangers. John's teaching centers on the importance of hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd. The thematic relationship between John 9 and 10 should now be obvious. Just as the man born blind was suggestive of the Messiah and was not

received by all those he interacted with, neither will the Good Shepherd be received by any who are not his sheep. Thus the answer to the earlier question posed by some of the Jews, "Are we blind also?" depends on whether one has learned to hear, believe, and obey. If those who have seen the recent sign will repent and begin to believe in the words of testimony and teaching they have heard, they will see and understand. In John 10, Jesus attempts to open the spiritual eyes of those who have begun to exercise faith in him, saying, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16; see also Ezekiel 34:23, 37:22). This pastoral imagery returns John's reader again to Ezekiel's prophecies of redemption and the second David[34] who would gather his sheep in the "cloudy and dark day" (Ezekiel 34:12) when the Lord would again establish a "covenant of peace" with his once scattered and afflicted flock (Psalms 85:8, 10–12; Ezekiel 34:25, 37:26; see also Isaiah 54:10, 56:3–8; Zechariah 11:4–14, 13:7).[35]

Jesus continues his teaching on his "other sheep" longer than some readers may realize. He does not leave the subject of the other sheep after John 10:16. Instead, Jesus in John 10:16–18 constructs a logic that can be recovered, given the difficulties of the text, only by resorting to details in 3 Nephi, where Jesus returns to this same teaching. But before going to our next pastoral text to determine how he fleshes it out there (3 Nephi 15–16), an attempt should be made to clarify Jesus's specific logic in John 10:16–18. This reading seeks to recover the messianic and Johannine logic as far as possible. In that recovery effort, it may be helpful to remember that at this stage in the symbolic sermon of the Good Shepherd and sheep, Jesus has already spoken about the Shepherd's willingness to "lay down [his] life" for his sheep. It is also worth pointing out that the awkwardly worded statement "them also I must bring," is the antecedent to the demonstrative pronominal phrase ("This commandment") that ends the sequence of verses. Importantly, the imperative term "must" implies that bringing into the fold the other sheep *is* the "commandment" he has "received of [his] Father." Jesus says to his audience:

> And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: *them also I must bring*, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.
>
> Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.[36]

> No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. *This commandment* [to bring them] *have I received of my Father.* (John 10:16–18)[37]

Whether or not any of the Jews described in John 9 and 10 really understood this pronouncement, Jesus apparently delivered it to them to open their eyes to the universality of his mission and the extent of his pasture even after his resurrection and ascension. Their immediate but varied reactions suggest that they thought they understood, at least in part, his intended meaning, as John reports in his response. Notice how this passage gathers together the earlier strands of John's account and underscores the significance and implications of hearing his divine voice and believing on him:

> There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings.[38]
>
> And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad;[39] why *hear* ye him?
>
> Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind [as he has opened the man's and now ours']? (John 10:19–21)

Then some of the same Jews who later in the day stood around him in Solomon's Porch requested further assurances:

> If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.
>
> Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye *believed* not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.
>
> But ye *believe* not, because ye are not my sheep, as I said unto you.
>
> My sheep *hear my voice*, and I know them, and they follow me. (John 10: 24–27)

Based on the foregoing, I propose that

> 1) John 9 and 10 are complementary;
>
> 2) the man born blind is a similitude of the Messiah in John's account;
>
> 3) one major theme of John 9 and 10 is the importance of hearing and believing Jesus;

4) that Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" over all people of the earth and that, according to the prophets, at his Father's command he would gather his sheep "in one;" and

5) that John 9 and 10 have a strong relationship to modern revelation, especially D&C 10 and Third Nephi.

The Book of Mormon shines a bright light on Jesus's symbolic discourse in John 10:16–18. Nowhere else in scripture is the intent of Jesus's first-century teaching on the Good Shepherd so plainly explained as in 3 Nephi. And yet, 3 Nephi 15 and 16 also contain something of a mystery, a mystery that returns us back to that which was suggested in D&C 10: that Jesus in the latter-days has still other sheep to bring through the Nephite record into his universal and expanding fold. To this day, the Good Shepherd seeks to gather his other sheep, all those who will hear his voice in the pages of the Nephite record, before he comes in glory. This teleological understanding of the purpose of the Book of Mormon, the new covenant, is what Jesus, himself the great exegete and executor of the Father's every command, emphasizes in his lengthy, two-day discourse in 3 Nephi (3 Nephi 11–28).[40] As part of the approach used here, only a small portion of 3 Nephi's extensive sermonic offerings will be examined in an effort to support the idea that the Nephite record is the articulation of the covenant and the divine voice or instrument for gathering the sheep before the prophesied calamities cut off those who will not hear the Shepherd's voice (see also 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5).

Pastoral Text # 3 (3 Nephi 16:7, 15)

Third Nephi is remarkably complex and full of interpretative possibilities.[41] Following the Sermon at the Temple (a sermon similar to the Sermon on the Mount), Jesus responds to a question posed by his audience. He had taught, "Old things are done away, and all things have become new" (3 Nephi 12:47). Some persons present on the occasion could not understand from that statement what he "would concerning the law of Moses" (3 Nephi 15:2). Jesus teaches them that whereas the law given unto Moses is fulfilled, the prophecies that were given of old are not all fulfilled. Thus, he says: "Behold, I do not destroy the prophets [prophecies] for as many as have not been fulfilled in me [already], verily I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled" (3 Nephi 15:6). Jesus led with a similar thought when his sermon first came from his mouth: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfill" (3 Nephi 12:17). All this gives D&C 10 a great relevance,

since the language of that revelation draws upon this same sermon in terms of the prophecies concerning the Book of Mormon's emergence. In D&C 10, Jesus explained to his modern Gentile audience that those who sought to destroy the work/book containing his gospel would be thwarted: "And now, behold, according to their faith in their prayers [faith of fathers] will I bring this part of my gospel [small plates] to the knowledge of my people. The Lord again affirms his purpose "Behold, I do not bring it [Nephite record] to destroy that which they [Gentiles] have received [Bible], but to build it up" (D&C 10:52; see also v. 62).

Third Nephi 15:12–16:16 thus interweaves the three passages examined in this present work on the Good Shepherd and his sheep. This claim for harmony among these passages is further confirmed if it is remembered that D&C 10 spoke of the prayers of the faithful concerning those who would inherit the Americas (see D&C 10:46–51). That is why it is unsurprising that in 3 Nephi 15 Jesus connects his statement about the yet unfulfilled prophecies to the lands of the Americas. Jesus declares to his Bountiful disciples, "Ye are my disciples; and ye are a light unto this people, who are a remnant of the house of Joseph. And behold, this is the land of your inheritance; and the Father hath given it unto you [and your seed]" (3 Nephi 15:12–13). This same teaching sequence ends similarly with a focus on location: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, thus hath the Father commanded me — that I should give unto this people [the assembled Lehites] this land for their inheritance" (3 Nephi 16:16). Both D&C 10 and 3 Nephi 15:12–16:16 concentrate on the land and the record to come forth. This discussion of place brings us to Jesus's exposition while among his Bountiful disciples of what he meant when in Palestine he said he had "other sheep" not of the Jewish fold, and that they would also hear his voice. The Jesus of 3 Nephi connects the Johannine prophecy and commandment of the Lord to four groups:

1) the Jews among whom he had recently taught;

2) the Lehites gathered at Bountiful;

3) the "other tribes" of the house of Israel (3 Nephi 15:15, 20–21); and

4) the latter-day Gentiles and others of the house of Israel who would also hear his voice by means of a sacred record, even if they would hear him in a way that was different from how he addressed the Gentiles in Palestine in the first century.

Those peoples of the first century among whom Jesus ministered would see and hear his voice directly. Whereas those persons who

would hear his voice in the day of salvation before his coming in glory as a second David would not see him. They would indirectly hear his voice through a sacred record that would come forth out of darkness unto light and would be comparable to the Messiah himself.

Since most students of the Book of Mormon are aware of items one-through-three above, it may be beneficial here to elaborate on item number four. Briefly, then, we learn from the account in 3 Nephi that when the Jews initially heard the statement about the "other sheep," they assumed that Jesus meant that He spoke of the first-century Gentiles. As documented, this is still a common way among Christian scholars to understand the passage. In what follows, Jesus's likely original meaning will be explained as it relates to the commandment he referred to in John 10:16–18:

> And verily I say unto you, that ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; *them also I must bring*,[42] and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.
>
> And they understood me not, for they supposed it had been the Gentiles; for they understood not that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching.[43]
>
> And they understood me not that I said they shall hear my voice; and they understood me not that the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice — that I should not manifest myself unto them save it were by the Holy Ghost.
>
> But behold, ye [Lehites] have both heard my voice, and seen me; and ye are my sheep, and ye are numbered among those whom the Father hath given me.
>
> And verily, verily, I say unto you that I have other sheep [lost tribes], which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister.
>
> For they of whom I speak are they who have not as yet heard my voice; neither have I at any time manifested myself unto them.
>
> *But I have received commandment of the Father* [see John 10:18] *that I shall go unto them*, and that they shall hear my voice, and shall be numbered among my sheep, that there may be one fold and one shepherd; therefore I go to show myself unto them. (3 Nephi 15:21–16:3)

I share this pastoral passage to point out that the 3 Nephi account not only clarifies John 10:16–18 but builds it up by adding additional material about other commandments and other sheep.[44] Significantly, this passage is not broken up across two chapters in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon as it is in our current versification system.[45] John mentions the "other sheep," but the Nephite record clarifies that these "other sheep" were not the Gentiles among the Jews (as it was supposed) but the remnant of the house of Joseph in the Americas, to which Jesus also adds the lost tribes of Israel. He has others yet to go and see; they also will hear his voice. But there is more than this that Jesus teaches these faithful people.

3 Nephi 15–16 also justifies reading John 10:16–18 as applying to the Lord's post-resurrection visit to the Lehites. I have argued that John's line "This commandment have I received of my Father" refers to Jesus's statement "other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring." Accordingly, Jesus tells his New World disciples at least six times in 3 Nephi 15 and 16 that "This much did the Father command me" and again "the Father hath commanded me, and I tell it unto you" (3 Nephi 15:16, 19). Given that 3 Nephi has a strong relation to the New Testament gospels and especially to the Fourth Gospel, including three direct allusions to John 10:16 within the space of two chapters (3 Nephi 15:17, 21; 16:3), this textual evidence seems to affirm adequately that the commandment alluded to in John 10:16–18 was not solely that Jesus should take up his life but that he should "take it again" that he might manifest himself unto his other sheep of whom he spoke in John 10:16. On this point, the Book of Mormon clarifies the Bible and affords its readers still more to think about.

Accordingly, in 3 Nephi 15 and 16, Jesus not only speaks of the Jews, Lehi's seed, and of his lost brethren, he suggests that he still has other latter-day sheep among the modern Gentile nations who will also hear his voice and follow him (along with many others of the house of Israel). This last idea that many people would hear his voice by means of a record is not well understood even among Latter-day Saints. That is, 3 Nephi 16 addresses this matter in a particular way that is not commonly appreciated. 3 Nephi 15–16 teaches that because the Jews misunderstood Jesus's original saying (and for many other reasons), a record would be kept and preserved that it might come forth to clarify such matters and fulfill the covenant made to the fathers in a latter-day (see 3 Nephi 16:4–6; see also 2 Nephi 3:12; Ezekiel 34:25; 37:15–20; Isaiah 54:10). And that record, or new covenant, would contain, as does the Bible, a "fulness of the gospel" which would go first to the Gentiles and then to all peoples (3 Nephi 16:6–14). It

would be a covenant of peace (see Isaiah 52:6–10).[46] Or, it would lay down contentions. The Nephite record would be instrumental in gathering the sheep before fire would cleanse the earth. And, whosoever would — *on hearing his voice anew through the Nephite record* — believe in him and obey the requirements of the new covenant would be saved, "body and soul" (1 Nephi 19:7). Whereas those Gentiles (and others) who would not hearken and heed his voice through the Nephite record would, in effect, be "trodden under foot," like "salt that hath lost its savor" (3 Nephi 16:15; see also 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5).

Jesus said that "the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice — that I should not manifest myself unto them save it were by the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 15:23). That paradox — how they (Gentiles) could hear his voice even if he would not speak to them directly — is what makes 3 Nephi 16 of real worth. For after Jesus decrees that the Gentiles should not hear his voice or be personally visited by him, he immediately teaches them that they would have the Holy Ghost: "And blessed are the Gentiles, because of their belief in me, in and of the Holy Ghost, which witnesses unto them of me and of the Father" (3 Nephi 16:6). Because the Gentiles' opportunity to accept the gospel will soon end, the Father pronounces a "wo" on them if they do not repent: "But wo, saith the Father, unto the unbelieving Gentiles. … At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel [covenant], and shall reject the fulness of my gospel," the Father will take the fullness of the gospel from them (3 Nephi 16:8, 10). "And then," Jesus promises, "will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them" (3 Nephi 16:11). This statement prefigures the Nephite record. "But if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel" (3 Nephi 16:13). "But if they will not turn unto me," he continues, "and hearken unto my voice, I will suffer [the Gentiles to be trodden under foot] … as salt that hath lost its savor" (3 Nephi 16:15). Simply put, the record referred to in 3 Nephi 16:4–5 may be understood as the "voice" of the Lord unto the Gentiles that is referred to in 3 Nephi 16:13–15. This reading is not unreasonable, given that Jesus continues the theme in much the same way from 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5. So the Gentiles collectively never directly hear the Lord's voice but do hear it indirectly. The book prepares the way for the eventual corporeal presence of the Lord. The great gathering comes by hearing not by seeing as Nephi teaches (see 2 Nephi 27:12–14).

Perhaps it would be helpful to connect Jesus's teachings in 3 Nephi 15–16 to the promise of the Holy Ghost to the Gentiles. (Note that Isaiah 52:8–10 concludes 3 Nephi 16):

> Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion.
>
> Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.
>
> The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God. (3 Nephi 16:18–20)

Here, once again, the "voice" of the Lord is foregrounded and merged into themes of redemption and salvation. In the Isaianic passage, the "voice," not unlike the brass serpent in the Old Testament story, is "lift[ed] up"; and thereafter, the "waste places of Jerusalem" and "all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God."[47] Jesus expounds Isaiah 52:7–10 in his subsequent Sermon on the Covenant (see 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5). It is beyond the parameters of this paper to analyze that complex sermon here. However, it is a teaching that largely concentrates on the role of the Book of Mormon in the latter-day fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant through the Gentile fullness.[48] 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5 then is not a separate sermon so much as a continuation of the same sermon that began earlier in 3 Nephi 15–16. Although interrupted in places, the Sermon on the Covenant discontinued in 3 Nephi 16:20 resumes in 3 Nephi 20:10 and concludes at 3 Nephi 23:5.

Not unlike Nephi's use of it (see 1 Nephi 22:19–21, 24–28), Jesus's treatment of the Good Shepherd's voice in 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5 is seemingly allied to Deuteronomy 18:15–19, which centers the people on the importance of hearkening.[49] This Mosaic passage with messianic implications is cited twice by Jesus during his visit (see 3 Nephi 20:23; see also Matthew 21:55 JST; Joseph Smith—History 1:40; Acts 3:22–23).[50] The second 3-Nephi-iteration of Deuteronomy 18:15 is particularly telling. This particular deployment of the messianic prophecy comes in the middle of a sermon on the Book of Mormon's latter-day role in fulfilling the covenant. Here are Jesus's words to his other sheep in Bountiful:

> Therefore it shall come to pass that whosoever will not believe in my words, who am Jesus Christ, which the Father shall cause him [latter-day servant] to bring forth unto the

> Gentiles, and give unto him power that he shall bring them [Nephite writings] forth unto the Gentiles, (it shall be done even as Moses said) they shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant. …
>
> And I will execute vengeance and fury upon them. …
>
> But if they will repent and hearken unto my words … I will establish my church among them, and they shall come into the covenant and be numbered [as sheep] among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance. (3 Nephi 21:11, 21–22)

These verses return us to D&C 10, where Jesus said:

> I do not bring it [the Nephite record] to destroy that which they have received, but to build it up.
>
> And for this cause have I said: If this generation harden not their hearts [against my words], I will establish my church among them [see 3 Nephi 20:22, above] …
>
> Therefore, whosoever belongeth to my church [or enters into the new covenant] need not fear, …
>
> But it is they who do not fear me … that I will disturb and cause to tremble and shake to the center. (D&C 10:52–53, 55–56, see also 2 Nephi 28:19)

D&C 10:52–53, 55–56 echoes Nephi's similar teaching on the sheepfold of God in his great prophecy on the role of the Nephite record near the end of his first book:

> For the time soon cometh that the fulness of the wrath of God shall be poured out upon all the children of men; …
>
> Wherefore, the righteous need not fear; for thus saith the prophet, they shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire. …
>
> And the Lord will surely prepare a way [of escape] for his people. …
>
> And the time cometh speedily that the righteous must be led up as calves of the stall. …
>
> And he [the Holy One of Israel] gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth; and he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and there shall be one fold and one

> shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep and in him they shall find pasture. …
>
> Behold, all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people shall dwell safely in the Holy One of Israel if it so be that they will repent. (1 Nephi 22:16–17, 20, 24–25, 28)

The promise of safety, deliverance, and ultimate salvation is unto all who — upon hearing his word/voice — choose to repent of their sins and be baptized in water and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. This constitutes entering the church. The promise is that they who enter the covenant would receive on condition of righteousness the peace of the Holy Ghost and come to a knowledge thereby of the Father and Son, and have his sanctifying and enlarging companionship. This doctrine, that the Gentiles and all nations of the earth would have access to the Holy Ghost (if not the immediate, corporeal presence of God among them to speak to them) before Jesus's second advent, is taught in many places in scripture (see 1 Nephi 13:37; 3 Nephi 15:23; Ether 4:11; Moroni 10:3–5; D&C 5:16). The way that would be prepared as a means of deliverance would be the coming forth of the Nephite record. This same teaching is further fleshed out in Nephi's final prophecy in 2 Nephi 25–30.

Nephi has said more about the worth of the word before the Lord comes in glory than John the apostle or anyone else on record. Notice how his teachings further fuse into one the concept that the promised manifestation of the Holy Ghost answers the paradox suggested in 3 Nephi 15–16: how it was that the Gentiles would in general not directly hear the Lord's voice and yet would hear it in some other way before his coming that they might be gathered and blessed with safety and peace.

Conclusion

In the foregoing, we have seen by means of a comparative method how it is that the Nephite record illuminates the "great mystery" identified in D&C 10. The other sheep referred to in John 10:16–18 were an allusion to those remnants of the scattered house of Israel that the Lord would visit after his ascension and resurrection. Third Nephi makes John 10:16 perfectly clear and yet opens up new vistas to explore. The Good Shepherd in John 10:6–18 was not referring to a ministry among the Gentiles in the first century, as most suppose. It is true that after Jesus's life, the work of salvation turned to the Gentiles, but not at any time did they hear his voice except through his servants who preached by the Holy Ghost. In that sense, the Gentiles heard his voice but did not enjoy his physical

presence. However, what I suggest here is that the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Nephi all speak of a gathering that would occur in a latter day *through a book* that would prepare the way for the coming of the Lord in glory. The record would represent the voice of the Good Shepherd to the nations of the earth. All those who would gather unto *that covenant* would be spared the destruction of the last days and saved in the kingdom of God (2 Nephi 30:10). The Nephite record would allow the Good Shepherd to continue gathering his sheep, on certain conditions, into his expanding fold, so that they might have peace and safety near the end wherever they were on earth. One greater than King David would stand on earth again, but even before that, the Royal Shepherd would invite all to come unto him and have pasture in his true church and fold. One of the most common phrases in the Book of Mormon is "come unto Christ [and its variants]," a phrase that invites readers into the covenant (see 3 Nephi 12:19–20; 3 Nephi 30:2; Ether 4:8–19; and Moroni 10:32). The Nephite record is the necessity of a new covenant because the Gentiles of the first century "strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant" (D&C 1:14–15). The Book of Mormon is the covenant of peace spoken of by the prophets that would prepare the way of the Lord and initiate the fulfillment of the remaining prophecies (see 3 Nephi 15:6–8; see 3 Nephi 29:1–2).

The following visionary excerpt from 1 Nephi 13 gathers into one the pastoral imagery that we as Saints have examined from D&C 10, John 9–10, and 3 Nephi 15–16 much as the Good Shepherd himself gathers his sheep and numbers and knows them. The unity of the scriptures, as evidenced here, is remarkable, and yet they are endlessly generative, as I have explained. After describing the great apostasy among the Gentiles, Nephi records this covenant and promise articulated by the angel sent to him from God, who himself is the ultimate Good Shepherd over his son, his Lamb, and over the others of his family and flock in all nations and across all time periods. Notice the emphasis on the Nephite record as harbinger and establisher of gospel peace:

> I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel. …
>
> For, behold, saith the Lamb: I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them. …

> And in them [the Nephite writings] shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation.
>
> And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb; and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be. (1 Nephi 13:34–37; see Isaiah 52:7–10)[51]

After clarifying that the Good Shepherd has sheep in all places and in all dispensations,[52] Nephi reports that the angel said to him that "other books" and ministering servants would come to gather still "other sheep," for he writes that the angel who revealed these things unto him said that the joining of the records would be instrumental in bringing to pass the prophecies concerning the Good Shepherd and his intention to establish a covenant of peace among all those who would hear his voice through his word. Ezekiel foretold of this destined day when the records would become one and thereafter the divisive nations one:

> These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, … and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father,[53] and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.
>
> And they must come [to him] according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; and the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed, as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; wherefore they both shall be established in one; for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth.
>
> And the time cometh that he shall manifest himself unto all nations [in word], both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles; … then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.
>
> And it shall come to pass, that if the Gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest

> himself unto them in word, and also in power, in very deed [see 1 Nephi 13:35], unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks — and harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered [as so many sheep] among the seed of thy father; yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever. (1 Nephi 13:40; 14:1).

Because of the timely emergence of the Nephite record and the other revelations of the gospel Restoration, all of the Good Shepherd's sheep who have been gathered into and numbered among those within the fold by him and his under-shepherds (as opposed to hirelings) will then lie down with him in green pastures forever and ever (Psalm 23).[54] The records will be one, and so will all the sheep be safely gathered in; all those who have heard his voice in the Nephite record, which record is in effect the covenant of peace to the world (D&C 84:47, 52).[55] Thus salvation will come to all those who embrace "every word that shall proceed from the mouth of God" (D&C 84:44; see also Moroni 7:25). The sheep will have been gathered across time and across geography into the fold.

The other sheep Jesus referred to in scripture are not just those who would hear him after his resurrection and ascension in the first century, but all those who would hear him before his coming in glory as King David, when again the earth would hear his word from his mouth in tangible form (see 2 Nephi 33:4, 10, 14; Ether 4:10–12). Then he will graze them and they will have no more enemies threatening their peace. Sin and death and the devil and endless torment and all robbers and thieves and wolves in sheep's clothing who have sought to steal, kill, and ravage will be far off. The whole earth will be full of the knowledge and peace of the Lord (Jeremiah 31:31–34). Isaiah's prophecies confirm Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's: "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. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6–7; see also Isaiah 40:11).

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Endnotes

1 "A passage like John 10:16 … is thought to refer to the Gentiles," according to Sjoerd L. Bonting, "Theological Implications of Possible Extraterrestrial Life," *Zygon* 38, no. 3 (September 2003): 590.

2 In an interesting article, John Paul Heil moves beyond the common Gentile reading and considers the other sheep phrase from John 10:16 in a prophetic context, much as is done in this paper. Heil says that the "universalizing and unifying effects of the death of Jesus as the good shepherd-high priest will far surpass this narrow nationalism [Jewish nationalism]. The Jesus who sacrifices his own life for the sheep has proclaimed that he has other sheep that do not belong to this fold, that is, all, Jew or Gentile, who are not yet believers. These also he must lead, and they will hear his voice, and there will be 'one sheep herd, one shepherd (10:25–16).'" John Paul Heil, "Jesus as the Unique High Priest in the Gospel of John," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1995): 3–4. However, this instinct as Christians to welcome others in the spirit of inclusiveness has been taken rather far on the grounds that John 10:16 warrants it: "What is important is not that we all have the same ideas, but that there are 'other sheep that do not belong to this fold' (John 10:16 NRSV) and that it is up to Jesus to lead them to pasture. It is a matter of understanding that, despite our differences, we are 'one flock' and have 'one pastor.'" Carlos Eduardo Calvani, "From Modernity to Post-Modernity: Inclusiveness and Making the Myth of Anglican Communion Relevant Today," *Anglican Theological Review* 90, no. 1 (2008): 116.

3 George Handley, "On the Moral Risks of Reading Scripture," in *Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah 2 Nephi 26–27*, ed. Joseph M. Spencer and Jenny Webb, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 89–104.

4 Here one might consider user-friendly modern translations of the Bible and pastoral homilies that make scriptural language accessible through explanation.

5 For instance, in Book 4 of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, an influential Christian epic, Satan is depicted as a wolf entering the fold when he leaps the steep and overgrown western walls of mount Eden to destroy the first man and woman instead of entering by the eastern gate where God's angelic guard is set. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. David Scot Kastan, Book 4 (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2005), 115 lines 183–93. The epic simile describing Satan's breech of Eden compares Satan to the corrupt hirelings (clergy) of the flock (Church) in Milton's day.

6 L.N. Meyer summarizes the use of the shepherd motif in the Old Testament as compared to the New Testament in her article: L.N. Meyer, "Ancient Art, Rhetoric and the Lamb of God Metaphor in John 1:29 and 1:36," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2015): 5.

7 The Book of Ezekiel may be divided into two parts. Part 1 contains the warnings of destruction (chapters 1–33); Part 2 contains the promises of redemption and deliverance (chapters 34–48). Isaiah, influential predecessor of Ezekiel, uses a similar structure. Ezekiel 34 begins the redemptive section of Ezekiel's writings as Isaiah 40 begins that prophet's second section. Thomas Renz writes, "The task of dissociation is undertaken primarily in the first part of the book, while the new orientation is offered particularly in chapters 34–48." Renz further writes, "the resistance of Ezekiel's exilic audience to the prophetic word is a major theme in the book, and 37:1–14 appears to comment on the fact that the prophetic word will accomplish its task … the second time round, in its written form. Including this comment on Ezekiel's literary structure here aids in associating it with the coming forth of the Nephite record later as a redemptive covenant of peace later. Thomas Renz, "Ezekiel, Book of," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 219.

8 $Alma_1$ receives an original revelation when he considers how to deal with the unrepentant of the church. The revelation later is adapted by his son $Alma_2$. Because space is limited it will be best to share only a small amount of what could be quoted from the Book of Mormon from $Alma_1$:

> Thou art my servant … and thou shalt … go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep.

> And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive. (Mosiah 26:20–21)

9 Latter-day Saint scholars and teachers have largely read the other sheep reference in John's gospel and its allusion in 3 Nephi 15 in orthodox ways. That is, the other sheep are usually identified by them with the Lehites gathered at Bountiful and with the other tribes of Israel that Jesus said he would visit after he departed from them (3 Nephi 15:21; 3 Nephi 16:1–3). This view has not changed much over the years. Ray Lynn Huntington's contribution to Dennis L. Largey's encyclopedic resource explains the conventional view. Huntington, "Other Sheep," *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed., Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 623–24. In a more recent comprehensive treatment of 3 Nephi, 3 Nephi 15 was, it appears, essentially passed over by the scholars contributing to that volume of essays. This choice may owe to the fact that the other sheep discussion in 3 Nephi, though extensive, falls in a textual seam between two landmark sermons: 1) the Sermon at the Temple: 3 Nephi 11–14; and 2) the Sermon on the Covenant: 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5 (using here the traditional boundaries of the sermons). *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012). In any case, for LDS scholars, the identity of the other sheep referenced in scripture seems a settled matter.

However, among non-LDS scholars, there has not been so much certainty. Raymond E. Brown, citing another scholar, tentatively suggests that some may have understood the "other sheep" in John 10:16 reference as having to do with other sects within the "larger Christian sectarian movement." He posits that "Johannine Christians" may have understood Jesus's statement as prefiguring a desired unification between "Apostolic Christians" and "Jewish Christians." Brown, "'Other Sheep Not of This Fold': The Johannine Perspective on Christian Diversity in the Late First Century," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 1 (March 1978): 6, 20. Another scholar reminds us that in general, "exegetical diversity and disagreement" is par for the course when wrestling with John's gospel. S.A. Cummins, "John, Book of," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, 394. The Book of Mormon itself explains that the earliest misapprehension of the divine statement about the

other sheep (and, it turns out, the current one) occurred when it first came from Jesus's lips. The Jews that listened to his saying assumed that He spoke of the "Gentiles." This interpretive error was corrected while Jesus taught among his Nephite sheep in the Americas (3 Nephi 15:22–23). I say more on page 149–51 about the now more established notion that the "other sheep" in John 10:16 refers to the Gentiles to whom the Lord's disciples would go.

In 3 Nephi, as we shall see, Jesus tells his assembled disciples that their words (in written form) will go forth, according to the promises/covenants, unto the gathering of his sheep well beyond their small New World context and even well beyond their first-century context. His other sheep would be gathered into his fold through a special sacred record they were then receiving and preparing for future generations (see 3 Nephi 23:4–5).

10 Don Bradley, for instance, has done extensive historical-critical work on the lost 116 pages referenced in D&C 10; see Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories,* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019). Clifford P. Jones has also historically contextualized the revelation; see Clifford P. Jones, "That Which You Have Translated, Which You Have Retained," *Interpreter, A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 43 (2021): 1–64, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/that-which-you-have-translated-which-you-have-retained/. One Latter-day Saint scholar who has ventured away from a historical approach is Nicholas J. Frederick. In his work on D&C 10, he examines John's writing's influence on its language and theological content. Frederick argues that D&C 10 is one of those sections of the Doctrine and Covenants that draw upon John's "logos hymn," or "prologue." New Testament scholars locate the hymn in John 1:1–18. The hymn, as does D&C 10:57–62, calls upon the classic Johannine images of "light and darkness, reception and rejection," according to Frederick. Frederick explains that the hymn in its echoing of Genesis can be seen as the announcement of a "new creation." In John's case, he announced the coming of the Lord to the Jews in the creation language of light breaking forth. In Joseph Smith's case, the hymn's language of light was similarly used to announce the emerging "idea of a restoration"; or, put differently, the breaking forth of new light from darkness was for Joseph "the ideal pericope for the Restoration." On the other hand, the hymn's use of darkness evoked the "Christian

rejection of Jesus" in the one case, and the rejection of the emergent Restoration in the other. Frederick's work is helpful but does not directly connect the Johannine imagery to the breaking forth of the Book of Mormon, nor does he examine D&C 10:64. Frederick only glosses John 10:16 (see D&C 10:59), at one point calling its expression "somewhat awkward." In short, Frederick adds something relevant and interesting with his description of John's creation hymn as heralding a "new creation" in the language of "reception," but adds little regarding the "other sheep" passage recorded in John 10:16 (see D&C 10:59). Nickolas J. Frederick, "Illuminating the Text of the Doctrine and Covenants through the Gospel of John," *You Shall Have My Word*, ed. Scott C. Esplin, Richard D. Cowan, Rachel Cope, 41st Sperry Symposium (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), https://rsc.byu.edu/you-shall-have-my-word/illuminating-text-doctrine-covenants-through-gospel-john.

11 An omission of the revelation's last third, intended or not, is seen in the article on D&C 10 in the work *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion*. The author does not mention the "other sheep," although they are important to understanding the latter part of the revelation. Andrew H. Hedges, "Historical Context and Overview of Doctrine and Covenants 10," ed., Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 720–22. I attribute this oversight to either 1) a greater interest by the author in the historical setting of the revelation, or 2) an uncertainty in the author's mind of how the second half of the revelation is to be approached and articulated.

12 A similar play on words can be found in 3 Nephi 15:15–17, where the Lord speaks of "other tribes" before he references his "other sheep." The relative proximity of the phrases both in D&C 10 and in 3 Nephi suggest that the one phrase is a prefigurement of the other more direct phrase. Of course, it is also helpful to realize that D&C 10 alludes extensively to 3 Nephi. D&C 10:52–54, for instance, alludes to 3 Nephi 12:17; 15:6–7.

13 In using the word *mysterious* to describe the statement in John 10:16, the Lord's own language is merely being used as located in D&C 10:64.

14 "Unto my disciples" is an interesting phrase, since Dana M. Pike writes that the other sheep teaching was given to "Jewish leaders." Dana M. Pike, "Jesus, the Great Shepherd-King," 2007, p. 70, Faculty Publications, Brigham Young University Archives, Provo, UT. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/3692/. Did Jesus have disciples among the Jewish leaders? Or was the teaching meant for the disciples, even though the text suggests rather clearly that Jesus was answering a question posed by Jews among the leaders when He spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd who defends the sheep?

15 They do err in two ways: 1) in that which Jesus said concerning his other sheep as recorded in John 10:16; and 2) in that which Jesus said concerning his gospel and doctrine when on the earth as recorded in the Bible.

16 "This great mystery," which the Lord alludes to, refers to how it is that Jesus could say to his disciples and those gathered to him that "other sheep I have which are not of this fold," and they also shall hear my voice or hear my gospel and doctrine. It has been most interesting this year during our *Come, Follow Me* study of the Doctrine and Covenants to observe how diverse the approaches are to explain this phrase. It is clear that the phrase is not well understood among our gospel teachers. And why would it be? The word *this* in the phrase "this great mystery" is several verses removed from its antecedent noun earlier in the revelation.

17 This claim might seem a stretch, except that the Lord makes this same comparison more than once in scripture. In another example of this comparison, the Lord uses the language of *even so* to signal the equivalence (D&C 45:9). In D&C 45:6–9, the Lord's coming and rejection is compared to the emergence of a "covenant" that is described as a "light," a "standard," and a "messenger" that prepares the way before the Lord. The "messenger," however, is not a human servant but an entity or object, or an "it" (see also D&C 45:28). The "light [, "standard," and "messenger"] are defined as the "fulness of the gospel" (45:28). The Nephites (and Jesus) used the phrase "fulness of the gospel [and its variants]" often to refer to their record, as do latter-day scriptures (see 1 Nephi 10:14; 15:12–14; 3 Nephi 16:4–5; D&C 20:9).

18 This concern is alluded to in Caleb O. Oladipo's article "Living in a Pluralistic Age: Constraints and Opportunities for Christians,"

The Muslim World Journal, 99, no. 4 (2009): 638, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2009.01291.x

19 Andreas J. Kostenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd Who Will Also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12, no. 1 (2002): 71–72, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26422341 and https://repository.globethics.net/handle/20.500.12424/160914.

20 Elder Bruce R. McConkie, for example, separates John 10:16 from its context when he expounds upon it in his work *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, The Gospels* 1, 24th printing, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 486–88. This is how John 10:16 is typically understood. I acknowledge that I am proposing a new expanded approach to the verse, but one that is in harmony with the earlier approach. Or, at least my reading does not discount the resurrection or the Lord's power to lay down his own life (men could not take it from him), if not also take it up again without the assistance of his Father in Heaven.

21 This phrase is used by S.A. Cummins when he compares the "raising of Lazarus" ([John] 11:1–57) and Mary's anointing of Jesus ([John] 12:1–8)." "John, Book of," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, 398. John 9 and 10 are earlier reinforcing narratives.

22 John B. Gabel and others explain that the miracles of Jesus are not the point of John's gospel: it is a "gospel of deeper meanings," in which sayings or teachings weigh more than events. The authors argue that "this gospel is more like a theological meditation punctuated with significant events than the busy narrative of activity in the synoptics." Continuing on in this vein, our authors observe that the five to eight "signs" — each "carefully arranged" — that John describes are actually "acts pregnant with extraordinary meaning, which Jesus chose to perform as a means of revealing aspects of himself." John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler, Anthony D. York, David Citino, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 241–42.

23 In an important article, Andreas J. Kostenberger writes, "The pericope of John 10 is intricately linked with the preceding chapter, John 9 (see 10:19–21)." Kostenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd," 70.

24 S.A. Cummins, "John, Book of," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, 395–96.

25 This reading squares with other treatments of this important character in the Gospel of John, even if it goes further than them. Scholars variously have referred to this man as the "paradigmatic figure of the disciple" or the epitome of "humanhood." Vincent B. Muderhwa, "The Blind Man of John 9 as a Paradigmatic Figure of the Disciple in the Fourth Gospel," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies,* 68, no. 1 (2012): 1, https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/1008. See also J. Thomaskutty, "'Humanhood' in the Gospel of John," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021), https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/6643. Others have seen the man born blind as serving a "typical function" in a "symbolic account." Jesus himself suggests that the man born blind is to represent a sign to others. Raymond Collins indicates that the blind man in the narrative is a "foil for Jesus"; thus, they have an intentional correspondence in the account, however conceived by John. Collins, "From John to the Beloved Disciple: An Essay on Johannine Characters," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 49, no. 4 (1995): 3, 6–7. It is common to view the character of the blind man at the very least as dynamic and emblematic of courage. As a disciple, the healed man is by definition a type of the master but in progress.

26 Scholars have read the character of the blind man as courageous and heroic. Brown, '"Other Sheep Not of This Fold,'" 11–12. I simply suggested here that John represents him as a messianic type. Others have examined John's portrayal of Jesus in John 10 as also courageous and heroic. Jerome H. Neyrey, "The 'Noble Shepherd' in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 281–87, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3268295.

27 Frederick analyzes John's use of this sacred name-title in his work. "Illuminating the Text," 2–3.)

28 Among the "macro-metaphor[s]" in the Gospel of John is one concerning the family. According to L.N. Meyer, "The close relationship and unity between Father and son is strongly emphasized in the Gospel." Meyer, "Ancient Art," 3.

29 Kostenberger takes issue with the episode being described as a parable or an allegory. He would rather it were generically

defined as a "symbol-laden discourse." Kostenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd," 72.

30 In John's account, not all Jews are the same. There is some complexity within the religious demographic as depicted in the sacred narrative. This is commonly understood among scholars.

31 The question when in context may alternatively be phrased? "Will ye also be his *sheep*?"

32 The phrase "except he be of God" is found in John 9:32 footnote 32a of the LDS Bible. It also should be noted that Joseph Smith alters John 9:27 to reflect that *hearing* in the sense that John uses the term is better rendered as *believing*. The Joseph Smith Translation reads: "He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not believe; wherefore would you believe if I should tell you again? and would you be his disciples?" *The Bible Corrected by Joseph Smith,* comp. Kenneth O. Lutes and Lyndell Lutes, (Midway, UT: Lutes, 1999), 287. This reading is consistent with Paul's teaching in Romans 10 that faith or belief comes by hearing (Romans 10:13–17), as well as with John's later usage of the terms in the remainder of the material (see John 10:25).

33 How others understand John 10:16 may be of some interest. Philip E. Thompson indicates that the reference "is pivotal, opening space to address crucial issues facing the church." He categorizes these ecclesiastical concerns as 1) the "ambivalence" of many believers toward the church; and 2) has to do with what is to become of those who "never come in contact with the means of grace, who never hear the gospel." On this second point the author cautions his readers about "exclusivistic" and "imperialistic" approaches to the question of salvation for the nonchurched. The other sheep, then, by this account, are those who are *by choice* unchurched or those who *because of circumstance* are unchurched. Thompson cites Thomas Grantham as saying, "it is Christ's work" to bring these unchurched into the fold: Grantham explains: "Many who never had the means to know the Mediator particularly and distinctly, must yet have salvation by Him." This work, Thompson believes, is carried on in the church's mission of proclaiming the gospel in word and action to those who have not heard. Philip E. Thompson, "John 10:11–18," *Interpretation, A Journal of Bible and Theology* 51, no. 2 (1997): 184–85.

34 Kostenberger says that Davidic typology "constitutes the thread connecting early divine promises with later biblical revelation." Thus," he continues, "at the center of John 10:16's allusive nexus and internal resonances are the traditions around King David." This authority explains that though "Shepherd typology" existed from Jacob forward it became particularly poignant during the "Babylonian exile" and the intertestamental period (Kostenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd," 81, 90–91). As the image of a shepherd who saves from danger is of real value in apocalyptic times of fear and extinction, it has the ability to provide hope. That is one reason Nephi and the writer of Hebrews use shepherd imagery in apocalyptic contexts (1 Nephi 22:24–28; Hebrews 1:1–2; 2:1–5; 13:17, 20). Elder Bruce R. McConkie dedicates two chapters to the scriptural tradition in his work *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 589–611.

35 Kostenberger's work on the Old Testament background of John 10:16 supports the conclusions of this study, even if it does not say what I say. In summary, from the point of view of John's Jesus, Kostenberger systematically examines a "merger of motifs" found in the prophecies of "Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Isaiah" (Kostenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd," 81, 70). He argues that John 10:16 "transcends its immediate context" of "Judaism" and begins to shift the Jewish paradigm as it relates to the work of salvation among others he calls Jesus's "new messianic community" or "new covenant community" (ibid., 71, 96). These "other sheep," Kostenberger asserts, are those in the first-century as yet "outside of God's redemptive sphere ['Gentiles']" (ibid., 74). Thus, while speaking to the Jews, he says, Jesus alludes to the "Gentile mission" (Ibid., 75). The "children of God" referred to in John 11:52 are those "foreigners," according to Kostenberger, among the Gentiles not yet of the covenant who would have the gospel preached to them (ibid., 80). (This aligns with Jesus's description of the incorrect first-century reception of his declaration that he had other sheep [see 3 Nephi 15:22–23]). Nevertheless, Kostenberger says that John 10:16 alludes to a work more of "universal scope" (ibid., 73). Kostenberger particularly locates this universal new covenant of peace in Ezekiel and in Isaiah (especially in Isaiah 56:3–8.)

So the question may arise, if this author finds a universal covenant alluded to in John 10:16, then what does this present study add? For one thing, Kostenberger is only really considering the first-

century implications of John 10:16 (and only among the Gentiles). Moreover, he does not say anything (how could he?) about the associated modern revelations or about the Book of Mormon's role in extending the voice of the Lord to the latter-day, scattered house of Israel through the latter-day non-Jews. On that point, Kostenberger avers that the "covenant of peace" referred to in the Old Testament prophecies is to be fulfilled in the first century (he may be open to a latter-day fulfillment of it too, as argued here), but not through the instrumentality of a new messianic record (or through the Son of God whose living breath it embodies) (ibid., 77). Instead, Kostenberger locates salvation, for "Jews and Gentiles," in the "substitutionary cross-death" of the biblical account (i.e., the death of Christ for his people on the cross as reported in the New Testament), and, by implication, the preaching of the same without reference to the companion Nephite record referred to in Ezekiel 37 (see 2 Nephi 3:12). The argument here, then, is temporally located in the last days before the end of wickedness on earth, while Kostenberger's argument is primarily located in the last days of the Jews (or in the day of their dispersion by the Romans and other nations). This argument centers on the Good Shepherd speaking anew through a revealed book, a new covenant offered unto all. In any case, Kostenberger insightfully speaks of John 10:16 as not only a "paradigm shift" but as a "message of judgment" (ibid., 74–75).

36 As indicated, this reading does not diminish the resurrection, but simply suggests that Jesus was teaching these Jews about other sheep he must visit after his resurrection. Strictly speaking, the Father loves the Son (and us) because of their relationship, not because of anything the Son does. My evidence for this alternative reading follows.

37 More will be said later about this reading. At this stage, however, it should be noted that the "commandment … received of the Father" is not that he (Jesus) would raise himself from the dead in his own time (at least that is not directly stated as a commandment of the Father in the text, but as something that he will do of his own volition because He is the Only Begotten and He has work to do.) Accordingly, Jesus's logic appears to be this: "I have other sheep to visit so I am going to take up my life and visit them because my Father has commanded me to do so. That I might go to them and minister to them is one reason my Father loves me and one

purpose of my being raised. Coming forth from the grave will allow me to obey my Father's command and carry on his work." It is acknowledged that this reading requires connecting seemingly separated terms (about seven lines of material), but the evidence for the reading stems from the text and seems consistent with John's book's challenging and interesting quality.

38 Dana M. Pike asserts that the discord likely arose not because Jesus had spoken of himself as a "devoted and compassionate leader of God's 'sheep,'" but because he had suggested that he was "royal and divine." "It was the royal and divine dimensions of the symbolism of the title 'Shepherd'" according to Pike, "that was so troublesome to them." Pike, "Jesus, The Great Shepherd-King," 72. Be that as it may, I believe that Jesus's statement that there were others besides the Jews to bring into the fold after his life was laid down and taken up would have triggered a hostile reaction, as it would imply that he is God or the Son of God. Indeed, such a radical claim would have led to the persons present calling him "mad" (John 10:20). And that is in fact what the account says occurred.

39 They sensed it was an inspired utterance that they could not fully account for, hence they resorted to the stock and trade idioms of the day.

40 Generally speaking, most scholars divide the primary sermons of 3 Nephi into three parts: 1) the Sermon at the Temple (3 Nephi 11:10–14); 2) the Sermon on the Covenant (3 Nephi 20:10–23:5); and the Sermon on the Church's Name and Gospel (3 Nephi 27:4–22). Instead, I propose a larger structure that incorporates all three of these smaller sermons and spans from 3 Nephi 11–28. (The sermon may actually start as early as Chapter 9.) The sermon, as Mormon arranges it, is balanced and begins in about 3 Nephi 11 and concludes at 3 Nephi 28. The part of interest here falls near the middle of the material, between the Sermon at the Temple and before the Sermon on the Covenant.

41 Grant Hardy has explored this complexity in great depth in his work. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

42 The use of the word *must* here, as in John 10:16, suggests this is the original "commandment" of the Father identified in John 10:18.

43 As mentioned in an earlier footnote, this is the prevailing view among scholars today. However, not all are in agreement. An article found on the Book of Mormon Central website confirms this point: "Scholars are divided on what John 10:16 actually means." "Why Did Jesus Say That There Were 'Other Sheep' Who Would Hear His Voice?" KnoWhy #207, October 12, 2016, https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-did-jesus-say-that-there-were-other-sheep-who-would-hear-his-voice. The article suggests that Jesus sought to gather his lost sheep ("northern Israelites") in the first century in Palestine, as he did when among the Lehites, themselves lost sheep from the house of Israel. The article does not point out that Jesus was generally unsuccessful; hence the Lord turned (or had his apostles turn) toward the Gentiles to establish his gospel covenant. John 10:16, they suppose, prefigures the mission to the Gentiles. The idea here is that the "Gentiles" would not hear his voice but that they would hear the voice of others who represent him. Jesus makes here an interesting distinction between the hearing of his own voice and the hearing of the voice of his servants sent forth in his name. This distinction seems to complicate the notion taught in D&C 1:38.

44 Dana M. Pike claims that a review of the scriptures suggests that "the Lord's flock" refers to his covenant peoples. Pike, "Jesus, the Great Shepherd-King," 69.

45 "Book of Mormon," 1st ed. p. 486, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1830/492.

46 The author has an article just out which, among other things, connects 3 Nephi 16:17–20 to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. It is instructive to note that Isaiah 52:7 is implied in 3 Nephi 15–16 but never quoted. Only Isaiah 52:8–10 is quoted at the end of 3 Nephi 16. Isaiah 52:6–7 predicts that the Lord would speak again to the earth and that he would again publish peace (v. 7). Matthew Scott Stenson, "'The Lord Hath Made Bare His Holy Arm': Nephite Treatments of Isaiah 52:7–10," *The Religious Educator* 22, no. 3 (2021): 36–57.

47 I have argued elsewhere that from a Nehite perspective, reading with faith is a form of seeing and believing (though we think of reading as listening to a text). I also have an article that examines Nephi's authorial choice to compare his record to the brass serpent:

see Matthew Scott Stenson, "'Wherefore, for This Cause': The Book of Mormon as Anti-type of the Brass Serpent," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 43 (2021): 291–318, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/wherefore-for-this-cause-the-book-of-mormon-as-anti-type-of-the-brass-serpent/.

48 For a helpful article that effectively covers this sermon, see Victor L. Ludlow's work: "The Father's Covenant People Sermon: 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5," in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2012), 147–74. Ludlow, among other things, argues that the sermon centers on 3 Nephi 21:4, the "sign of the covenant," even the Book of Mormon (p. 166).

49 Deuteronomy 18:15–19 is a passage that contrasts false sources of revelation (Deuteronomy 18:14) with true sources of revelation (Deuteronomy 18:15–22). In these verses, Moses predicts the coming of "a Prophet" to whom all must listen and obey or be "cut off." Moses says to his Israelite audience that since they were not willing to enter the presence of God and hear his voice when at the foot of Sinai, they will not have the opportunity anymore for a long time. Many of them would be scattered and driven for centuries before they would have such an opportunity again. Thus the Lord says to Moses, "they have *well spoken that* which they have spoken." And what is it they insisted upon? They pled, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not" (Deuteronomy 18:16–17). For many of the house of Israel would not hear the voice of God again until the first century, after the Lord's resurrection and visits to them. Still others later in time among the Gentile nations would only hear his voice through the Holy Ghost when given access to the Nephite record through messengers to the nations.

50 One reason this is interesting is that scholars have speculated that the Johannine community may have developed around certain Old Testament passages of interest to the Jews. Brown, "Other Sheep Not of This Fold," 7. One of those passages that is salient in John's gospel is Deuteronomy 18:15–19.

51 As mentioned, I have an article in *The Religious Educator* on the presence and meaning of Isaiah 52:7–10.

52 The eschatological horizon for sheep is as expansive as the eschatological horizon for the "seed of Christ" as discussed by

Abinadi (Mosiah 15:10–18) or for the submissive as discussed by the angel with King Benjamin (Mosiah 3:19). According to 3 Nephi and D&C 10, the other sheep identified in John 10:16 are not specific to national geography or historical moment.

53 It appears that John the Baptist is John the Beloved's source for the name *Lamb of God* (see D&C 93). John the apostle uses it frequently. The fact that the name is found frequently in Nephi's vision so often (see 1 Nephi 11–14) indicates that Nephi and John the apostle saw much the same vision. Nephi is the only figure in the Book of Mormon to name John the apostle; and John the apostle is the only New Testament apostle named in that record. That Jesus is called Lamb suggests that his Father is the original Good Shepherd. Jesus does only what he has seen his Father do.

54 L.N. Meyer, in her article cited earlier, explores the messianic suggestiveness of Psalms 23. She links the Psalm's pastoral imagery to the prologue of the Gospel of John and John 10. Meyer, "Ancient Art," 5.

55 Elder Dallin H. Oaks has spoken at some length on D&C 84:48 in its scriptural context. The Book of Mormon, according to him, is the new covenant that has come forth "for the sake of the whole world." Dallin H. Oaks, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," Church Educational System Satellite Fireside, Brigham Young University, June 6, 1993, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1994/03/another-testament-of-jesus-christ?lang=eng. D&C 84:45–47 also appears to define the "word of the Lord" as the "voice of the Spirit." Or, rather, the word of the Lord invites the Spirit of the Lord, and when the Spirit speaks to a humble student of the word of the Lord, it is the voice of the Lord to him or her.

Abridging the Records of the Zoramite Mission: Mormon as Historian

Steven L. Olsen

Abstract: *Since the mid-twentieth century, scholarly studies of the literary craftsmanship of biblical texts have revealed considerable insights into the intended purposes of the authors of these scriptural narratives. The present study applies the analytical methods of these studies to Mormon's abridgment of Alma's records of the Zoramite mission (Alma 31–35), revealing intricate patterns of literary conventions ranging from the most specific (e.g., diction, syntax, and figures of speech) to the most general (e.g., rhetoric, tone, and structural logic). From this perspective, Alma 31 provides a framework to distinguish Nephite and Zoramite religious practices and structure the narrative of the entire Zoramite mission, including the missionaries' teachings. More broadly, Mormon's account of the Zoramite mission sets the stage for the general degradation of Nephite society that focuses his abridgment of Nephi's Large Plates for the next one hundred years.*

[**Editor's Note:** This article provides a good example of using literary analysis to enhance understanding of the scriptures. While it was previously published, it has not been widely accessible, and thus we have chosen to republish it to bring it to the attention of readers. It was first presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 25 January 1992, at Westminster College in Salt Lake City. An abridged and edited version was later published as "Patterns of Prayer: Humility or Pride," *Ensign* 22, no. 8 (August 1992), 8–11, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1992/08/patterns-of-prayer-humility-or-pride. The original presentation was included in *The Association for Mormon Letters Annual 1994*, 212–15. The article is reprinted here with the permission of the author, with minor edits.]

Alma's mission to the Zoramites occupies a crucial place in Mormon's record of Nephites at Zarahemla (Alma 31–35). It is located between extended accounts of relatively successful ecclesiastical and military missions (Alma 5–27, 43–62). A detailed examination of this text reveals Mormon's purposes in incorporating it into his abridgment, as well as something of the nature of the record he was creating and of the literary task he had undertaken.

Mormon divides his abridgment of this account into three parts. He identifies Alma's motivations for undertaking the mission and strategies to ensure its successful completion. He details Alma's execution of that plan. And he evaluates the success of the mission as a commentary on the moral condition of Nephite society.

Setting the Stage

Mormon introduces the Zoramites in the conclusion to his narrative about the apostate, Korihor (Alma 30). The text mentions that after Korihor had confessed his iniquity and after his followers had reconverted to the gospel, he went begging for his sustenance among the Zoramites. While going from house to house, he was "run down and trodden down, even until he was dead" (Alma 30:59). By this narrative bridge, Mormon introduces the Zoramites through an action that signals the ignoble end of an individual apostate and the reprehensible moral conduct of an apostate group (see Mosiah 2). The group would ultimately prove more dangerous to the Church and more destructive to Nephite spirituality than the individual Korihor. Aware of this condition of apostasy, Alma organized a mission to reclaim the Zoramites.

Mormon attributes to Alma three motivations for his mission. The first was spiritual. The record mentions that the Zoramites had fallen into a state of apostasy and had become idolatrous (v. 1). Thus, Alma did "sicken because of the iniquity of the people" (v. 1) and was "exceeding sorrowful" (v. 2). He was, above all, concerned for the welfare of their souls. Alma's second concern was tactical. The Zoramites had physically separated themselves from the believers in Christ (vv. 2–3). As a result, the spirituality of the believers per se could not directly influence the Zoramites to return to righteousness. Their successful reconversion could result only from direct intervention. The third motivation was political. Mormon observes, "The Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites" (v. 4). Alma's mission was undertaken partly to prevent this unholy alliance. Motivated by these concerns, Alma concluded that,

> the preaching of the word [of God] … had a more powerful effect upon the mind of the people than the sword, or anything else—therefore Alma thought … [the missionaries] should try the virtue of the word of God. (v. 5)

Mormon's introduction lastly specifies the apostate practice to be the focus of his narrative. Although he mentions that the Zoramites "would not observe to keep the commandments of God" (v. 9) and that "they did pervert the ways of the Lord in very many instances" (v. 11)—the only point of apostasy Mormon specifically mentions is that they did not "observe the performances of the church, to continue in prayer and supplication to God daily, that they might not enter into temptation" (v. 10). By this emphasis, Mormon foreshadows "prayer and supplication" as the focus of this portion of his abridgment.

Reconstructing the Mission

Consistent with his stated purpose for abridging Alma's account, Mormon develops his narrative around the apostate practices of "prayer and supplication." To do so, he cites verbatim the prayers of the Zoramites and of Alma, and he offers simple, direct, and systematic commentary on each. Mormon sets off the apostate prayer by the words "astonishment" and "astonished" (vv. 12, 19), suggesting that this prayer serves as a foil against Alma's true worship. To make this contrast more poignant, Mormon ascribes this reaction not to his own editorial voice but to the missionaries who experience the apostate practice.

Although the rest of Alma 31 is chronologically ordered, its details are structured specifically to reinforce Mormon's editorial purpose. He includes in this historical vignette only details which serve that specific purpose. Mormon emphasizes, first, the exclusivity of Zoramite worship. This worship occurred only at a specific time (v. 12) and place (v. 13). Only one person could worship at a time; the worshipper was separated from the main body of believers (vv. 13–14); and only one fixed prayer was allowed (v. 20). The exclusivity of worship is further reflected in the fact that during the rest of the week this prayer had no effect upon their daily lives (v. 23).

Mormon also emphasizes the static and elitist nature of Zoramite worship. The prayer was fixed in both its delivery and contents. The worshipper had to mount the holy stand alone, "stretch forth his hands toward heaven, and cry with a loud voice" (v. 14). The one prayer that everyone offered expressed the belief that the Zoramites were "chosen" or "elected" to the condemnation of all other people (vv. 16–17, 22) and

thanked their god that "their hearts were not stolen away to believe in things to come" (v. 22). This belief specifically refers to the coming of Christ, which had earlier been prophesied to them (see vv. 8, 17) but which, ironically, "they knew nothing about" (v. 22). Mormon thus reveals the spiritual ignorance to which apostasy had led the Zoramites.

Through the selective use of specific language, figures of speech, and historical details, Mormon represents Zoramite worship as restrictive and static. The "who," "what," "where," "why," and "how" of worship all seek to limit artificially individual and group spirituality. Mormon then identifies four consequences of this apostate practice. He indicates, that the Zoramies had become "a wicked and perverse people" (v. 24). They had become materialistic, having "their hearts … set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods" (v. 24). Mormon also mentions their vanity and pride (v. 25). Having witnessed this gross state of apostasy, Alma was moved to lift "up his voice to heaven" in prayer (v. 26).

Mormon includes Alma's entire prayer as a powerful contrast to the vain recitations of the Zoramites. His prayer was consistent with the "performances of the church" (v. 10), being a "supplication to God." It sought divine assistance to accomplish a righteous purpose: "O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing [the Zoramites] again unto thee in Christ" (v. 34). In contrast to the exclusivity of the Zoramite worship, Alma's invocation took place in the midst of his brethren and on behalf of both them and the Zoramites. Despite the apostate practices of the Zoramites, Alma recognized that "their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren" (v. 35).

Alma's prayer focused on specific details and requests. He identified the points of "gross wickedness" needing correction: pride, hypocrisy, vanity, materialism, elitism, and atheism (vv. 27–29). He followed this inventory with a specific request: that the missionaries be strengthened beyond their normal capacities and comforted in their trials to accomplish their divine mission (vv. 30–33). The prayer ended with a clear declaration of the mission's objective: "that we may bring these, our brethren, again to thee" (vv. 34–35). The prayer of Alma demonstrated his certain faith in and loving relationship with the Lord. Unlike the Zoramites who actively sought to deny the reality of Christ, Alma was anxious that both he and his companions be comforted in Christ (vv. 31–32) and that the Zoramites be brought "again unto [God] in Christ" (v. 34).

Consistent with his analysis of Zoramite worship, Mormon then identifies four consequences of Alma's prayer. Immediately after his prayer, Alma blessed his companions and "they were filled with the Holy Ghost" (v. 36). His prayer sought divine blessings for his companions, and subsequent actions demonstrated the sincerity of this request. Second, the missionaries "did separate themselves from one another" (v. 37), seeking individually to perform their collective mission to restore their brethren to the gospel. The prayer and the mission both sought to unify, not divide, and to integrate, not discriminate, by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Third, the missionaries were not concerned with their material sustenance and comfort but relied on the Lord who "provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst" (v. 38). He also ends this poignant analysis by commenting on why Alma's prayer constituted true worship: "Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith" (v. 38).

In Alma 31, Mormon selects and organizes material from the records of Alma's mission to comment on the state of Nephite righteousness. He does so by means of a simple yet direct and systematic contrast between the worship of two groups, one apostate and the other faithful. The focus of this contrast is their respective prayers, included verbatim in the text. Then through the actions and observations of the missionaries and his own selective but powerful editorial commentary, Mormon contrasts the motivations and consequences of the two forms of worship. Alma 31 not only functions as a powerful commentary on righteousness drawn from the historical narrative, but it also foreshadows the doctrinal discourses Mormon includes from the rest of Alma's mission records. For example, Mormon's declaration that the efficacy of Alma's prayer was a product of his faith (v. 38) directly precedes Alma's powerful discourse on faith (Alma 32).

Other teachings in this narrative correct apostate beliefs and practices specifically detailed in Alma 31. The missionaries taught that true worship should not be limited to a single time and place (Alma 33:4–11), that it confirms a belief in the Son of God (Alma 33:14–23), that the atonement of Jesus Christ provides the only sure hope of salvation (Alma 34:1–17), that prayers can address a wide variety of concerns and need not be fixed (Alma 34:17–27), and that true worship includes having charity for one's fellow humans (Alma 34:28–29).

Commenting on the Mission

In Alma 35, Mormon evaluates further the state of Nephite righteousness by having Alma reflect on the mission, in terms of his three initial motivations for undertaking the mission. Based on Alma's political and tactical motivations, the mission failed. Unrepentant Zoramites join with and incite Lamanites to wage war on reconverted Zoramites (vv. 10–15). This conflict is the first in the series of devastating battles which become the narrative focus of the last half of the Book of Alma (see Alma 43–62).

In terms of Alma's spiritual motivation, the mission was also largely unsuccessful. Although many Zoramites were brought to repentance, Mormon specifically observes that,

> Alma, being grieved for the iniquity of the people … and seeing that the hearts of the people began to wax hard, and that they began to be offended because of the strictness of the word, his heart was exceeding sorrowful. (v. 15, cf. Alma 31:1)

Unfortunately, the "word of God" had not had a greater effect on the people than the sword (Alma 31:5), and Alma's righteous desires for undertaking the mission remained largely unrealized.

This portion of Mormon's abridgment thus serves as far more than a powerful moral or theological lesson. By skillfully abridging the records of Alma's mission, Mormon sets the stage for his account of the disintegration of Nephite society, which began with the wars brought on by dissent and apostasy and culminated in the natural disasters immediately preceding Christ's visit to the promised land.

Although Mormon refers to important evangelical and ecclesiastical missions during the century between the Zoramite mission and the coming of Christ (e.g., Alma 43:1–2), the historical narrative includes little specific information about the church as a force for social order and moral virtue among the Nephites. The government becomes corrupt and increasingly ineffective as an agent for public good, and the responsibility for securing the Nephite social order devolves upon the military (Alma 59–62; Helaman 1–2). The locus of righteousness in the promised land transfers from the Nephites to converted Lamanites. The efforts of these righteous Lamanites to reclaim apostate Nephites are largely rejected (Helaman 5–6, 13–15). Eventually, only famine can get the people to repent; and then when the people reject even the redeeming effect of natural disasters, those disasters destroy nearly the entire civilization (3 Nephi 8–10). After the failure of Alma's mission, only Christ's visit keeps

the second half of the abridgement from documenting one steady and certain path to total destruction. Mormon strategically locates Alma's mission within the Book of Mormon narrative to signal the beginning of this dramatic decline.

The Role of Structure in the Historical Narrative

The full meaning of Alma 31 and of Alma's mission to the Zoramites cannot be comprehended solely from an examination of the contents (i.e., historical, doctrinal, geographical, biographical, social, political, military, and other details) of the records. It is essential, as well, to analyze the methods by which Mormon organized and thereby interpreted those records himself.

The organization, or structure, of Mormon's abridgment of Alma's mission to the Zoramites depends to a great extent upon literary conventions. Mormon uses the various languages of introspection, narrative, dialogue, and observation to create a sense of the dramatic crisis of the mission. Likewise, his restrained but strategically placed and powerfully worded commentary provides the reader with enough emotional distance from the events to grasp more fully the meaning of the lessons being taught. In addition, the order in which Mormon includes details in the abridgment and their juxtaposition, contrast, and harmony create greater insight into the subject than if a strictly chronological documentary had been Mormon's intent.

Through these literary conventions, the narrative reveals the degree to which the human and the divine, the historical and the spiritual, are integrated in the lives of the Nephites, as seen through the eyes of one particularly inspired literary craftsman. If Alma 31 is indicative of Mormon's writing in the rest of the Book of Mormon, we see how finely and completely the messages in this volume of scripture can be articulated. It is unlikely that this level of literary craftsmanship is accidental. More reasonable are the conclusions that Mormon consciously selected and organized material for his sacred history from the voluminous records in the Nephite archives, that he was guided in his writing by a firm understanding of God's purposes in having him abridge the "record of the people of Nephi" (Title Page), and that Mormon came to this understanding through his obedience to the call of a prophet of God to write (Words of Mormon 1:5–7; Mormon 1:1–4; 5:12–14; 6:6).

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Witnessing to the New Witness

Brant A. Gardner

Review of Robert A. Rees, *A New Witness to the World* (Salt Lake City: By Common Consent Press, 2020). 244 pages. $9.95 (paperback).

Abstract: *Robert A. Rees has written about the Book of Mormon for over sixty years. In this book are collected sixteen essays that all focus on different aspects of the text of the Book of Mormon, and two that provide a personalized interaction. The topics range from the examination of the spiritual biographies of Nephi and Ammon to the issue of automatic writing as a possibility for the dictation of the Book of Mormon to an essay examining the Nephite 200-year peace.*

A New Witness to the World collects Robert A. Rees's essays covering six decades of serious thought about the Book of Mormon. It necessarily covers multiple topics. All writers who approach the Book of Mormon naturally view it with the tools in their personal kit. Rees is a literary critic and unsurprisingly examines themes in the Book of Mormon and comparisons to the literary world into which the Book of Mormon was presented. The breadth of his interests over time confirm that he takes the Book of Mormon seriously and thinks seriously about how it speaks to its readers.

Preamble: It Has Opened My Heart Wider to Experience His Love

Rees loves the Book of Mormon. That isn't my description. It is his. The very first line of the very first essay (labeled as the Preamble) is "I love the Book of Mormon" (p. xvi). In total, eight of the sixteen paragraphs in the essay begin with "I love …" and develop a different aspect of the text. It is a testament to his literary sensitivity that the repetition enhances the

message without becoming boring. I would like to imagine that it was an unconscious mirror of the parallelisms in the book he loves.

This essay is the oldest in the collection, originally having been published in 1989. Placing it at the beginning of the collection declares that it also reflects a current sentiment. As a preamble, it is intended to set the tone for the essays to follow, and therefore, the rest of the essays contextually become examples of things that Rees loves about the Book of Mormon.

There are a total of fifteen essays, including the preamble and introduction. Two essays date from the 1980s. Most were published in the 2000s. The introduction, chapter 1, and chapter 13 were written for this volume. I offer my impressions from each of the articles.

Introduction: Carrying Water on Both Shoulders.

Rees's opening sentence is, "How are we to regard the Book of Mormon and how are we to read it?" (p. 1). The essay is a short tour through the ways that the Book of Mormon has been approached through history and moves to important changes that represent the current approaches. Rees's discussion of history is on point, but what resonates is the current situation.

Rees's love for the Book of Mormon is strong enough that he can use critical thinking when approaching it. He clearly keeps up with some of the best of the secular approaches to the Book of Mormon, specifically citing a work by Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hicks.[1] He does not review the articles but emphasizes their insight that the Book of Mormon continues to be polarizing and tends to form two camps — the religious and the secularist (p. 9). The history he has already described is evidence that this is a persistent issue, but it becomes one that needs to have some resolution. We are beginning to see a newer dichotomy that is no longer between true and false, but between faithful examination and secular examination. To be certain, secular examination separates itself from the religious, but it is a qualitatively different approach than past issues that focused only on truth claims. The secularist approach is beginning to accept the Book of Mormon as a text. It is understood that it is a text sacred to a community, but the examinations have no interest in the religious truth claims. Fortunately, neither is it their primary intention to contradict truth claims.

1. Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hicks, eds., *Americanist Approaches to The Book of Mormon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

The current state of Book of Mormon studies places us in a new position. Rees suggests that, too often, "in relation to Book of Mormon scholarship, the heart of the problem as I see it is that those on each side of the argument seem to be talking past one another or, to use Paul's words, to be 'speaking into the air' (1 Cor. 14:9)" (p. 10). Rees sees the emergence of the modern secularist approaches to the Book of Mormon as a good thing, and one that we on the religious side need to understand. He warns, "We need to recognize that as extremes each position is limited. Those who defend the Book of Mormon primarily with their testimonies tend not to be open to some of the challenging questions the book presents in its claim to be a translation of an ancient text. They need to acknowledge that some questions raised by those who do not consider the book of divine origin and influence are worthy of consideration and examination" (p. 11). I find myself nodding in agreement when I read this. Personally, I have found that questions, and even hard questions, can lead to an enriched understanding of the Book of Mormon.

Rees makes explicit his understanding that both secularist and religious approaches to the Book of Mormon can have value. "It is the dialogue between the two, the respect for what they each can teach us, which should inform our quest for both temporary and ultimate meaning, for what our brains can help us discover from empirical evidence and what our hearts can help us discern of what lies beneath and beyond such evidence" (pp. 13–14).

I continue to find myself agreeing with Rees when he begins to propose a way forward. He references his approach, and it is one that I hope more can take: "As I have read the Book of Mormon over a lifetime, I have been committed to thoroughly and thoughtfully considering all the evidence and arguments put forth by scholars, believers, and skeptics as to the book's claims. In doing so, I have tried to employ my best scholarly and analytical skills while being open to intuitive and imaginative perceptions — and appraising and pondering my spiritual experiences with the book" (p. 15). I can say no more than Amen.

1 Nephi: Reading Nephi Closely

As I often did with his introduction, I find myself nodding in agreement with his statement that

> In both fiction and non-fiction, as in real life, first-person narrators can be unreliable storytellers. It isn't that they consciously are deceptive or dishonest (although that possibility always exists), but rather that, like everyone, they

> have their individual motivations, objectives, prejudices, and limitations in the way they see and make sense of the world, including their own and other's experiences. Invariably, if we read closely, such narrators may tell us more than they intend to, including about themselves. (p. 22)

Implicit in Rees's discussion of Nephi's writing is that he understands that Nephi was a real person. That implicit understanding that we are reading a first-person account of a real person distinguishes the way the text can be approached. Were we to approach it as an author's fictitious first-person account, the analysis would differ. The texture of the human reality that can be seen behind the story that is being told would be very different. From a literary perspective, Rees sees an interesting shift occur when the story of Laban's death is told. Rees sees Nephi approaching that scene as a young man, and then notes that after that event, Nephi describes himself as "being a man, large in stature" (1 Ne. 4:31). Rees sees this as a significant turning point in the development of Nephi's character. Becoming a man involved the hard choice of following a divine command that he was hesitant to do.

The article continues in the vein of examining the emotional and spiritual biography of a Nephi whose overt purpose in writing was not to tell that biography. Rees is an acute and perceptive reader, and the Nephi that emerges in this article is a very believable and relatable human, for all that at times Nephi might "come off as a bit insufferable, at least in the beginning" (p. 23).

To Sing the Song of Redeeming Love: The Book of Alma

This essay first appeared in *The Reader's Book of Mormon.* That context is important for understanding what Rees has done in this chapter. Recently the Maxwell Institute commissioned and published a series of Theological Commentaries on the Book of Mormon, with different authors examining (typically) one book. This article is a similar introduction to important themes in one book, the book of Alma. However, because it spends time on important insights, it ignores the half of the book of Alma that endlessly speaks of battles, commanders, and military strategies. Few readers will be disappointed in that lack of coverage.

Rees begins the meat of the essay with the sentence, "It is that burning desire to share the gospel that informs nearly every page of the book of Alma" (p. 38). That encapsulates Rees's interest in the book as well as implicitly foretells the absence of the half of the text that would

be hard-pressed to fit into the idea of sharing the gospel. This is, however, the context in which the first half of the book of Alma feeds the soul.

Because the context of the article was an overview of the book of Alma, Rees moves through the general events of the text and provides perspectives on the lessons that might be learned from those events. Rees provides a section on the "Evocative Silence of Women," which highlights a place where we wish to have known more of the role of women in Book of Mormon times and contrasts that silence to the story of Abish. This section is a good read on understanding the seldom explicit presence yet continued importance of women in the Book of Mormon.

Ammon: The Hero's Journey

Like Rees's essay on 1 Nephi, this essay is a spiritual biography. He is telling Ammon's story, but in a way that expands our understanding of the person and the way his story is told rather than simply recount events. Rees suggests that "the power of this story, with its compelling similarity to other epic heroic journeys, may be one of the reasons Mormon, faced with choosing among a repository of narratives, chose to include it in his abridgement" (pp. 55–56).

For Rees, this sentence is simply a setup for the rest of what he will discuss of Ammon's story. Personally, it is a place where I want to stop briefly and add my own observation about how important Rees's suggestion is. I believe (and I think Rees may as well) that it is important to understand that what we have in the Book of Mormon is a choice Mormon makes from a large amount of material. I would suggest that it is never sufficient to simply accept that a story is told in the Book of Mormon because it happened. Many, many things happened that were not told. Mormon declared, "I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people" (Words of Mormon 1:3). Mormon intentionally selected the stories he included, and understanding the possible reasons he chose them enhances our understanding of the message Mormon wanted us to learn.

The selectivity in Ammon's story appears again when Rees reminds us that of all the events that happened in the fourteen years Ammon spent among the Lamanites, we have only one detailed account: Ammon in the land of Ishmael (p. 58). Rees sees the selection of this story as representing the conversion possibilities of making a missionary journey.

As Rees concludes his brief spiritual biography of Ammon, he declares, "The story of Ammon speaks to those of us in Christ's kingdom today. It reminds us that repentance takes courage and sacrifice; it

inspires us to share the gospel with others, no matter how hardened their hearts or foreign their way of life; it teaches us that heroism inspired of God is possible for all and that with faith we can perform great miracles" (p. 64).

Alma the Younger's Seminal Sermon at Zarahemla

Rees believes Alma the Younger to be "the greatest spiritual orator in the Book of Mormon" (p. 65). To be fair to other Nephite spiritual leaders, he didn't have too much competition for the title. Mormon included five of Alma's sermons, but only one of King Benjamin's (which was pretty darn good, by the way). Still, the point isn't to quibble but to understand, and this essay delves into the first of Alma's recorded missionary sermons after giving up his position as the Chief Judge.

Rees situates Alma's sermon in a Zarahemla that had recently received two immigrant groups from the land of Nephi: those who followed Alma's father and those who fled with Limhi. Both of those groups brought with them the stories of political and religious divisiveness that had plagued them in the land of Nephi. They entered a Zarahemla that had been facing those same pressures. Rees contextualizes Alma the Younger as one who straddled both the division and the need for a return to the religion (and political unity) of the Nephite religion. Alma the Younger had fought against the Nephite religion. After his dramatic conversion, he championed it.

Rees notes, "It is against this backdrop of recently subdued external threat and internal discord that Alma surrenders his position as chief judge and, retaining his office of high priest, goes 'forth among his people … that he might preach the word of God unto them'" (p. 67). The sermon in Zarahemla is the first of this new mission. It is important for its position in history and socio-political impact, but Rees is a literary critic. Rees understandably sees Alma's sermon against his own background in literature, and for the benefit of all who don't have that sensibility, applies it to Alma's sermon in enlightening ways.

It is best to let Rees describe what he examines in Alma's sermon: "Alma's sermon to the church members in Zarahemla as recounted in Alma chapter 5 is a skillful blending of various rhetorical devices, making it an exceptional achievement, a virtual sermonic tour de force. Those include parallelism, allusion, repetition, imagery, symbolism, contrasting pairs, rhetorical questions, and more" (p. 68). I encourage all to read this essay for perspectives and appreciations that are enhanced by Rees's ability to see and explain these details.

The Heart in Alma 12–13

Alma 12–13 contains one of Alma's responses to the religious conflict in Ammonihah, a conflict played out in a confrontation with Ammonihah's Nehorite lawyers. It is a response to issues brought up to contradict the Nephite religion and focuses on resurrection and judgement. Rees doesn't really talk about any of that. His touchpoint for his essay is "harden hearts," a phrase that is repeated three times in Alma chapter 12 (in verses 33, 36, and 37). Rees finally discusses what it means to harden one's heart nine pages in to an eleven-page essay. This simple placement of what may have been the verses that launched the essay should alert readers that this essay ranges much further than a simple commentary on Book of Mormon verses. This is an essay that comments on meaning.

Rees examines the metaphorical use of "heart" in a wide range of literature, and even finds some support in a physiological study of the interaction of heart activity and higher brain centers dealing with cognition and the creation of emotional experience (pp. 80–81). As an essay focusing on a single metaphorical word in the text, it is itself a tour de force in appreciating the world of meaning that can be packed into a single word and how it is used.

Imagining Peace: The Example of the Nephites

This essay revises and consolidates two previous essays on the same topic. I continue to note how (quite unsurprisingly) Rees's background as a literary critic informs the way he sees scripture. As he begins this essay, he tells us,

> Studying scriptures over the years, I have been struck by how often writers of sacred literature use elements of drama to teach important lessons. In fact, one could argue that the extent to which God inspires and directs the writing of scripture demonstrates that he is himself a superb dramatist. The use of dramatic setting, plot, tension, and irony in scripture is similar to what one finds in greater literature, from the Greeks to the present. (p. 91)

This is an interesting way to begin an essay on peace, and signals that the reader is in for more than a declaration that the Nephite two hundred years of peace was a wonderful thing. Rees understands drama, and to build the drama, he contrasts peace with the very unpeaceful prelude.

This is an essay with a perceptive contrast between the days of light at Christ's birth and the days of darkness at his death. The mundane cycle of night and day are seen symbolically and set up an eventual contest between darkness and conflict and Christ, light, and peace. To intensify and replicate the drama, Rees moves to the destruction and darkness. It is not simply night; it is darkness as a possible loss of hope. He recounts the events of destruction that were followed by not just darkness, but thick darkness. He asks, "What would be your psychological state?" (p. 95).

Rees points out the symbolic ray of hope and light. The textual conditions are continuing darkness when a voice is heard. Rees focuses on the declaration that the speaker is "the light and life of the world" (p. 96). The theme of darkness and light returns but is (at this point in the drama) the promise of light. Of course, that light comes with the appearance and teachings of the Savior. It is at this point that Rees follows up on the destruction and darkness by having them replaced first by Christ (the light) and then Christ's teaching of the Gospel of Peace. Rees understands that the combination of the terrors of destruction and the appearance of the God of light bearing a message and method of peace to be the catalyst for the two hundred years of peace the Nephites enjoyed.

Rees doesn't back away from the sad fact that the peace didn't last. War and destruction returned, this time with a destruction that was to end the Nephites as a nation and people. His message for modern times is that

> Since the purpose of drama is to engage us intellectually, imaginatively, and spiritually so that we may see ourselves in the distant mirrors of others' experiences, the dramatic narrative presented in Third Nephi places a special burden on us to be among those who work to end war and establish peace. How are we to do this? To begin with, we can accomplish what the Lord and his Latter-day prophets have urged us to do: "[R]enouce war and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children" (D&C 98:16). (p. 105)

Irony in the Book of Mormon

I must confess that this essay is the most difficult for me to review. It is an essay that almost requires a deep background in literature to even conceive of the article, and a greater appreciation of elements of

literature than what I bring to the essay. That does not mean that it isn't interesting or important (my copy has several paragraphs that I have marked to remember when I return to it). It means that I cannot do it justice. I apologize for that.

Rees begins by defining irony in literature as a concept and proceeds to show how it operates in the Bible. From there, he shows how the biblical forms of irony also appear in the Book of Mormon. His conclusion is, "I contend that the presence of irony in the Book of Mormon cannot be explained as the result of unconscious genius, absorption of biblical texts, or automatic writing. The most logical explanation is that the ancient writers of the Book of Mormon were consciously writing in an ironic tradition that was part of their Hebraic literary heritage" (p. 124).

I am sure that I am not alone in not having noticed this aspect of the Book of Mormon. I continue to be amazed at all the little things in the Book of Mormon that sit so well in an ancient context. I continue to be amazed that a modern Joseph would allegedly have consciously added such obscure details — but neglect to point them out. The very fact that it has required trained readers from multiple disciplines to see the ways that the Book of Mormon fits a different context than the early 1800s emphasizes Rees's conclusion that the text itself is the result of antiquity.

The Book of Mormon and Automatic Writing

There have been many explanations for the Book of Mormon other than the one Joseph Smith declared for it (and which the faithful have accepted). One of the more interesting is the process of automatic writing, also known as spirit writing. The nineteenth century saw more than one of these texts, in which the one producing the text claimed that the contents were transmitted by psychic forces, angelic voices, or some other supernatural entity (pp. 126–27). That very simple definition appears to so closely represent the story of the Book of Mormon's translation that it is no surprise that automatic writing has been proposed as a naturalistic explanation for the composition of the Book of Mormon.

Rees gives a background on the various means by which these spirit writings occurred (p. 127). He notes that the texts that were produced also range in content and could contradict other texts received by the same methods. The range of means of production as well as content led him to declare, "As one examines the wide range of texts claimed to have been received through the process of automatic recording of communication from another realm, it is difficult, if not impossible, to conclude that all such communications are authentic and legitimate" (p. 129).

Despite the difficulty of accepting all such communications, there are those that do appear to defy explanation. Rees notes one case of the medium speaking in a Chinese dialect that has not been spoken in China for centuries. To test the medium, an expert provided the first line of an obscure Chinese poem. The medium finished the poem and used the correct ancient intonation. Rees doesn't know how to explain these cases any better than any of the experts who have examined them. He says, "It is interesting to speculate about the possibility of a variety of communications coming from beyond the veil — some inspired and some not, some truthful and some not, some rational and some not" (p. 131).

How does this apply to the Book of Mormon? The Book of Mormon fits into the general category, but the category is broad enough that it becomes too easy a target. The Book of Mormon also "fits comfortably within the larger world of narrative fiction and the narrower world of sacred literature" (p. 134). Although one application of automatic writing might be to suggest that the Book of Mormon is not the result of authentic divine communication, the various spirit writings that are hard, if not impossible, to explain might also suggest that the Book of Mormon could be an authentically divinely transmitted text (p. 135).

Rees spends time examining scientific evidence that there may be legitimate communication with a spirit realm. It is a fascinating section of the essay. Having suggested that the naturalistic world might support such a divinely transmitted text, Rees summarized elements of the text that appear to be beyond the ability of Joseph's information environment to produce. For that matter, most are beyond any available information environment. Rees concludes, "While I do not find the Book of Mormon a credible candidate as an automatic text, I believe it is more closely related to automatic writing than, say, normative narrative fiction, the former (in some instances) coming from some place outside the author's mind and imagination and the latter coming entirely from within them" (p. 150).

Joseph Smith and the Writers of the American Renaissance

In this essay Rees examines the possibility that Joseph Smith could have authored the Book of Mormon (as opposed to being its translator). As a literary critic, Rees examines Joseph in the literary environment of his contemporaries. Rather than a comparison that simply lists authors, Rees examines topics:

- Literary Imagination and Talent

- Education and Cultural Milieu
- Information/Knowledge Base: What did Joseph Smith Know?
- Sophistication

Rees agrees with many critics that Joseph Smith appears to have had a good imagination. He also notes, "There is an enormous difference between being able to conceive of something imaginatively and being able to shape it into a concrete, complex, and coherent artifact" (p. 153). There is much in the Book of Mormon that required a complex composition, and little else in Joseph's writings suggest that he could produce a work of that length and complexity.

Other writers during the American Renaissance had a better education and, most importantly, their writings show evidence that they had other early writings that influenced their later masterpieces (p. 157). This lack of education also shows in the absence of references to either expected literary tropes or the influence of other writers. While books like Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*[2] have been suggested as influences, the connections are tenuous. The Book of Mormon shows a familiarity with the Bible, but no other work, whether available to Joseph or not.

The Conception and Creation of a Major Work of Literature

This essay follows "Joseph Smith and the Writers of the American Renaissance" and really should be read after that essay. It was first published fourteen years after the previous essay but feels very much like a follow-up that moves more in depth in a comparison of the literary biographies of the major writers of Joseph's era and how they contrast with Joseph.

The Matter of Dictation: Joseph Smith and John Milton

This essay examines Ryan Eikenbary's idea that the best comparison for Joseph Smith would be to John Milton. "Eikenbary's thesis was that just as Milton had absorbed an enormous amount of material through his education and his informational and cultural environment, that allowed him, even after going blind, to dictate his masterful epic, so Joseph Smith did the same in mentally and imaginatively preparing for and then composing and dictating the Nephite-Jaredite narrative. This

2. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews* (Poultney, VT: Smith & Shute, 1823), https://archive.org/details/ViewOfTheHebrews1823EthanSmith/mode/2up.

chapter examines the validity of that comparison" (p. 194). The details of the chapter are important, but one of Rees's observations is one that I haven't quite heard or seen expressed in quite this way:

> Although there is ample evidence, according to Philp Barlow, that Joseph's "mind was demonstrably saturated in biblical language, images, and themes," the same and more could be said of many of his contemporaries (including most of the clerics and others more educated and scholarly than Joseph Smith) who failed to produce anything comparable to the Book of Mormon. (p. 201)

The Midrashic Imagination

Rees opens with the important and expected background necessary for those unfamiliar with what a midrash is. It was when he began to develop his idea of a midrashic imagination in relation to the Book of Mormon that he took a left-turn from my expectations. I had thought he would speak of the plausible use of midrash in the Book of Mormon. He does mention that it would not be surprising if the Nephites brought with them, along with the brass plates, the concept of midrash (p. 217). I agree, and I believe it can be an important understanding of how Nephi writes. But that isn't what Rees wanted to say.

After presenting the introductory explanatory information, Rees declares, "All of this is a prelude to my argument that latter-day Saints should consider writing midrashim in conversation with Restoration scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon" (p. 213). Rees isn't addressing what an ancient author might have done, but what modern writers could do. Perhaps should do. Rees's ideas are interesting and provocative. I hope his ideas find writers willing to write these midrashim.

The Figure of Love: The Ultimate Message of the Book of Mormon

Literary critic that he is, I see Rees intentionally bookending his essays with the theme of love. His preamble spoke of his love for the Book of Mormon. The concluding chapter examines love as "the primary message from the Book of Mormon from the beginning to the end" (p. 229). More than just the theme of love for and in the Book of Mormon, the preamble and the final chapter are personal. In a way, Rees turns a critical eye on himself and his own intellectual and spiritual development. This is not

an examination of the concept of love in a text but of how God's love is manifest through texts and into receptive hearts.

My Last Comments

Readers bring much of themselves to the reading of a book. A good book speaks to the complex times and circumstances the reader brings. I read these articles months before writing this review. I had a hard time thinking of what to write, not because of what Rees wrote, but because of who I was when I picked up the book. I seem to be a little different of a person now. Going through it again I see things I had missed before. At times I wondered why I had marked some of the things I did. Fortunately, Rees has provided a collection of essays that can feed us in many of the personalities and appetites we bring to his table. It is also not a simple one-time meal. Read the book. Then come back to it and read it again. I did. I am better for it.

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The Body As the Temple of God

LaReina Hingson

Abstract: *Metaphors occur when there is a contradiction in the senses of the words used that cause the text to be interpreted non-literally, as Paul Ricoeur has noted. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians describing the body as a temple has been taken to be one such scriptural metaphor: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? … know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). As a metaphor, it is a strong one. The supposed contradiction between a temple and a body includes the inanimate nature of the temple, its holiness in contrast to the natural man, and its unchanging, eternal purpose. The non-literal interpretation of both the body and the temple being a place where the spirit of God can dwell is emphasized in the metaphorical reading and rightly allows us to consider how we may invite the spirit into our lives. Yet to reduce the "body as temple" doctrine to a mere metaphor robs us of the deeper understanding of the body and its role in our spiritual progression and exaltation in the Plan of Happiness. Using the common characteristics archeologists and temple scholars use to classify various sites as temples across the world, this paper shows how the human body can rightly and without contradiction be called a temple of God (D&C 93:35).*

A *physical body* is the foundational purpose of leaving the premortal sphere to come to Earth,[1] however brief or extended our stay may be. It is a necessary step in the progression of a spirit into a soul (D&C 88:15) and toward the exaltation of godhood. And while the body's inherent *natural man* poses opposition to our final state, the body itself is given and retained in resurrection with glory empowering the state of godhood. Without the body, no one can become truly like God.

1. Hartman Rector Jr, "Turning the Hearts," *Ensign* 11, no. 5 (May 1981), 73–75, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1981/05/turning-the-hearts.

There is something glorious about the body itself, then, which is holy and sacred, from the time it is bestowed upon us in mortality to its sanctified possession in immortality.

The holy nature of the physical body is found throughout scripture modern and ancient. Joseph Smith spoke to this holiness of the body when he revealed that "the elements are the tabernacle of God; yea, man is the tabernacle of God, even temples" (D&C 93:35). Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, carries this association between the body and the temple, stating, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? … Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). King Benjamin makes clear that the holiness of the body, as associated with the temple, is separate from the nature of its inhabitor when he states of the wicked soul, "The Lord hath no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples" (Mosiah 2:37).

Understanding our bodies as temples allows us to consider the body in its proper perspective, by providing a greater appreciation for the body, inspiring greater commitment to caring for the body as we do a temple building, and reinforcing a desire to keep the body a consecrated and holy place for the spirit of God to dwell. This article addresses the literal aspects of the body as a holy temple site using the common considerations of temple typology.

Metaphorical and Typological Considerations of a Temple

As French philosopher and theorist Paul Ricoeur observes in his influential work, *Interpretation Theory*, metaphors involve some kind of contradiction in the senses of the words used that cause the text to be interpreted non-literally.[2] In the metaphor of Christ as the "author" of our faith (Hebrews 11), we see the use of the words *author, our faith,* and *Christ* interacting in anomalous or contradictory[3] ways that prevent a literal "dictionary only" interpretation. Whereas *author* can be defined in its usual or literal sense of 'creator of a written work,' *our faith* represents a non-tangible character trait, and Christ is, in part, literally a personage capable of producing a tangible written work and our literal means of salvation. Taken together, however, *Christ*, despite his omnipotence (Mosiah 2–4), is not literally capable of producing

2. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 51.

3. James R. Hurford, Brendan Heasley, and Michael B. Smith, *Semantics: A Coursebook*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 209.

a written work (*author*ing) that results in a non-tangible character trait (*our faith*). Thus, the description of *Christ* as the *author* of *our faith* is contradictory in a literal sense, and the metaphoric combination here must be read as having an unexpected point of commonality that allows us to make sense of this statement.[4] In this case, the unexpected point of commonality that makes *sense* of the otherwise *sense*less contradiction is that both *author* and *Christ* overlap on the concept of *creator*, and whereas an author produces a physical written work, Christ is capable of producing within us what the apostle Paul calls "a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). The metaphor may be strengthened by the idea that an *author* produces a work over a process of time, just as *our faith* is commonly developed in a variety of situations over the process of our lifetime. Metaphors have a strong place in scriptural interpretation as they invite us to consider concepts such as *Christ* and *our faith* from various angles.

And as a metaphor, the apostle Paul's teaching of the body as a temple seems similarly useful and clear: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? … know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Here, the *temple* is inanimate, it is inherently holy, standing as a symbol of eternal, unchanging purposes. The *body* is animate (or at least houses an animate spirit), contains the unholy natural man, and mortal bodies are constantly changing. The non-literal interpretation of both the *body* and the *temple* being a place where the spirit of God can dwell is emphasized in the metaphorical reading and rightly allows us to consider how we may invite the spirit into our lives. Yet to reduce the "body as temple" doctrine to a mere metaphor robs us of the deeper understanding of the body and its role in our spiritual progression and exaltation in the Plan of Happiness. I argue that a clearer understanding of what defines a *temple* causes us to reevaluate the *body,* not as a contradiction or anomaly of what can literally be called a *temple,* but rather as the prototype of what sites can be defined as temples.

In order to explore how the body is a temple site on par with other temple sites ancient and modern, we must first ask: What makes a temple? Former Chief Librarian of the Asian and Middle Eastern division of the New York Public Library John M. Lundquist is among the dominant temple scholars using "complex archeological, architectural,

4. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 50.

and typological discussions" to address this question.[5] Variations exist from site to site and religion to religion, thereby making it untenable to require temple sites to be only those sites that include every possible temple element. Instead, the test to determine what qualifies a site as a temple is one of fitness: does the site in question, taken in aggregate, Lundquist asks, function as a temple?[6]

Five main considerations, developed here as a guide based on James L. Carroll's groupings of the many features Lundquist and others have painstakingly identified as temple features (and discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this article), help answer this question of fitness.[7] They are:

1. Image of the site
2. Activities of the site
3. Purpose of the site
4. Focus of attendees at the site (e.g., creation, holy of holies)
5. Centrality of the site

First, the image or appearance of the site must be considered. In what ways does the site display intentional divine design, delineated space consecrated to spiritual matters, and other considerations of appearance? Second, the activities of the site must be considered. How are we to act in relation to the site? What special activities (such as sacrifices and offerings) or connections with the divine are intended to be engaged in at the site? Third, what is the overall purpose of the site? How does it benefit mankind and help us to ascend to heavenly states? Fourth, what focus does the site aim to direct our attention to? Does it contain a holy of holies or function as a cosmogram of the universe? Are there features of a primordial landscape? Does it engage in discussion or explanation of creation? Fifth and finally, we must consider the site's centrality in community and time. What is the eternal nature and consequence of this site? What place does it hold in economics of the community?[8] Taken as

5. John M. Lundquist and Jared W. Ludlow, "The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2010): 184,

6. John M. Lundquist, "What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology" in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 83–117.

7. James L. Carroll, "A Revised Temple Typology," in *Ayiov Temevos II: Essays on Temples and the Sacred in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2006), 3–5.

8. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 111–12; Lundquist, "What is a Temple?"; and Carroll,

a whole, these five considerations provide a picture of whether the site in question functions as a temple. Applying these five considerations to the physical body demonstrates not only the weight or power of the metaphor of the body as a temple but the *reality* of the body as an actual temple of God equal in function to any constructed temple building.

Image: The Body is Constructed by Divine Design

The first consideration of whether a site is a temple is the external appearance of the site. Temples are often recognizable by their looks being distinctive and intentional in their design. When the Lord commanded a temple to be built in Kirtland, Ohio, he provided not only the revelation of what was to be done, but instructions on its design: "A commandment I give unto you, that ye shall commence a work of laying out and preparing a beginning and foundation … here in the land of Kirtland, beginning at my house. And behold, it must be done *according to the pattern* which I have given unto you" (D&C 94:1–2). The rest of the revelation proceeds with such architectural details as the exact width and length dimensions of various rooms, the relation of chambers and floors to each other, and overall design. The Nauvoo Temple construction similarly describes God-given design plans.[9] This practice of intentionality in design was recorded anciently as well in many temples, including when the prophet Ezekiel was given a vision of a temple (Ezekiel 40).

The natural design of our bodies, including our sex, is also done "according to the pattern" the council of the Gods set in the beginning, a pattern *after our likeness*, and *in their own image*. Abraham records that as part of the creation of the Earth, "the Gods … said: Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness," and this was carefully carried out: "So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them" (Abraham 1:27). This intentionality is highlighted most strongly in the use of the Hebrew verb *banah* in the Genesis account to describe the creation of Eve — a word translated not as "made," but as *built,* just as are "altars, towns, and fortifications, suggestive of considerable effort."[10]

"Revised Temple Typology," 2006.

9. See "William Weeks: Architect of the Nauvoo Temple," Church History, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/content/museum/william-weeks-architect-of-the-nauvoo-temple.

10. E. Douglas Clark, *Echoes of Eden: Eternal Lessons from Our First Parents* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2010), 27. See also Ludwig

Like other temple building constructions, the use of the verb to describe Eve's creation also suggests considerable effort in her physical design. Paul further utilizes this concept of intentional design in his teachings on the body when he declares, "Ye are God's building …. I have laid the foundation [of Christ], and another [you] buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon" (1 Corinthians 3:9–10). As Ricoeur wrote, "There is a triple correspondence between the body, houses, and the cosmos, which makes the pillars of a temple and our spinal columns symbolic of one another, … between a roof and the skull, breath and wind," each designed to connect us to the Sacred.[11] This *divine design* is as inherent to the physical body as any other temple design in that "the plan and measurements of the [body] are revealed by God … and the plan must be carefully carried out."[12]

This concept of intentional construction is fortified by the use of the word *image* in the Genesis account. There, the word *image* is translated from the Hebrew *tselem,* the same word used to describe the creation of idolatrous images.[13] The *image* of the Gods making mankind is a literal construction or "cutting out" — a carving of the likeness of the Gods. The use of *image* appears to be connected with creating a likeness of the divine. To be created in God's image, then, is to be built to represent the divine.

A temple site is not only divinely designed, but often demarcated from the surrounding land by fence or other line to create the set apart space of the site. In individual bodies, it is the flesh that serves to separate the space for our spirit from the rest of the mortal world. The flesh clearly demarks the space between what is physically part of the body and what is separate from the body. Even from the womb, the coalescing of skin cells as the child forms serves to separate the physical nature of the child from that of its mother. That God recognizes this physical boundary of bodies between the mother and child is evidenced in both the placement of a separate spiritual being in the child and in his direct association with that child. As Isaiah declared, "The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name" (Isaiah 49:1; see also Judges 13:5 and Job 31:15).

Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 139. Hereafter referred to as *HALOT.*

11. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory,* 62.

12. Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 3.

13. James Strong, S*trong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1989), 6754. See also *HALOT*, 1028–29.

The only scriptural references that unite the flesh of separate bodies[14] do so under the Lord's covenant of eternal marriage. The command to Adam to "cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Moses 3:24) describes a literal blending of the physical boundary through sexual relations. The recognition by God of this process uniting two bodies into one body (or one flesh) in effect expands the boundary site of the physical bodies under a single temple domain. That male and female[15] are both divine representations instituted in the creation of Adam and Eve (Abraham 4:27 and Genesis 1:26–27) and the only body combination in which two separate bodies are recognized as a single flesh/body suggests further that godhood is, by design, a joint union between the sexes. The covenant to become one flesh becomes a covenant of male and female bounded together in a single godhood and manifested through a single temple site — the physical joining of the bodies. That temple sites and bodies both possess these boundaries of "separate, set-apart, sacral, or guarded space"[16] individually as well as jointly in sexual relations, is indicative of their shared characteristic as an image invoking God.

How we treat our physical bodies, and how we identify with basic elements such as our image and sex, are indicative of how we are aligning the temple of our bodies with the design God has given. Just as temples vary in superficial features of size, shape, color, and other accent features, so too do bodies. All of these superficial features add uniqueness to individual temples, and none of these features impair the nature of the temple in the original design. Temples are, however, preserved as

14. In our fallen mortal world, not everybody born follows the ideal design established with the clear biological sexes of Adam and Eve. Rarely, due to abnormal processes in the womb, a body may be born either without the normal biological indicators of sex (e.g., sex organs or chromosomal XY constructions) or with partial or full sets of both (e.g., sex organs). Neither of these biological indictors is dispositive of a body's sex, and science currently uses several measures of male/female expression in the body. That each of these measures is recorded on a binary scale of male/female still indicates a fundamental reality of the binary biology of a body as male or female. The presence of a gendered spirit, as taught in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," can help parents and the child, through prayerful consideration, make choices regarding their child's sex when these rare situations do arise.

15. The case of conjoined twins is distinct in that it is two spirits in one mortally connected body. In the case of sexual relations between male and female, there are two separate bodies that are labeled by God as one. Thus, the existence of conjoined twins does not negate that the only situation in which two become "one flesh" is under sexual activity.

16. Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 3.

sacred houses of God through the maintenance and care we give them. Just as temple buildings require upkeep and standards of care, God has commanded that our bodies be maintained with standards of care. Just as he gave Adam and Eve their first "coats of skins" (Genesis 3:21), he has counseled us to keep our bodies appropriately covered. "Modesty," Elder Hales taught, "is fundamental to being worthy of the Spirit."[17] Rather than draw attention to the external nature of our physical temples, keeping our bodies private and choosing to cover up reflects the *secret* or sacred nature worthy of a temple of God.[18] As Nibley notes, "No … pretense is necessary for the Latter-day Saints, because for them the temple should be a place for serious concern, with no place for pretense or show, no … gorgeous vestments … [nor] adornments … — it is the temple work alone that counts."[19] The importance of bodily presentation is inescapably representative of our relationship with God and to what extent we choose to convey the Godly image he has created us with. As Levenson explains, "the sight of the Temple conveys a revelation about God."[20] Our bodies, as the image of God consistent with the first characteristic of temples of God, also convey revelations about God by the image we present with them.

Table 1. Temple Imagery and the Body.[21]

Elements	Body
Physical site: The temple is a physical location or area that can be pointed to referentially.	**Physical site:** The body is a physical entity that can be pointed out referentially.

17. Robert D. Hales, "Modesty: Reverence for the Lord," *Ensign* 38, no. 8 (August 2008), 34, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2008/08/modesty-reverence-for-the-lord.

18. Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 5.

19. Hugh Nibley, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, vol. 12, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 70.

20. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 149.

21. The "elements" section of the tables throughout this paper are borrowed from the extended temple typology produced by Lindquist and others and collated in Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology." As such, expansion on these points is not always explored in this paper fully. For more detail on any of these elements, please see the named references.

Elements	Body
Divine design: The plan and measurements of the temple are revealed by God and the plan must be carefully carried out.	**Divine design:** The body is made into male or female in "the image of the Gods," and the creation of a body is carefully carried out
Set apart space: The temple is built on separate, set-apart, sacral, or guarded space.	**Set apart space:** The body has physical boundaries of flesh that create a barrier to help us control what we allow in.

Activities: The Body as a Site of Sacrifice and Offering

The second consideration for a site to be identified as a temple involves the activities that occur in relation to the site. Examples of temple activities include sacrifice, votive offerings, divination and revelation, creation, and even, in ancient times, community meals and festivals.[22] Central to temple activities is the function of *enacting* rituals of these types, which are reserved for sacred purposes at the temple site.

Temples are divinely designed not just for their looks but also for the activities that take place within them. The *image* of the body, therefore, must speak not only to the superficial appearance but to the sacred activities of the site to be considered a temple. Throughout the scriptures, the Hebrew root *dmh* is more prevalently used than *tselem* in the description of the temple's significance.[23] It is the same root used to describe the likeness or image of God (e.g., Isaiah 40:18–19) and therefore an important consideration in the analysis of our bodies as being created in the image (*dmh*) of God and the *dmh* of His temple. Levenson describes the meaning associated with *dmh* as more than superficial *likeness*, but a cognitive activity captured by *thought* and *imagining* — to bring forth an image in the mind. To *dmh* something is not only to create something similar physically, but to fully visualize its reality mentally first. It may be thought of as the spiritual creation in a vision that precedes the physical creation. An image, once it is verbally formed, is then in the temple created physically through the *re-enactment* of the image — a living embodiment of the likeness.[24] The text of Abraham 3, which dramatizes the conversation between the Gods as to the Earth's creation and purpose, is a clear example of a temple drama in which the verbal image of the Earth's purpose and creation is

22. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111–12; Lundquist, "What is a Temple?"; Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 3–5.
23. *HALOT*, 1028–29.
24. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 149.

a (re-)enactment of the image ritualizing God's creation of mankind in physical reality rather than just a telling of it.[25] This enactment, Nibley notes, is "a preparation, a training, a school, and a theater, teaching by precept and example … [to] give you an idea of the '*true* things' it is supposed to represent."[26] Similarly, other sacrifices and offerings, as the basis of temple activities, serve to *image* the celestial nature of God's dwelling place by embodying its likeness cognitively and physically.[27]

Knowing that every person's body is a *dmh* or image of God, the embodiment of his image is formed and enacted through the physical commandments that recall to us the true nature of our bodies. In addition to regulations on the visual aspect of image already mentioned, the commandments related to consumption of foods and fasting (*infra*) serve to focus the maintenance of our bodies on their design in God's image. In the same manner as temples, we are called to guard the holy space that is the body (as separate from the profane, external space beyond the boundary of the body) from the commonplace of the world. From the first man and woman on this Earth, we have had commandments regarding what we do or do not consume.

The idea that what we eat is important was recognized in the early Church when Peter told the Lord that "nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth" (Acts 11:8).[28] The Pharisees were

25. Hugh Nibley, "Abraham's Temple Drama," in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1–42.

26. Ibid., 11.

27. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion,* 148–49.

28. Here, as well as other notable places in the paper, there arise questions related to the controversies of which exact applications do or do not apply. For example, knowing that the law of Moses forbade certain meats but that later those same meats were identified as not inherently polluting the body (Acts 10:15) can raise questions as to why those meats were off limits for a while and whether it was a great sin to have eaten bacon then but not now. Modern concerns like alcohol consumption and marijuana usage for medicinal purposes can also become subject to these time-bound questions. There has always been a law surrounding what we consume, but that law has not stayed constant over the dispensations. This suggests that while there may be certain foods or drinks that are inherently bad for the body under any conditions, obedience to a time-bound restriction on what we eat is more likely to be about, first, purity in following the law itself by denying the body in some way (as the inherent struggle of the natural man discussed in the paper) and second, restrictions that are most helpful to body maintenance at a particular space in time (e.g., 1st century BC Middle East vs. 21st century Argentina). Similarly, in other areas of the paper, dressing modestly raises questions related to transgender

so preoccupied with this guarding of the body's sacredness through the mouth that they took it to an extreme that lacked understanding of the purpose of a sacred space of the body (Matthew 17:18–19). What we physically consume is still important today; however, like the Pharisees we miss the point of the rules surrounding physical consumption when we focus only on the rules themselves. Jesus corrected them on the true purpose of bodily commandments when he chastised them, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me …. Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:8,11). In other words, the letter of the law of what to eat or not must be conjoined with the spirit of this law that the body is for the expression of the holy. One without the other is impotent in function. Jesus further fulfilled this law of bodily consumption as a creation and maintenance of sacred space when he added that we must guard not only what we eat but what we see and hear and learn, saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). How we nourish the body, in thought as well as victual, reflects the cognitive and bodily aspects of *forming an image* of God.

And it is through these victual embodiments of God's image that Levenson's identification of the temple as "the place where effective decrees are issued"[29] — the decrees of moral exercise, government, and stability — gets realized in the body. The commandment of the word of wisdom in which the body is kept undefiled by negative substance (victual or thought) or practice (e.g., behaviors of disordered eating or gluttony) primarily serves the purpose to open the doors to increased spiritual dwelling of God and to his revelation.[30] As D&C 89:18–20 concludes in its description of this commandment regarding consumption:

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dress and expression. While these are all considerations that may be justifiably raised and are interesting to consider, none of these applications are the subject of this paper and are not addressed here. The objective of this paper is simply to precede those discussions and implications with the simple foundational claim that the body is not only a metaphor for the temple but a literal temple in substance.

29. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111; see also Luke 22.

30. *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* (2018), 494–509, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/doctrine-and-covenants-student-manual-2017/chapter-35-doctrine-and-covenants-89–92.

> And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones; And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures.

Creating a physiological environment to allow for revelation is "essential to our salvation."[31]

Within the temple the process of receiving personal revelation is not received the same way every time, and may, on occasion, require an oracle such as the Urim and Thummim. Often in the temple, however, certain areas are designated especially for the purpose of receiving the decrees of revelation (sometimes called places of *divination*); the holy of holies in the tabernacle of Moses's day being one such example (Exodus 33:20; Leviticus 16:12–15). The body's areas designated to *divine* revelation are similarly attested to in the Lord's instruction to Oliver:

> You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me. (D&C 9:8–9; see also Luke 24:32)

Here, two specific locations of the physical body are identified as affected during the revelation process: the bosom and the mind (stupor of thought). Although anciently thought was associated with the bosom not the brain and therefore these were the same area, the language of Oliver's instruction from the Lord here in recent revelation clearly demark the study of the mind as separate from the reception in the bosom. Regardless of the physical location of the mind in the brain or the bosom, the mind as a location is identified along with the bosom in these verses. Both of these areas are kept clear and clean for revelation as the commandments regarding consumption (mental and physical) and law of chastity (addressed later) are observed.

Keeping our bodily appetites in check by not "consuming it on our lusts" (Moroni 9:28; James 4:3) is a restriction, thereby serving as

31. Bruce R. McConkie, "How to Get Personal Revelation," *New Era* 10 no. 5 (June 1980), 46–50, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/1980/06/how-to-get-personal-revelation.

sacrifice we keep at God's command. Because we are the stewards of our bodies, we may, like the priests who felt they deserved a greater portion of the offerings than they were commanded, glut ourselves on physical pleasures available until we are unworthy of serving in the Lord's house (1 Samuel 2). As increases in availability and access to whatever we would like to consume exist in abundant cultures and times, the sacrifice to avoid these consumptions rather than to simply not seek them out is an increase in the nature and form of the sacrifice, not a fundamental change to the type of sacrifice required. As our spirits choose to make the *sacrifice* of observing these commandments, however, we prove ourselves wise stewards of the temple of our bodies and glorify God.

In addition to sacrifices, temples often are accompanied by *votive offerings* in which we seek not to compensate God for our physical stewardships, but to "secure the favor of the deity" by offering gifts.[32] One such offering enacted in the body is found in the law of the fast. Isaiah writes messianically of the benefits of the fast:

> Is not this the fast that I have chosen? … thy light [shall] break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. (Isaiah 58:6–9)

The blessing of a proper fast is, as Isaiah describes it, the favor of God — that His glory accompanies us and he answers our prayers. Like other temples, the body serves as a main site of revelatory decrees and procured favor of God through its sacrifices and offerings, which are instituted to remind us of the true nature of the body as divinely constructed. "The ordinances [of the body] are vital," Nibley taught. "They are not mere forms or symbols, they are analogues … [that] must be performed in this life."[33] To be created in the image of the Gods, then, is to not only possess "the form of godliness" (2 Timothy 3:5) but to take the "spirit and the body" and "fill the measure of its creation" (D&C 88:15, 19) cognitively and physically.

32. Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 4.
33. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 309.

Table 2. Temple Activities and the Body.

Elements	Body
Sacrifice: The temple is a place of sacrifice.	**Sacrifice:** The law of chastity and word of wisdom are bodily sacrifices.
Divination: As part of the revelatory process, "divination occurs by man in a special chamber of the temple."[34]	**Divination:** Revelation occurs in the body, primarily through the bosom and mind.
Revelation, decrees, and governance: The temple is the central location where God's word is revealed to man, usually in the holy of holies, to priests or prophets attached to the temple or to the religious system that it represents.[35] "It is also 'the place where effective decrees are issued,' in other words, the moral as well as the physical capital of the universe, a place 'involved in the government and stability of the Cosmos.'"[36]	**Revelation, decrees, and governance:** The physical body is necessary to personal revelation and is a site of revelation. Revelation often involves moral agency, and our spiritual and temporal state is governed by our responses to the revelation we receive.
Votive offerings: Votive offerings, or "gifts to the gods" are offered at the temple to secure the favor of the deity.	**Offerings:** The law of the fast is the common and universal gift to God each body can apply to secure His favor.
Initiation: Inside the temple, images of deities as well as living kings (in the case of certain non-Latter-day Saint temples in antiquity), temple priests, and worshippers are washed, anointed, clothed, fed, enthroned, and symbolically initiated into the presence of deity, and thus into eternal life.	**Initiation:** The body allows the spirit to be washed (e.g., birth, baptism), anointed (dedicated to God), clothed ("coats of skins"), fed (e.g., word of wisdom and doctrine), enthroned, and returned to the presence of God (resurrection and judgment).

Purpose: Overcoming the Natural Man in the Body

The third consideration of the body as a temple lies in the purpose for which the site exists. The temple is a place where worshippers enact symbolic ascension to heavenly realms often by physically ascending in height throughout the site or by traveling through various rooms within during rituals. In a body, the purpose or "measure of creation" is to allow the soul the opportunity to enact "the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:47). Teachings on the plan of salvation add that in

34. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion,* 148–49.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 111–12.

order to progress as eternal beings toward godhood, we *needed* a body.[37] "To Latter-day Saints, the physical body is sacred. One of the primary reasons we entered mortality was to gain a physical body. It is not only a great blessing now, but also a prerequisite to exaltation and eternal life hereafter."[38] Our spirits made the journey to leave the presence of God and come to Earth to inhabit our physical bodies.[39] This journey is one each of us must make toward salvation. It is, as described of temples, a *pilgrimage* of the spirit through the Cosmos much like the journey a Muslim must make to Mecca or a Latter-day Saint must make to complete temple ordinances.

One day, our same bodies will be immortalized (Mosiah 16:10; Enos 1:27; Alma 41:4) and, dependent on our worthiness, glorified eternally (1 Corinthians 15:41–42). Our mortal bodies, then, also express the idea of *successive ascension* toward godhood. Temples often carry the "idea of a successive ascension toward heaven"[40] in which mankind looks to progress above his or her current state and is oriented toward the heaven, the dwelling place of God. The doctrine of our literal ancestry as spirit children of Heavenly Parents, and therefore capable of attaining godhood ourselves, is a fundamental truth inherent in our understanding of ourselves in the plan of salvation. Knowing both the "point of origin" as spirit children, and "the goal toward which mankind strives" — godhood — is indicative of our bodies as the *sacred center*, reminders of our current state in our progression from one to the other.[41]

And yet the doctrine of the natural man invokes an inherent difficulty within the body: "For the natural man is an enemy to God" (Mosiah 3:19). Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, thus violating the command to guard what entered their body. Sin and death came into the world, and the nature of man became no longer aligned with God. As Origen described the problem, "What good is [a body] in training the mind for contemplation, when the senses present only a vast

37. Carole M. Stephens, "The Family Is of God," Ensign 45, no. 5 (May 2015), 11–13, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/05/general-womens-session/the-family-is-of-god.

38. Spencer J. Palmer, "What Exactly is Reincarnation? Is It Contrary to the Teachings of the Gospel?" *Ensign* 19, no. 8 (August 1989), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1989/08/i-have-a-question/what-exactly-is-reincarnation-is-it-contrary-to-the-teachings-of-the-gospel.

39. Stephens, "Family Is of God."

40. Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 4.

41. Ibid., 3.

array of distractions, of things other than God to attend to?"[42] Alma added, "Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state" (Alma 42:10). How then could such an intrinsic problem allow our bodies to function as a sacred space for the Lord's spirit to dwell?

Although Origen's assumptions and conclusions about the eternal nature of the body deviate markedly at times from the theology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he presents at least one argument worth considering in answering this question: the idea that the body is not merely adorning the spirit like a layer of clothing but is instead an integral state of the soul. "So too with the Fall," he argues, "we descend into density." And if the body and spirit "are on this material spectrum [of density], then it is easier to understand how the spirit might learn something about itself" by descending into a bodily state.[43] Comparing human beings to birds who were not stripped of their wings but merely weighted down so that they could learn to fly with steadfastness, he continues, "the density of our current condition is a remedy because it trains our minds to attend to God while burdened with our own new weight."[44] As Elder Bednar taught, the addition of burdensome weight (including the body) to our situation (mortality) provides the solution the Lord was offering for the development and progression of the soul.[45] Christ, in condescending to mortality, serves as an example of the ultimate overcoming of the natural man when he bore the weight of a fallen world in order to redeem it through the atonement.

Viewed this way, the trials of the body, both internally with the natural man and externally as the result of a fallen world subject to disease, famine, and other "distractions" of the senses, are to be embraced as part of the upward ascension that purifies us before God.[46] As Charles M. Stang of Harvard Divinity School, explains,

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42. Charles M. Stang, "Flesh and Fire: Incarnation and Deification in Origen of Alexandria," in *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism: Studies in Honor of Alexander Golitzin*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov (Boston: Brill, 2020), 134.

43. Ibid., 132.

44. Ibid., 135.

45. David A. Bednar, "Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease," *Ensign* 44, no. 5 (May 2014), 87–90, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2014/05/sunday-morning-session/bear-up-their-burdens-with-ease.

46. There is a difference between accepting and embracing adversity on the one hand and creating it or seeking it out on the other (e.g., Catholic corporeal mortification), the first being the point made here and the second being the leap

> We should not expect, or even want, that God's help will come quickly. It is better … that we are brought to salvation slowly, and only after many trials and tribulations. Like a fever that must run its course before it breaks, [our burdens] must play themselves out, even if, perhaps especially if, we suffer along the way. … For God deals with souls [not as mortal beings but as eternal ones].[47]

Additionally, purification into the new creature comes only through the process, not by short-cutting it. This conflict with the natural man, or the body's weight of distractions, is not inconsistent with considering the body as a temple site. It reinforces the reality of the body as a temple site. Levenson, based on Clifford's work, further describes the temple as a site whose purpose consists of inherent challenges. He says, "It is 'the battleground of conflicting natural forces.'"[48] There are inherent challenges to ascending to godhood, and this is part of the essential nature of a temple experience. As Nibley described, "The way to heaven led through the temple,"[49] and the internal conflict we experience in the body is likewise capable of leading us to heaven. To overcome the natural man (through Christ) is to overcome the inherent difficulties in striving for salvation.

The conflict between the natural man and the spirit, is resolved, as Irenaeus describes, as the weakness of the natural man gives way to the strength of our spirit (here capitalized): "For when the weakness of the flesh is absorbed, it manifests the Spirit as powerful. … [I]t inherits the

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in behavior lacking the underlying purpose of the adversity; similar stories are circulated among Latter-day Saint members when discussing trials and the concept of praying for trials (see Henry B. Eyring's "Mountains to Climb" address for one example). In both adversity and trials, the underlying concept articulated here is the ways in which these experiences work together for your sanctification if you let them. Henry B. Eyring, "Mountains to Climb," *Ensign* 42, no. 5 (May 2012), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2012/05/saturday-morning-session/mountains-to-climb.

47. Stang, "Incarnation and Deification," 137.

48. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 112; see also Richard J. Clifford, "The Temple in the Ugaritic Myth of Baal," in *Symposia: Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900–1975*), ed. Frank Moore Cross (Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979), 145; Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and in the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 7–8.

49. Hugh Nibley, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 4, Mormonism and Early Christianity (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 400.

flesh for itself, and from both of these is made a *living* human being."[50] It is the joining of the body to the spirit, through resolving the inherent conflicts created in the natural man, that we are capable of being inherited, Behr says, by God. This inheritance by God is both the very purpose of the body and the reason for the conflict of the natural man. It is the successful resolution of this conflict that Christ prays for his disciples in his great Intercessory Prayer to the Father: "Sanctify them through thy truth; … That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us[,] … that they may be made perfect [or *whole*] in one" (John 17:17, 21, 23). It is through the conflict with the natural man that we are capable of perfection, of wholeness, of life.

Table 3. Temple Purpose and the Body.

Elements	Body
Successive ascension and pilgrimage: Temples express the idea of a successive ascension toward heaven.	**Successive ascension and pilgrimage:** Our spirits journeyed through the veil to our physical bodies and the body will undergo continued changes until it is immortalized and glorified.
Underworld: The temple is associated with the underworld, the realm of the dead, the afterlife, and the grave.	**Underworld:** Our bodies are fallen as a consequence of this world and will die.
Conflict: The temple is a site of conflicting natural forces where various difficulties are inherent in progression.	**Conflict:** The mortal body does not allow us to see God and live; the "natural man" is an enemy to God in necessary conflict that allows our spirit to progress as it learns to accept and subjugate the body as a part of the soul.

Attendee Focus: The Body as Enabled Creator

The fourth consideration of the body as a temple site is to consider the focus of the site and the content it orients us towards. Lundquist,[51] as summarized by Carroll, states, "The temple is associated with creation …. [T]he waters of life, the tree of life, and many other aspects of temple design recreate the primordial landscape of creation."[52] In particular, the waters

50. John Behr, "Flesh Invested with the Paternal Light: St Irenaeus on the Transfiguration of the Body," in *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism: Studies in Honor of Alexander Golitzin*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov (Boston: Brill, 2020),123, emphasis added.

51. Lundquist, "What is a Temple?"

52. Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 4.

of life in discussions of temple typology are given great significance.[53] As Levenson describes of essential temple site elements, "[Lastly], from the [temple] there frequently is thought to issue a miraculous stream, whose waters teem with supernatural significance." Additionally, temples incorporate as an essential part of the ritualized experience aspects of creation.[54] For the body to be considered a temple site, then, it must not only find parallels in the elements of the primordial landscape but also in the essential aspect of creation.

The primordial landscape contains at least two parallels within the body: the waters of life[55] and the tree of life. The life created in Adam and Eve began the mortal journey for them, but the inherent conflict of the natural man created by the Fall enabled their continued progression toward godhood by enabling them (and consequently us) to partake in God's power to create life. Our physical, mortal bodies provide the site not for just creation and life, but for the creation *of* life. The *waters of life* thus are found in the body's reproductive organs, both in the amniotic fluid of the womb and in the sperm. Thus, both the male and female body each contain a parallel of the *waters of life* that, in combination, contribute to the environment of the creation of life.

Critically, this power of creation is a central function of having a body. As Elder Packer taught,

> Adam and Eve were sent to the earth as our first parents. They could prepare physical bodies for the first spirits to be introduced into this life. There was provided in our bodies — and this is sacred — a power of creation …. The power of creation — or may we say procreation — is not just an incidental part of the plan: it is essential to it. Without it the plan could not proceed. The misuse of it may disrupt the plan.[56]

"In fact," Clark adds, "marriage [in order to exercise the procreative power] *is* the plan. A Jewish mystical teaching tells that 'cosmic marriage

53. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 112.

54. Lundquist, "What is a Temple?"

55. Metaphorically, we can treat the waters of life as symbolic of the revelation that "flows" from heaven toward us. Since revelation is treated elsewhere in this paper and we are concerned not with the metaphors of the body but the literal temple applications, it is not further explored here.

56. Boyd K. Packer, "Why Stay Morally Clean," *Ensign* 2, no. 7 (July 1972), 111, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1972/07/why-stay-morally-clean.

underlies the whole of existence.'"[57] This centrality of the procreative power is true regardless of sexual attraction or orientation.[58] As Dallin H. Oaks explains without caveat, "The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given His children."[59] That power, in and of itself, is what makes the body most in the image of a Creator God. Why? The potential creation of new life is the highest creative act, and the design of the body in a perfected state includes an unlimited capacity to create life. Life, as it extends throughout generations, becomes a family tree. This *tree of life* contains the family members who will be sealed together and presented to God as recorded in the Book of Life (D&C 128:6–8). As Joseph Smith explained, "The doctrine or sealing power of Elijah is as follows: If you have power to seal on earth and in heaven, then we should be wise. The first thing you do, go and seal on earth your sons and daughters unto yourself, and yourself unto your fathers in eternal glory."[60] Through the ability of your body to be physically sealed to its biological predecessors and progeny, your body, and by extension your family, become the *cosmogram* or model by which we understand the universe and eternal life. Through the sealing of physical families to each other, the body also becomes a site of *prosperity* for the family line.

The essential nature of creation in the body is further attested when one considers the centrality of temple design. The central-most place within temple design in Jewish temples was called the *holy of holies* and was reserved for private communion with God by authorized users in restricted settings of place and time. Barker explained that the holy of holies, as the center of the center, was where the power of God was most manifest: "The theology of the holy of holies was the preserve of the high priesthood" and to Jesus, as "the true high priest … the secret things of God [were] committed."[61] Through the sacred nature of the procreative act, we exercise the priesthood of the Everlasting Covenant (D&C 132) as co-creators with God.

These "secret things of God," or the creation of life, are maintained in the secrecy of their discussion and use. Like the secrecy of temple rites, the secrecy of the procreative power "made for a great deal of

57. Clark, *Echoes of Eden*, 17.

58. See Jeffrey R. Holland, *Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001).

59. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Great Plan," *Ensign*, 50, no. 5 (May 2020), 95, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2020/05/51oaks.

60. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 340.

61. Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 21.

misunderstanding and above all opened the door to unbridled fraud."[62] Misuse and misapplication (or total disregard) of the Law of Chastity often revolve around this disconnect between the primary purpose of the body and the secrecy surrounding the sacredness (i.e., sanctity) of its use. Perhaps this is why Paul specifically contextualizes the Law of Chastity within the framework of the body as the temple of the spirit of God. He counseled the Corinthians,

> Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:13, 18–19)

As a temple site, the body belongs to the greater nature of co-creating with God, and as participants in the exercise of this high priesthood, each of us is accountable for the use of the body. The prominent nature and function of human sexuality within marriage as a primary purpose of obtaining a body rightfully conjoins it to the centrality of the *holy of holies* in temple structures.

Finally, Margaret Barker points out that in Jewish theology, the holy of holies starts as relatively empty but progresses through time to a fullness. Whereas the temple (and holy of holies) imagery in the book of Genesis signified an empty heaven of God's presence, the book of Revelation depicting millennial celestiality is full of angels, buildings, jewels, and gold.[63] The body nicely parallels this reality in creation of life as our family trees start "empty" as the body grows and matures, but through time and participation in the ordinance of procreation, they grow and abound until they reach a fulness. Just as the temple was regarded as the giver of abundance and prosperity,[64] so too do our bodies as bearers of lives that are "fruitful" and "multiplied" (Genesis 1:28). Essential to this fulness of the procreative power through family lines is the sealing power[65] that creates the living tree of life; without it, when the temple of the body is destroyed through death, the "whole earth would be utterly wasted" (D&C 2:1–3; JS-H 1:38–39; See also Malachi 4:6).

62. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 365.
63. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 19–21.
64. Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 5.
65. Rector, "Turning the Hearts," 73–75.

The realization of the fulness of the *holy of holies* within the body, then, requires both the utilization of the *waters of life* in the procreative power as well as the manifestation of the *tree of life* in the sealing power. It is what makes the salvation of the dead an essential mission of the Church today.

Given that the procreative power is a central feature in the purpose of a physical body as well as a central feature in the ideation of the body as a temple, it is unsurprising that it, like the holy of holies, is sacredly restricted in use, and that any deviation from that God-ordained purpose risks defiling the whole temple. As Paul explains to the Thessalonians (4:3), the Law of Chastity is God's will, "for … even your sanctification."

Table 4. Temple Content and the Body.

Elements	Body
Waters of life: The temple is often associated with the waters of life that flow forth from a spring within the building itself or is in some other way connected with water.	**Waters of life:** The womb and sperm as necessary to body formation in the creation of life.
Creation: The temple is associated with creation, and creation myths are often recited and reenacted as part of temple worship. Further, temple rituals often make specific reference to the creation or procreation.	**Creation:** The body is intrinsic to the sacred procreative power that creates life.
Tree of life: The temple is associated with gardens and the tree of life.	**Tree of life:** The body forms a biological family line that can be sealed together.
Cosmogram: The temple is seen as a Cosmogram, or model of the universe, often focusing on the welding of heaven and earth.	**Cosmogram:** The body is a model of eternity, welding heaven and earth through the sealing power.
Sacred marriage and fertility: The temple is often seen as a place of marriage, either between the people and their god, or between the gods themselves. These rites are seen as providing fertility and prosperity to the society.	**Sacred marriage and fertility:** The non-symbolic union of man and woman as "one flesh" and the procreative power to "multiply and replenish" provide fertility and prosperity.
Secrecy: The temple and its ritual are enshrouded in secrecy.	**Secrecy:** The body is enshrouded through modesty in dress and appearance, covering the "private parts" of the body, and through the sacred nature of procreation.

Elements	Body
Source of prosperity: The temple is perceived as the giver of abundance and prosperity, and the destruction or loss of the temple is seen as calamitous and fatal to the prosperity of the community in which the temple stood.	**Source of prosperity:** The Earth-bound ordinances of the body are necessary for the salvation of each of us and our relatives, and require the law of the proxy to use the body for the dead to receive the ordinances to avoid the Earth being "utterly wasted."
Unifying institution: The temple is the central, organizing, unifying institution.	**Unifying institution:** Serving the temporal needs of the body of others unifies us; the sealing power unifies us.

Centrality: The Body as the Eternal House of the Lord

The final consideration of the body as a temple site is the centrality it possesses in the larger cosmos. Any temple, insofar as it centralizes and encapsulates the entirety of existence and our relationship to God, becomes "the point in relation to which all space attains individualization and meaning. [A temple] sustains the world, as the umbilical cord[66] sustains the embryo … except that the world does not outgrow [it] as the baby outgrows the need for an umbilical cord." A temple, then, while physical, is not about the location of the place or the shape of the building as much as the characteristics of that place which serve to imbue meaning and self-actualization as a result of stepping into God's presence. One example of this is the use of Liberty Jail, which, during the time Joseph Smith was there, acted as a temple where he received revelation.[67] As Clifford and Levenson each explain, the temple is not meant as a literal description of any heavenly place where God dwells, but rather is representative of "characteristics and potencies of … an infinite and universal scope."[68] It is the temporary connection of heaven and earth, uniting both in the "meeting places at which men … attempted to make contact with the powers above."[69] Nibley and others consistently remark on the central nature of the temple to community life: "It is the hierocentric point around which all things are organized. It is the … 'navel' around which the earth was organized…a scale model

66. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 139–40.

67. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Lessons from Liberty Jail: A Prison and a Temple," [Brigham Young University fireside, Sept. 7, 2008], https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/lessons-liberty-jail/.

68. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111.

69. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 359; Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111.

of the universe … for the purpose of taking our bearings on the universe and in the eternities, both in time and in space."[70] The "navel" to which Nibley refers in his description of the meeting place of gods is both symbolic and actualized in the body. Just as the navel is the point of attachment and connection to your life-giving mother where your body first received life and nourishment through the umbilical cord, the body is the point of attachment and connection to your life-giving God; the place where you can physically and literally meet with Him. For the body to function as a temple site, it need not be a place that God inhabits, but a place to which he is invited to meet with us, and us with him. Thus, the body meets the hierocentric characteristic of a temple, as it occupies a central place in the plan of salvation, allowing us to meet with God in every prayer in any external location.

That our physical bodies are essential, even in their mortal state, to the plan of salvation is repeated throughout scripture. Job writes, "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:26), and Jacob similarly counseled his brethren, "I know that ye know that our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God" (2 Nephi 9:4). "We are not given a different body in the resurrection," Behr explains, "but the same body living now by the spirit."[71] To be sanctified, then, we must observe how we treat our bodies in mortality, for we will have them eternally.[72] This is the doctrine that underlies the physicality of the temple ordinances concerning the body, such as washing and anointing,[73] blessings upon the loins of creation, and other physical enactments. It is the holiness of the bodies God created for us that we are meant to recall and re-enact, more than the temple structures *we created for him*.[74] Without applying temple concepts to the body, temples "do not exalt us; they merely prepare us to be ready in case we ever become eligible." [75]And it is through that care of the body that we ascend, as temples remind us, from the mortal version of our bodies to

70. *Nibley, Temple and Cosmos*, 15.
71. Behr, "Flesh Invested," 123.
72. See Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 310–11.
73. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 46.
74. See, for example, G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL, and Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press and Apollos, 2004), 59–60.
75. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 26.

eternal ones by piercing the veil[76] of the Fall and overcoming the natural man to meet God.[77]

Having considered all five tenets of temple sites, we see that bodies are temples of the Almighty God, with our individual spirits residing as worshippers of God. Like modern church temples, we are each designed uniquely with individual interests, size, and beauty, but with the same underlying foundation and purpose. The most important use of this description of the body as a temple has been to focus the sanctity of a temple as the place of God's dwelling with the sanctity of our own selves as a place where the spirit of God can dwell. It is the place we receive revelation, speak with God, and feel of his Spirit. As future beings capable of godhood ourselves, our meeting with Him becomes a *meeting place of the Gods* in an eternal sense. Perhaps this is why the doctrine of the body as a temple is used almost exclusively when discussing rebellion and the audience's wicked state (e.g., Mosiah 2:37; D&C 93:35; 1 Corinthians 6:19) — it is a call to remembrance of our divinity, the eternal consequences of our attitudes and actions, and an explanation of how to have the Lord "dwel[l] in the midst" (Moses 7:69) of you.

Table 5. Temple Centrality and the Body.

Elements	Body
House of the Deity: The temple is considered the home or house of the deity, and the worshippers are considered the house "servants" of the deity.	**House of Deity:** Bodies are the "dwelling place of the spirit of God" (See 1 Corinthians 3:16), "even temples" (D&C 93:35).
Sacred center: The temple is seen as the sacred center, the point of origin, and the goal toward which mankind strives.	**Sacred center:** Bodies make salvation possible and godhood attainable.

But perhaps the body is more than a temple site. The body may in fact be thought of as the "true temple"[78] after which temple structures are modeled. Where temple buildings have to symbolically discuss creation and life, the body performs creation and life. Where temple buildings symbolically marry mankind with God as "meeting places" with the

76. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 73.

77. Beale, *Dwelling Place of God*, 393.

78. G. K. Beale infers the status of the body as temple, explicitly in the case of Christ: "The redemptive-historical development may be explained as proceeding from God's unique presence in the structural temple in the Old Testament to the God-man, Christ, the true temple." See Beale, *Dwelling Place of God,* 392–93.

divine,[79] the body receives the spirit of God and in its immortal state is capable of housing divinity. Where the temple building performs ordinances to seal families together, the spirit's stewardship of the body makes that sealing effectual. Perhaps, then, instead of the body as a metaphorical analogy for a temple structure, as an initial reading in the scriptures might infer, a true understanding of the body and the purposes of the temple is to understand that the temple building is in fact simply a representation of the body and its function as the house of the Lord. The temple building is the symbolically carved-out *image* of the body in eternity, not the other way around. As we seek out and attend temple services to sanctify us, then, let us not forget that the most important temple is the physical body in which we constantly reside.

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79. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 359; Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111.

Lehi's Dream, Nephi's Blueprint: How Nephi Uses the Vision of the Tree of Life as an Outline for 1 and 2 Nephi

Noel Reynolds

Abstract: *This essay harnesses the late twentieth-century discovery of Hebrew rhetoric by Bible scholars to identify Lehi's dream as the foundation of the carefully constructed unity in Nephi's writings and to identify previously unrecognized elements of that dream which are distributed throughout his final work. The teachings and prophecies in 1 and 2 Nephi are shown to derive from their shared dream/vision. Further, the entirety of Nephi's writings in the Small Plates is shown to be a tightly designed rhetorical production that establishes the centrality of Christ's identity, mission, and teachings for current and future generations of Lehi's descendants and ultimately for the entire world. For decades, interpreters of the Book of Mormon and its teachings have singled out the vision of the tree of life given first to Lehi and subsequently to his son Nephi as one of the book's most prominent elements that require careful study. While literary and visual artists continue to find inspiration in the human dramas retold throughout the book, the text itself features visualizations[1] of its basic doctrinal messages: (1) God on his throne in heavenly council, (2) the tree of life with the straight and narrow path, the iron rod, and the great and spacious building, and (3) the allegory of the olive tree. As I will explain below, those three visual images are part of Lehi's and Nephi's great vision and provide the blueprint for the complex of covenant history and doctrinal*

1. This paper partners the concepts of visualization and verbalization to explain the visions and teachings of the Nephite prophets. *Visualizations* are the word paintings that allow readers to create illustrative pictures in their minds to show how the gospel or the plan of salvation are structured and how they work in human lives. *Verbalizations* are the explanations in words that can facilitate and regulate understanding of those same mental images through verbal discourse. By using both, the text supports the needs of both visual and verbal learners.

teaching recorded by multiple authors throughout the entire book. This article will trace that blueprint in the structure and content of Nephi's Small Plates with limited side glances at the rest of the text.

This paper explains how Nephi's writings constitute a tightly designed rhetorical unity presented as an expansion of the great dream or vision first given to Lehi and subsequently repeated for Nephi. Writing in the last decades of his life, Nephi used the original contents of that vision to lay out several key teachings for his readers:

1. The future coming of Christ into the world to atone for the sins of all peoples and
2. to overcome death by providing a resurrection for every human being.
3. The plan of salvation and the gospel or doctrine of Christ.
4. The prophecies about the future cycles of obedience and rebellion for Lehi's posterity, the house of Israel, and for the Gentile nations.
5. The frequently repeated prophecy that the prophetic records of the Nephites, including Nephi's immediate writing, would play a key role in the salvation of Israel and the Gentiles in the last days.[2]

Three Timeframes, Three Verbalizations, and Three Visualizations

Once the full scope of this great vision is identified, I will show that the central doctrinal teachings of the founding Nephite prophets and their successors are presented therein from the perspectives of three integrated timeframes, each of which is supported with both a visualization and a verbalization for those teachings. The eternal perspective is visualized for Lehi as he sees God on his throne in the heavenly council and verbalized as the plan of salvation. The perspective of salvation history and the future of God's covenant peoples on the earth is visualized in the allegory of the olive tree and verbalized as God's covenants with Abraham, Lehi, and the founding prophets of other dispensations. The perspective of individual lifetimes is visualized in the vision of the tree of life with a straight and narrow path that leads to salvation and with

2. See the discussion in Noel B. Reynolds, "Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant through the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018): 61–66.

many strange and forbidden paths that lead to the great and spacious building and eventually to death. This perspective is visualized further in the ancient doctrine of the two ways — the way of light and life that leads to Christ and eternal life, and the way of darkness and death that leads to the eternal captivity of Satan. The former is verbalized throughout the Book of Mormon as the way or as the gospel or doctrine of Christ which men and women can follow back to the presence of God and constitutes the primary message of the Nephite prophets.

The Larger Project

This paper brings to completion a larger project that has explored both the rhetorical structure and the doctrinal content of the Small Plates of Nephi. While it does exploit insights from contemporary biblical studies, its focus is primarily on the Book of Mormon text for evidence and guidance, and it does not draw significantly on other Book of Mormon scholarship. The resulting large picture can now be evaluated in comparison with other interpretations of Nephi's writing, but that comparison is not attempted here. Because it is the culmination of a larger project, many of the references will be to earlier papers that are part of the same project and upon which this one stands.

With Mine Own Hand

Modern readers have found nothing odd in Nephi's claim that he is writing his own record of prophecies and revelations. But he may have had good reason to emphasize in his opening sentences his role as both prophet and scribe. Because he has "had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God," he asserts that double role five times in rapid succession saying, "*I make a record* of my proceedings in my days" (1 Nephi 1:1).

> Yea, *I make a record* in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians. And I know that the *record which I make* to be true. And *I make it with mine own hand*, and *I make it* according to my knowledge. (1 Nephi 1:2–3)[3]

3. All quotations from the Book of Mormon are taken from the Yale critical edition, including punctuation and capitalization. Italics are sometimes added to call readers' attention to key terminology in this discussion. See Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Having received the highest level of scribal training in a late seventh-century Manassite scribal school in Jerusalem, Nephi would have been highly sensitive to the evolution of the Jewish scriptures in that century as other scribal schools reworked prophetic texts from multiple ideological perspectives.[4] Based on their study of the Hebrew Bible, modern scholars have doubted that any prophets wrote down their own histories or prophecies. As Marti Nissinen has observed, "not a single source from the entire [extra-biblical] documentation even remotely alludes to a prophet writing a text her- or himself."[5] But from his perspective after thirty years of study in the Brass Plates, Nephi could easily have seen that as a prophet's opportunity and duty.

Distributed Pieces of the Vision

The universal approach of the published interpretations of Lehi's dream has been to focus on the descriptions of that vision located in the central chapters of 1 Nephi without recognizing that Nephi possibly held back the most important part of that great vision to share as a flashback and climax to all his writings at the end of 2 Nephi.[6] This paper assembles a broad range of evidences for seeing other passages in 1 and 2 Nephi as additional pieces of that first great vision that are meant to expand its perspective and elevate its importance in Nephite religious culture to the highest level. It argues that Nephi's presentation of this vision is intended to provide a comprehensive guide and lens through which

4. See Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 161–215; and Noel B. Reynolds, "A Backstory for the Brass Plates" (forthcoming).

5. Marti Nissinen, "Since When Do Prophets Write?" in *In the Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes: Studies in the Biblical Text in Honor of Anneli Aejmelaeus*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 72, ed. Krisin De Troyer, T. Michael Law, and Marketta Liljestrom (Leuven, BE: Peeters, 2014), 592.

6. The following presentation will include relevant insights and arguments first published in some of my earlier papers, including "Nephi's Outline," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 20 (Winter 1980): 1–18; "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 31, no.3 (Summer 1991): 31–50; and "The Gospel According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31," *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51–75; "On Doubting Nephi's Division between First and Second Nephi," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 25 (2017): 85–102; "Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: Second Nephi as a Case Study," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 193–210; and "Nephi's Small Plates: A Rhetorical Analysis," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 99–122.

all the principal themes of his writings in the Small Plates are to be understood.

This approach uses but does not extend the excellent work of others who have focused on related traditions in the Ancient Near East.[7] This paper will only show how the vision is used by Nephi to both inform and structure his writings.

Though this paper focuses on Nephi's writings, its findings do apply to the rest of the Book of Mormon text. For example, in 1967 Hugh Nibley pointed to a passage in Helaman that appears to borrow several elements from Lehi's vision.[8]

> Yea, we see that whosoever will lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil and lead the man of Christ in a straight and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery, which is prepared to engulf the wicked, and land their souls — yea, their immortal souls — at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and with Jacob and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out. (Helaman 3:29–30)

As will soon become more evident, Lehi and Nephi really did see essentially the same vision. In a research note first published in 1993, John W. Welch showed how the visions of Lehi and Nephi, though considerably different as presented, could be read as being the same vision.[9] Nephi wrote, "I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me" (1 Nephi 14:29). As will be seen below, there is considerable evidence that items not detailed in Nephi's brief account of the tree of life image in Lehi's vision, and that do show up in Nephi's account of his own version

7. See, e.g., the 40th annual Sperry Symposium compilation, *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision,* ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2011); and the 1988 compilation of papers from the Second Annual Book of Mormon Symposium in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1988).

8. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed., ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 161.

9. See John W. Welch, "Connections between the visions of Lehi and Nephi," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s,* ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 49–53.

of the vision, were also shown to Lehi when he received the original vision. The vision of the tree of life is treated in more detail in Lehi's account, and the prophecies and salvation history are detailed more in Nephi's account. But the evidence seems clear that both had seen all of it. By featuring different elements or dimensions of the larger vision as Lehi's account or Nephi's account or as unlabeled pieces distributed throughout his Small Plates, Nephi may have been able to include the whole vision without unnecessary repetitions.

The Big Picture

When reading 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi, it is important to remember that the text we have is a focused and carefully planned account of spiritual matters drawn decades later from the longer and more complete records written by both Lehi and Nephi, beginning with their original revelations and flight from Jerusalem around 597 BCE.[10] Nephi did not begin writing this second record until thirty years after leaving Jerusalem, and it took him more than a decade to finish it.[11]

All of Nephi's writings in the Small Plates are a single project. Matthew Bowen has shown that all of 1 and 2 Nephi is tied together as a single inclusio, with opening and closing references to "the goodness of God."[12] That suggests to the reader that 1 and 2 Nephi should be seen as a single, carefully designed rhetorical unit — not as an accumulation of independent pieces. The division between Nephi's two books was unnecessary from a historical perspective but was dictated by the rhetorical structures that he devised for the project.[13] The unity of the two books may also be indicated by the fact that in the Original Manuscript

10. In a separate paper, I have identified seven passages where Nephi and Jacob explain the nature and purpose of Nephi's Small Plates. The paper also proposes analyses of the rhetorical structures of those passages and summarizes the rhetorical structure of the Small Plates as a whole that I have published in previous articles. See Reynolds, "Nephi's Small Plates."

11. See 2 Nephi 5:28–34.

12. Cf. 1 Nephi 1:1 and 2 Nephi 33:14. See Matthew L. Bowen, "Nephi's Good Inclusio," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 17 (2016): 181–95 and now reprinted as the lead chapter in a collection of his related papers: Matthew L. Bowen, *Name as Key Word* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2019), 1–15.

13. In response to some interpretations of the Small Plates that propose a different division in the text, I have written an extended explanation of my reasons for opposing any attempts to reject Nephi's obvious textual structure through interpretation. See Reynolds, "On Doubting Nephi's Division."

they bore identical titles — *The Book of Nephi*.[14] Readers should see both 1 and 2 Nephi as products of a mature prophet looking back on his life experiences with decades of added perspective and wisdom. This timing also gave Nephi plenty of time to bring his early education in Hebrew rhetoric to bear on this final project, enabling him to communicate his most important thoughts and memories through both words and rhetorical structures in this second telling.[15]

A Side Comment on Superscriptions, Prefaces, and Chapter Breaks

Other writers have speculated about the authorship and purposes of the superscriptions, prefaces, summaries, and chapter breaks that were part of the original translation of the Book of Mormon. I have not found any of these to be convincing or important for the present study and so will not engage them here. They obviously are not creations of Joseph Smith, because they derive from knowledge of what is coming in the text. Royal Skousen has shown definitive evidence in the photographs and transcriptions of the Original Manuscript and the testimony of witnesses to the translation process that Joseph was dictating one word at a time from his view of 25–30 words that would appear on the stone until they were transcribed.[16]

Nor do they seem to have been written by the authors of the text, at least for the Small Plates translation. Nephi emphasizes repeatedly that the Small Plates were a late composition designed to bring out the spiritual teachings of the revelations and prophecies that he, Lehi, and Jacob had received.[17] But the superscriptions consist of unsystematic lists

14. See the explanation provided in Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2017), 44.

15. In "Nephi and Lehi as Trained Manassite Scribes," I have developed a long, historical argument that presents Nephi as a recipient of the very highest level of scribal training available in seventh-century BCE Jerusalem, together with an outline of the system of Hebrew rhetoric that scholars believe was at its peak of development at that same time.

16. See Royal Skousen, "A Pre-Print of A Discussion of the Book of Mormon Witnesses," *Interpreter Blog*, February 8, 2021, https://interpreterfoundation.org/blog-a-pre-print-of-a-discussion-of-the-book-of-mormon-witnesses-by-royal-skousen/; and Royal Skousen and Robin Jensen eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations,* Vol. 5: *Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon* [facsimile edition] (Salt Lake City: Church Historical Department, 2021), x.

17. See Reynolds, "Nephi's Small Plates."

of historical events that seem quite insensitive to the guiding purposes of the writer and the rhetorical structures he employed.

The prefaces to books abridged by Mormon also tend to be historical or genealogical, very brief, and totally dependent on information the reader would easily get from the text itself. It is not easy to see Mormon penning these. And he would not likely have written prefaces for Nephi's and Jacob's writings in the Small Plates, which Mormon seems to have discovered late in his project and simply attached to his plates.[18]

These reflections admittedly leave us with more questions than answers. One possibility could be that the unknown translator inserted these prefaces. But we know almost nothing about such a hypothetical person other than that he/she produced a text that is most easily identified with Early Modern English (EME).[19] Potentially narrowing that identity, we can note that the superscriptions prepended to 1 and 2 Nephi do include two occurrences of a usage clearly identified with the EME of southern England (*rebelleth* with a plural subject).[20] There are also thirteen brief explanatory prefaces for new sections within books. These seem to fit the same analysis offered above for the book's superscriptions.

The chapter breaks in the original manuscript also remain unexplained. In his work on the critical text project, Royal Skousen speculated that in the transcription process Joseph Smith may have seen some symbol or even blank space that he was interpreting as the end of a chapter — leading him to dictate the word *chapter*.[21] But the significance of these breaks for interpretation of the text remains obscure, and I have not made them an issue in the interpretation of the Small Plates offered in this paper. The clearly labeled break between the first two books

18. See The Words of Mormon 1:3–7.

19. The most recent general exposition of this conclusion is presented in Stanford Carmack, "The Nature of the Nonstandard English in the Book of Mormon," in *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon: Part One: Grammatical Variation*, Royal Skousen (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2016), 45–95. The original version of this paper was published as Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 11 (2014): 209–62.

20. Charles Barber, *Early Modern English,* 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1997), 169.

21. See the explanation in Skousen, *Earliest Text*, xl. Brant Gardner has published a very helpful and detailed study of the chapter breaks we can attribute to Mormon, but that does not apply directly to this study of 1 and 2 Nephi. See Brant A. Gardner, "Labor Diligently to Write: The Ancient Making of a Modern Scripture, Chapters 4 & 5," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 35 (2020): 47–106.

of Nephi is the only such break that seems to have a purely rhetorical function. It does not coincide with any break in the story or authorship, but as will be explained below, it only marks the transition from one major rhetorical structure to the next.

Hebrew Rhetoric

Reviewers of this paper have suggested that it should include at least a brief overview of Hebrew rhetoric as now understood by Old Testament scholars. In other writings I have described in some detail how these scholars have moved on from traditional reliance on Greek rhetoric in their study of the Hebrew Bible. They realized that the Hebrew writers of the seventh century BCE had developed their own rhetorical patterns by which meanings could be communicated at a distance in their texts, a full century or more before the Greeks developed their more direct analytical or logical rhetorical style.[22] We have no access to ancient handbooks or manuals that would give us a seventh-century scribe's perspective on Hebrew rhetoric. We do now have contemporary reconstructions of the principles and patterns that seem to have guided those scribes.[23]

For present purposes, I will introduce *four basic principles* of Hebrew rhetoric that I find most helpful in the interpretation of the Nephite compositions.[24] It helps to understand and appreciate these principles by remembering that they are used to organize and present texts for listeners in an oral culture. I refer to these principles as *repetition, demarcation, parallelism,* and *subordination.* These principles are not the products of the Hebrew language itself, but rather of a literary approach developed among seventh-century Hebrew scribes in their oral culture. The same principles of composition could be used when writing in other languages, as is done by Nephi, who tells us he is writing in Egyptian.

1. Bible scholars and translators have long recognized the Hebrews' penchant for *repetition*. Often viewed as inefficient and unnecessary by translators, *repetition* plays a key role in organizing and signaling the organization of Hebrew texts.

22. Noel B. Reynolds, "The Return of Rhetorical Analysis to Bible Studies," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 17 (2016), 91–98.

23. See the survey of these late twentieth-century efforts in Reynolds, "The Return of Rhetorical Analysis."

24. For a more developed explanation and these four principles of Hebrew rhetoric see Reynolds, "Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts."

2. The Hebrews used repetition and internal rhetorical structuring to *demarcate* subunits of text. The *demarcation* of subunits is important because it enables recognition of larger rhetorical structures in which smaller units serve as pieces. Rhetorical structuring can also partially compensate for the absence of conventions of punctuation.
3. Many forms of *parallelism* appear in Hebrew texts, both to augment or intensify meaning and to signal rhetorical structure. *Chiasmus* is commonly introduced as a form of reverse parallelism.
4. Large rhetorical structures can be formed by the *subordination* of smaller rhetorical structures, which can again be composed of even smaller ones. Some analysts have identified up to six or seven rhetorical levels in some biblical texts. Questions about the chiastic structure of Alma 36 are resolved when we recognize that every word of that chapter fits into a multi-level chiasm.[25]

These principles will surface repeatedly but unheralded in the rhetorical structures of 1 and 2 Nephi that will be identified in the rest of this paper.

Reading and Seeing Things

Hints of Nephi's rhetorical strategy begin to surface when we ask ourselves exactly at what point in his story did Lehi receive the vision of the tree of life. Chapter 1 reports explicitly on two visions received by Lehi in Jerusalem during the first year of the reign of king Zedekiah. In the first one (v. 6), "he saw and heard much," which seemed to confirm what the other prophets were saying, that the people "must repent or the great city of Jerusalem must be destroyed" (1 Nephi 1:4); it left him quaking and trembling "exceedingly."

In the second one (vs. 8–13, 19), while still "overcome with the Spirit" he "was carried away in a vision." Nephi includes more details of Lehi's second vision, all of which may match up with elements of their shared tree of life visions as described in later chapters by Nephi. Specific elements of the second vision that show up later include (1) the opening of the heavens (seeing God on his throne), (2) seeing one descending out of heaven and (3) "twelve others following him," (4) learning of the

25. See Noel B. Reynolds, "Rethinking Alma 36," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2020), 279–312.

abominations of Jerusalem and the coming destruction and captivity of its inhabitants, (5) the future coming of a Messiah, (6) the baptizing of the Messiah, and (7) the redeeming of the world. Lehi's own writings contain many other "things which he saw in visions and dreams" (1 Nephi 1:16).

However, it was not until the full group that would be traveling together to their promised land was assembled at the first camp in the wilderness after two trips back to Jerusalem that Lehi shared his vision of the tree of life. It was after Nephi's acquiring of the Brass Plates, the arrival of Ishmael's family and the gathering of "seeds of every kind" while they "tarried in the wilderness" that Lehi announced, "Behold, I have dreamed a dream, or in other words, I have seen a vision" (2 Nephi 8:2). Nephi does not tell his readers how much time elapsed between Lehi's first vision and his telling of the tree of life vision — whether it was a few weeks or many months. The most problematic text for this equation of the tree of life vision with the second vision Lehi received in Jerusalem is 1 Nephi 9:1: "And all these things did my father see and hear and speak as he dwelt in a tent in the valley of Lemuel." But even this might possibly be read to say that the things Lehi had "seen and heard" in Jerusalem were what he spoke to them in the wilderness.[26] It is also possible that Nephi was shown all the things his father had seen in multiple visions.

As Nephi relates the tree of life segment of Lehi's vision to his readers, he warns them that they are getting the short version. "And now I Nephi do not speak all the words of my father. But to be short in writing, …" (1 Nephi 8:29–30). "And it came to pass that after my father had spoken all the words of his dream or vision, which were many" (1 Nephi 8:36) — "including a great many more things which cannot be written upon these plates" (1 Nephi 9:1). Then, two chapters later, as Nephi records his own version of the vision, readers may start to recognize bits and pieces that sound like the earlier vision Lehi had reported receiving during those first critical days in Jerusalem. Several key sections of Nephi's writings may derive from Lehi's great vision, which are distributed throughout 1 and 2 Nephi as anchoring elements in Nephi's larger rhetorical design.

Twelve Others Following Him

One of the more obvious connections is in 1 Nephi 11:29 in Nephi's account of the ministry of Christ where he mentions seeing "twelve

26. In his discussion of Lehi's visions, Don Bradley also sees connections between the tree of life vision and the vision reported in 1 Nephi 1. See Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 127–33.

others following him." This is the exact phrasing Nephi attributed to Lehi's report of his second vision: "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 noonday. And he also saw *twelve others following him*" (1 Nephi 1:9–10). In Hebrew rhetoric, this kind of repetition invites the reader to reflect on the connections between the two occurrences of the phrasing. While this may not prove that Lehi received his great vision of the tree of life during those first critical days in Jerusalem, it does clearly suggest that possibility.

The Goodness of God

In the second sentence of his first book, Nephi explains: "having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days, yea, having had a great *knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God*, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days" (1 Nephi 1:1). As mentioned above, this early reference constitutes the first element of the inclusio that signals the textual unity of all of 1 and 2 Nephi. It also introduces the most fundamental theme of Nephite theology that both connects the Book of Mormon to the Hebrew Bible and distinguishes the theologies in the two scriptures.[27] Old Testament references to "the goodness of God" usually refer to the Lord's dependability as a covenant partner. This seems to be the very concept Nephi has in mind when at the end of this first chapter he announces his thesis, which describes how the Lord will deliver the faithful from their earthly enemies (1 Nephi 1:20). But Nephi and other Nephite prophets also use the phrase to explain God's motivation for developing a plan of salvation for all his human creations — a plan of eternal deliverance from sin and death for those who will accept and follow his gospel.

The Mysteries of God

The second personal qualification Nephi gives for him to be writing this record is his great knowledge of *the mysteries of God*. Nephi mentions his desires for this knowledge twice when he goes to the Lord for revelation.[28] What may not be obvious to modern readers is that this phrase was linked in Old Testament discourse to the visions of prophets who see

27. For a comprehensive analysis of this Book of Mormon usage, see Noel B. Reynolds, "The 'Goodness of God' and his Children as a Fundamental Theological Concept in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 46 (2021): 131–56.

28. See 1 Nephi 2:16 and 1 Nephi 10:19.

the heavens opened and God on his throne as he receives his prophetic calling. In that experience, the prophet becomes part of the heavenly council and then returns to earth with a divinely appointed message for his people.[29] While older ANE literatures speak of divine councils that send divine messengers to men, they do not include human prophets in that function. "No parallel to this concept of prophecy, or even to Israelite prophecy itself, has thus far been found in the ANE."[30]

Prominent Bible scholar Raymond E. Brown warns strongly against the tendency of Christian scholars to link pre-Christian usages of "mystery" to the *mysterion* of Greek mystery religions. Rather, he sees pre-exilic references to the divine council where secrets are shared with prophets as the source of *the mysteries of God*. This meaning persisted among others down to the first century BCE in pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Prophecies of what would happen to humans at the end of times were also called *mysteries* in this tradition.[31]

Saw the Heavens Open

As Nephi reports, Lehi "saw the heavens open," and saw "God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels." Then he saw "one descending out of the midst of heaven" and "twelve others following him." Then the first "stood before" Lehi and "gave unto him a book and bade him that he should read" (1 Nephi 1:8–11). Modern scholars have claimed that "it was by such a vision that a prophet received

29. The linkage of the prophetic call to the vision of God on his throne in a heavenly council has been documented by biblical form critics and has been recognized to have some similarities with ancient Near Eastern (hereafter ANE) literature that describes a council of the gods. See the very helpful summary of the scholarly literature on the divine council in the Bible and in ANE literature by John W. Welch, which also recognizes and incorporates the findings of earlier Book of Mormon scholars on this topic: "The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem" in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 421–48.

30. The quotation is from E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1980), 218; cf. 279. Interested readers can consult the full discussion on pp. 209–26.

31. Raymond E. Brown, "The Pre-Christian Semitic Concept of "Mystery'," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 20, no. 4 (October 1958): 417–43. John W. Welch has incorporated the insights of Brown and many other scholars into his superb analysis of 1 Nephi 1. See Welch, "The Calling of Lehi."

his commission, his authorization, his perspective, his knowledge of God, and his information about God's judgments and decrees."[32]

The similarity of this description with Nephi's description of his own experience with his vision is striking. Four times Nephi saw the "heavens open." The first time, "an angel came down and stood" before him, becoming his guide through the next part of the vision in which he would first see the unfolding of the events related to the nativity of Jesus Christ (1 Nephi 11:14). The second time, he saw the baptism of Jesus and how "the Holy Ghost came down out of heaven and abode upon him in the form of a dove" (1 Nephi 11:27). He then saw Jesus "ministering unto the people in power and great glory" and "twelve others following him (vs. 28–29). The third time he saw "the heavens open again," and he "saw angels descending upon the children of men" and ministering unto them (v. 30). The fourth time, Nephi "saw the heavens open and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven" as he came down and showed himself to the Nephites about one year after his resurrection (1 Nephi 12:6). And again, he saw the Holy Ghost fall "on twelve others" who "were ordained of God and chosen" (vs. 7).

Nephi does not explicitly state that he saw God on his throne in any of these four occasions in which he reports seeing "the heavens open," but he does later share what the Father and the Son taught him on that occasion.[33] We can remember his clear references to his knowledge of the mysteries of God in his opening lines (1 Nephi 1:1) as his qualification for writing the Small Plates and to his desire to know the mysteries (like Lehi) as expressed in his preface to this vision (1 Nephi 10:19, 11:1–3).

Given the connection explained by Raymond Brown, we can reasonably conclude that Nephi also saw the council of Yahweh, as did his father and as did various Old Testament prophets at the time they received their prophetic calls.[34] Bible scholars have concluded that in these visions of the heavenly council, the prophet becomes a member

32. Welch," Calling of Lehi," 427.

33. 2 Nephi 31:4–21 reports how Nephi was team-taught the doctrine of Christ in connection with his vision of the baptism of Christ. As will be explained further below, this all seems to have been part of the great vision that began with the tree of life.

34. See the detailed explanation and documentation in Welch, "Calling of Lehi," 40–42. Note how five centuries later Alma quotes Lehi's exact words from 1 Nephi 1:8 to describe the experience that launched him as a Nephite prophet to succeed his father: "Yea, and methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God" (Alma 36:22).

of that council, participates in its deliberations, and becomes a trusted emissary to convey its decisions to the people of his generation. From that time on he operates having the eternal perspective of God and his council and can speak for them authoritatively in different situations that may arise with the people.[35]

Reading and Seeing Marvelous Things

Lehi had been praying "with all his heart, in behalf of his people" when these first visions came to him. After he saw the twelve following after Jesus in the second vision, Jesus came

> and stood before my father and *gave unto him a book* and bade him *that he should read*. And it came to pass that *as he read*, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord. And *he read*, saying: Woe woe unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations. Yea, and many things *did my father read* concerning Jerusalem, that it should be destroyed and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword and many should be carried away captive into Babylon. (1 Nephi 1:11–13)

What the Lord gave Lehi to read in this vision would seem to have confirmed his worst fears: he had been praying that somehow these destructions prophesied by other contemporaries might be averted. Nephi no doubt expects his readers to be surprised, to do a double-take, as he reports Lehi responding with great joy:

A And it came to pass that *when my father had read and saw many great and marvelous things*,
B he did exclaim many things unto the Lord, such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty.
C *Thy throne is high in the heavens*,
D and *thy power and goodness and mercy is over all the inhabitants of the earth*.
C* And because thou art merciful, *thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish*.
B* And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God, for *his soul did rejoice and his whole heart was filled*

35. See the extended discussion in Welch, "Calling of Lehi" and H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 167–72, where he reviews several examples of the prophetic call in the Old Testament to support this interpretation of the heavenly council.

> *A** because of *the things which he had seen*, yea, which the Lord had shewn unto him. (1 Nephi 1:14–15)

While there is no straightforward repetition of language to convince us that this important passage is a chiasm, it is not difficult to imagine that Nephi had organized it chiastically. Key quotations that could be reused in various contexts are often presented in chiastic format by Nephite and biblical writers. The principles of Hebrew rhetoric as articulated by modern scholars are not hard and fast rules that ancient authors had to follow. Rather, they are only principles that authors can implement in creative ways to accomplish their purposes. If Nephi was thinking chiastically as a way to set this passage apart as a quotation and as an explanation of Lehi's transformed perspective about the pending destruction of Jerusalem, readers can note how A/A* both refer to what Lehi had read or seen. B/B* both report Lehi's words in praising God from his new perspective and emotional state. C/D/C* give us the content of that new perspective with D at the center, stating the foundation of all subsequent Nephite theology with its dense concatenation of covenant terminology. It is the power, goodness, and mercy[36] of God that explain his great plan of salvation and the gospel as a covenant path back to his presence for all the earth's inhabitants.[37]

Nephi clearly wants readers to ask themselves what the "many great and marvelous things" were that had so dramatically changed Lehi's perspective on the coming calamity for Jerusalem. The great and marvelous things Lehi "read and saw" included the plan of salvation, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the salvation history[38] spelled out at least partially in chapters 8–15, and the expansions and repetitions of each of these presented throughout 1 and 2 Nephi. Nephi clarifies immediately that the things which Lehi "saw and heard" and "read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah and also the redemption of the world" (1 Nephi 1:19).

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36. *Mercy* is the preferred English translation for biblical *hesed* in the KJV. For an explanation of *hesed* as covenantal faithfulness, see Noel B. Reynolds, "Biblical hesed and Nephite Covenant Culture," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2021): 143–72.

37. See Reynolds, "The Goodness of God."

38. I use the terms salvation history and covenant history to refer to the accounts of the Lord's dealings with his covenant people as recorded in scripture or as prophesied in future events and not in the technical senses that have evolved through contemporary Christian theological studies.

Only after seeing all that did Lehi realize how "great and marvelous" are the works of the Lord God and that his "power and goodness and mercy is over all the inhabitants of the earth," and not just the House of Israel. And it was this same perspective from which the mature Nephi drew as he formulated and advanced his thesis for the book of 1 Nephi: "Behold, I Nephi will shew unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord is over all them whom he hath chosen because of their faith to make them mighty, even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20). First Nephi exhibits an elaborate rhetorical structure that organizes its six stories and its visions and prophecies into a powerful proof of that thesis. It is excerpted and summarized below.[39]

The Things Which Lehi Had Read

The things that Lehi "had read" come back to us in 2 Nephi in his final teachings to his children as he explains basic concepts of the plan of salvation to Jacob, who in turn will become the great explainer of the "great plan of our God" (2 Nephi 2:17 and 9:13). In the middle of this principal Book of Mormon discussion of the creation of mankind with agency to choose between good and evil, Lehi appears to refer to that same second vision as his source for this knowledge: "And I Lehi, *according to the things which I have read*, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God" (2 Nephi 2:17).

From our perspective as modern readers, we might speculate that Lehi got all this from reading the brass plates, which may have contained an expanded version of the creation story such as is recorded in the Book of Moses that was revealed to Joseph Smith in 1830.[40] But recognizing that Nephi, as the author, will be using selective repetition of phrases to send his readers back to the original mention of a phrase for more complete understanding of both, we can recognize the reference and

39. See Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline."

40. In Jeffrey Lindsay and Noel B. Reynolds, "'Strong Like unto Moses': The Case for Ancient Roots in the Book of Moses Based on Book of Mormon Usage of Related Content Apparently from the Brass Plates," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 1–92, we have shown the high likelihood that the version of Genesis included in the Brass Plates is quite similar to the Book of Moses.

assume that indeed, the plan of salvation or *redemption* was part of what Lehi learned in the second vision reported in chapter 1.[41]

2 Nephi 31 as a Flashback to the Tree of Life Vision

An exploration of how the principles of Hebrew rhetoric apply to 2 Nephi finds that Nephi's presentation of the doctrine or gospel of Christ in 2 Nephi 31 is set up as a parallel passage to Lehi's teaching of the plan of salvation in chapter 2.[42] That makes it less surprising to discover that chapter 31 is a major piece of that great original vision that Nephi has held back to use as the climax of all his writings.[43]

We are alerted to the flashback character of Chapter 31 in its opening verses when Nephi says: "Wherefore *I would that ye should remember* that I have spoken unto you concerning that prophet which the Lord shewed unto me that should baptize the Lamb of God, which should take away the sin of the world" (2 Nephi 31:4). Readers will note how this baptismal scene is reported by both Lehi and Nephi, so that the flashback takes us to both of their accounts and links the subsequent instruction in the doctrine of Christ to both their visions.[44]

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Having returned to his account of the baptism of Jesus, Nephi describes in more detail how it provides the example to "the children of men" of how they must repent or humble themselves and witness to the Father by baptism in water that they too have covenanted to keep his commandments and to take the name of Christ upon them.[45] Then,

41. The most frequently used label for this plan of salvation in Nephite discourse is *plan of redemption*, and the atonement of Jesus Christ is usually its featured component. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Plan of Salvation and the Book of Mormon," *Religious Educator* 20, no. 3 (2020): 31–53.

42. See Reynolds, "Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts."

43. In his contribution to the 40th annual Sperry Symposium, Jared T. Parker argued that "Nephi used the vision of the tree of life as the model for teaching the doctrine of Christ." Parker recognized a number of elements in 2 Nephi 31–32 that echoed or assumed elements from the tree of life visions, though he did not recognize the two as reports of different parts of the same visionary experience. See Jared T. Parker, "The Doctrine of Christ in 2 Nephi 31–32 as an Approach to the Vision of the Tree of Life," in *The Things Which My Father Saw.*

44. Compare 2 Nephi 31:4 with 1 Nephi 10:7–10 and 11:27.

45. For a comprehensive account of this interpretation of Nephite baptism see Noel B. Reynolds, "Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 4–37.

without any forewarning, Nephi begins quoting both the Father and the Son as they taught him the basic points of the doctrine of Christ — citing or quoting each of them three times.[46] Nephi knows full well that nowhere else in scripture does a prophet claim to have been team-taught the gospel by the Father and the Son.[47]

It is small wonder that Nephi chose this part of his earliest visionary experience as the climax of all his writings. He styled 1 Nephi as his proof that the Lord will deliver all those who keep their covenants with him from the dangers and sorrows of this mortal world. Second Nephi more directly applies that same thesis to spiritual salvation and uses this account as a capstone that tells every human being what they must do to be delivered from the devil and receive eternal life, concluding with parallel triplets as follows in verse 21:

A And now behold, my beloved brethren, *this is the way*.
B And *there is none other way* nor name given under heaven
C whereby man can be saved in *the kingdom of God*.
A* And now behold, *this is the doctrine of Christ*,
B* and *the only and true doctrine* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,
C* which is *one God* without end. (2 Nephi 31:21)

In these closing three chapters of 2 Nephi readers are reminded nine times that for Nephi *the gospel of Jesus Christ* or *doctrine of Christ* is also termed *the way* or *the straight and narrow path* that leads to eternal life — and that this specific teaching is the central and final message of all his writings.[48] The doctrine of Christ thus provides a verbal explanation for the visualization of "the straight and narrow path" as described in the vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:20).

46. See the analyses of this teaching in Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ" and "The Gospel According to Nephi," and in Noel B. Reynolds "The Gospel according to Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 29 (2018): 85–104.

47. For discussion and documentation of how the Nephite prophets used the doctrine of Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ and other terminology (the way, the path, the word) interchangeably, see Noel B. Reynolds, "This is the Way," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 79–91.

48. Compare 2 Nephi 31:18, 21 (twice), 32:1, and 5 with 2 Nephi 31:9, 18, 19, and 2 Nephi 33:9 (twice).

The Lamb of God

Other textual connections indirectly confirm the hypothesis that Nephi's account of how he was taught the doctrine of Christ by the Father and the Son in 2 Nephi 31 was given to him and to Lehi as part of the larger vision that began with the tree of life. First, Nephi's accounts of that vision uniquely refer 60 times to the Lord as "the Lamb of God." That title for the Lord does not show up again in the text until 2 Nephi 31–33, where it is used another four times.[49] As the author of all these passages, Nephi's repeated returns to the divine title used uniquely in the tree of life vision must be understood as an intentional and silent linkage of the content of 2 Nephi 31 to the earlier vision account.

The Fullness of the Gospel

Reading 2 Nephi 31 as a flashback to the tree of life vision resolves one other textual question. As Lehi related his dream or vision to his family in Chapter 10, he also told them that *the gospel* would be taught to the Jews and that *the fullness of the gospel* would be given to the Gentiles in the last days so that it could be instrumental in gathering the house of Israel back "to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer" (1 Nephi 10:11 and 14). These are the first direct mentions of the gospel in Nephi's writings, though the preservation and propagation of the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ will be mentioned repeatedly in revelations to Joseph Smith as one of the primary purposes for the compilation of the Book of Mormon.[50] Where did Lehi learn about the gospel, which has not been mentioned in the accounts of his visions to this point? The most economical explanation is that he received it as Nephi did in that great vision which included the tree of life. And the visualization provided in that vision shows how the gospel of Jesus Christ provides *the way* or *the path* that leads people to him.

In 1 Nephi 8, Nephi includes the visualization of the tree of life part of Lehi's vision only in his account — while mentioning repeatedly that there was a lot more he has not included. We then get an indication of the parts he did not include as he lists in Chapter 10 sixteen other topics Lehi covered with his family while reporting his dream or vision of the tree of life, including these two references to the gospel. That would suggest

49. I am grateful to Joseph Spencer, who points out this strategic repetition, even though he does not recognize the original unity of these two texts. See Joseph M. Spencer, *1st Nephi: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo: Maxwell Institute, 2020), 48.

50. See D&C 20:9, 27:5, 42:12, and 135:3.

that a full account of Lehi's dream and vision would have included the presentation of the doctrine or gospel of Christ that Nephi finally provides in 2 Nephi 31.

Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Nephi

In my 1980 exploration of the rhetorical structure of 1 Nephi I found the book to be deliberately divided into two halves. As labeled by Nephi, "Lehi's account" includes chapters 1–9, and "Nephi's account" includes the rest (chapters 10–22). I then showed how each of these can be divided into twelve sequential units or pericopes that remarkably parallel one another point by point in the two accounts.[51] On that analysis, Nephi's brief account of Lehi's revelations received in Jerusalem (1 Nephi 1) matches up in a chiastic structure with his summary of the many things Lehi taught his family after recounting his vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 10:2–15). That match is even more powerful when we recognize that the two structurally parallel passages appear to report the same vision and have the same content. Clifford Jones has proposed a different way of interpreting the structure of these passages by leaning on similar resumptive patterns in the much later writings of Alma and Moroni, but I continue to find the clarity and power of the parallel chiasms identified in my 1980 article to be truer to Nephi's language, purpose, and overall rhetorical strategy, as will be explained more fully below.[52]

Table 1. Lehi's Account Compared to Nephi's Account.

1 Nephi 1–9 (Lehi's Account)	**1 Nephi 10–22 (Nephi's Account)**
1. Nephi makes a record (or account) of his proceedings but first gives an abridgment of Lehi's record (1:1–3, 16–17).	1. Nephi now commences to give an account of his proceedings, reign, and ministry but first "must speak somewhat of the things of [his] father, and … brethren" (10:1).
2. Nephi gives a brief account of Lehi's prophecies to the Jews, based on visions he received in Jerusalem (1:5–15, 19).	2. Nephi reports Lehi's prophecies about the Jews, as given to Laman and Lemuel in the wilderness (10:2–15).
3. Lehi is commanded to journey into the wilderness, and he pitches his tent in the valley he names Lemuel (2:1–7).	3. Nephi desires to see, hear, and know these mysteries; he is shown a great vision by the Spirit of the Lord and by an angel (10:17–14:30).

51. See below Table 1 as excerpted from "Nephi's Outline," 4. Note the balanced reversal in the parallel accounts. Elements 3 and 5 and 9 and 11 are reversed in Nephi's account relative to their parallel elements in Lehi's account.

52. See Clifford P. Jones, "The Record of My Father," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019): 9–32.

1 Nephi 1–9 (Lehi's Account)	1 Nephi 10–22 (Nephi's Account)
4. Lehi teaches and exhorts his sons, and they are confounded (2:8–15).	4. Nephi instructs and exhorts his brothers, and they are confounded (15:6–16:6).
5. Nephi desires to know the mysteries of God; he is visited by the Holy Spirit and is spoken to by the Lord (2:16–3:1).	5. Lehi is commanded to journey further into the wilderness, and he pitches his tent in the land he names Bountiful (16:9–17:6).
6. Lehi is commanded in a dream to send his sons for the brass plates of Laban; this he does (3:2–5:22).	6. Nephi is commanded by the voice of the Lord to construct a ship; this he does (17:6–18:4).
7. In response to a command from the Lord, Lehi sends for Ishmael's family (7:1–22).	7. In response to a command from the Lord, Lehi enters the ship and then sails (18:5–23).
8. They gather seeds of every kind (8:1).	8. Lehi's family plants the seeds and reaps in abundance (18:24).
9. Lehi reports to his sons the great vision received in the wilderness (8:2–35).	9. Nephi details the distinctions between the two sets of plates (19:1–7).
10. Lehi exhorts Laman and Lemuel, preaching and prophesying to them (8:36–38).	10. Nephi preaches and prophesies to Laman and Lemuel, his own descendants, and all Israel (19:7–21:26).
11. Nephi makes a distinction between the two sets of plates (9:1–5).	11. To explain Isaiah's prophecies to his brothers, Nephi draws on the great vision given to him and Lehi (22:1–28).
12. Nephi ends with a general formulation of his thesis and the formal punctuation: "And thus it is. Amen" (9:6).	12. Nephi ends with the highest formulation of his thesis, and with the formal punctuation: "And thus it is. Amen" (22:29–31).

Further analysis shows that the six basic stories in 1 Nephi provide the grounding for both the thematic and the rhetorical framework of that book. The 1980 publication shows how the two principal stories of obtaining the Brass Plates and building the ship provide the structural and thematic centers for Lehi's and Nephi's accounts respectively. Further, these two principal stories are presented chiastically, and they each feature the murmuring of Laman and Lemuel as their central point and references to the miraculous power given to Moses as he delivered Israel from Egypt.[53] The four other stories are each doubly parallel (1) to the other minor story in the same account, and (2) to the corresponding

53. In a separate essay, I explore the ways in which the murmuring of Laman and Lemuel provides a key structural element in Nephi's account, giving insight into the ways of the wicked who resist the gospel's call to repent and endure to the end and who seek to kill the prophets, as do the Jews at Jerusalem and the followers of the devil in all times and places. Noel B. Reynolds, "Rethinking Nephi's Treatment of Laman and Lemuel," working paper, August 10, 2021.

(by order) minor story in the other account. Nephi built the parallel structures into the stories by repeating a long sequence of similar elements in the stories in the same order.[54]

The result is a structural foundation based in the six stories that Nephi advances as support of his thesis that the Lord will deliver the faithful — a version of the Abrahamic covenant promises.[55] With all this arranging of the stories and the parallels of Lehi's and Nephi's accounts, Nephi has also managed to present each account chiastically as shown in the following tables. First Nephi turns out to be structured as two facing chiasms with matching elements that make them parallel to each other, presenting both Lehi and Nephi as witnesses of the same divine teachings, prophecies and promises in their respective accounts. And, because Nephi has also introduced in these first accounts the visions and other revelations on which the teachings of 2 Nephi will be based, he has linked 1 and 2 Nephi solidly together in terms of their purpose and teachings.

Table 2. Chiasmus in 1 Nephi 1–9 (Lehi's Account).

A	Nephi discusses his record, and he testifies it is true (1:1–3).
B	Lehi's early visions are reported, followed by his preaching and prophesying to the Jews (1:6–15, 18–20).
C	Lehi takes his family into the wilderness (2:2–15).
D	The Lord speaks prophecies to Nephi about Lehi's seed (2:19–24).
E	Lehi's sons obtain the brass plates, and Nephi records the most striking example of the murmuring of his faithless brothers (3:2–5:16).
D*	Lehi, filled with the Spirit, prophesies about his seed (5:17–19; 7:1).
C*	Ishmael takes his family into the wilderness (7:2–22).
B*	Lehi's tree of life vision is reported, followed by his prophecies and preaching to Laman and Lemuel (8:2–38).
A*	Nephi again discusses his record, and he records his testimony (9:1–6).

54. See the detailed explanations in Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline."

55. To see how I interpret this as a version of the Abrahamic covenant, see Noel B. Reynolds, "Covenant Language in Biblical Religions and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2022), 139–76.

Table 3. Chiasmus in 1 Nephi 10–22 (Nephi's Account).

A Lehi expands on his great vision, detailing prophecies about the Jews and gentiles (10:1–16).

B Nephi explains that all men can know the mysteries of God by the power of the Holy Ghost (10:17–22).

C Nephi reports the great visions and prophecies given to him (11–14).

D Overcome by the hardness of his brethren, Nephi interprets the great vision to his family, rehearsing one of Isaiah's prophecies as support (15:2–16:5).

E Lehi takes his family further into the wilderness (16:9–17:6).

F Nephi builds a ship and records his most complete reply to the murmuring of his brothers (17:7–18:4).

E* Lehi takes his family across the ocean in the ship (18:5–25).

D* Concerned for those at Jerusalem, Nephi writes for his descendants and all the house of Israel and explains the ancient prophecies of a Redeemer (19:3–23).

C* Nephi quotes chapters of a prophecy from Isaiah which parallels portions of his own great vision (20–21).

B* Nephi explains to his brethren that prophecies are only to be understood by the same Spirit that also manifested these things to the prophets (22:1–3).

A* Nephi offers a final summary of the prophecies about the Jews and the gentiles, drawing primarily from the language of the great vision but also from the brass plates (22:3–28).

Rhetorical Analysis of 2 Nephi

In 1980 very few nonspecialists would have been aware of the turn taken by the highly successful "form criticism" movement among Bible scholars to broaden their approach under the rubric "rhetorical criticism" and search out the full range of rhetorical techniques exemplified in the Hebrew Bible.[56] The work that movement produced over the last few

56. In his 1967 presidential address to the Society for Biblical Literature, James Muilenberg, a leading form critic, pointed out the diminishing returns of that movement as he and his colleagues seemed to have wrung out all the illumination they were going to get from that approach to textual biblical studies

decades of that century and into the next led to explorations of the basic tool kit taught in the scribal schools of Jerusalem, which is now known as *Hebrew rhetoric*.[57]

A brief listing of four basic principles of Hebrew rhetoric has been provided above. By way of comparison, Duane Watson penned a brief description of the methodology employed by the rhetorical critics who study Hebrew rhetoric:

> A basic methodology includes first defining the literary unit, looking for repeated motifs, opening and closure formulas, and *inclusion*. … Second, both the overall structure (macro-structure) and the structure of individual components (micro-structure) of the literary unit are determined and the relationship between all components defined. At every step, close attention is given to repetition, parallelism, strophic structure, motifs, climax, chiasm, and numerous other literary devices. Such close examination of the composition is an attempt to achieve a better understanding of the movement of the author's thought, intent, and message, and to determine how the rhetoric would be experienced by the audience.[58]

Applying this new approach in Hebrew Bible studies to 2 Nephi in 2018, I found structural patterns that were previously invisible. Applying the principle of demarcation revealed that all of 2 Nephi is divided into 13 smaller textual units by the standard biblical rhetorical device of *inclusio*. These 13 subdivisions were organized chiastically in turn into one grand chiasm as determined by their principal themes. The following tables 4 and 5 show first the 13 textual units and the inclusios

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and were increasingly forcing tenuous claims with debatable evidence. His address recommending the shift to a new phase of "rhetorical criticism" has been published. See James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (March 1969): 1–18.

57. For a more detailed description and documentation of these developments in Hebrew rhetoric as they may relate to the Book of Mormon, see Reynolds, "The Return of Rhetorical Analysis," 91–98.

In a separate paper I have advanced the hypothesis that Lehi and Nephi were trained in a Manassite scribal school in seventh-century Jerusalem. See Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes." Nephi's extraordinary mastery of the Hebrew rhetoric of that period may be the most compelling evidence for that thesis.

58. Duane F. Watson, s.v., "Rhetorical Criticism," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Winona Lake, IN: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:182.

used to demarcate them. Table 5 lists, in chiastic format, the principal themes of those 13 text units, demonstrating the parallel elements in the structure.[59]

Table 4. Inclusio markers for 2 Nephi.

Label	Text	Rhetorical boundary (inclusio) markers
A	2 Nephi 1:1–1:30	"out of the land of Jerusalem"
B	2 Nephi 1:31–2:4a	Zoram and Jacob "blessed"
C	2 Nephi 2:4b–30	"know good"/"have chosen the good part"
D	2 Nephi 3:1–4:12	Lehi "speaks" — to Joseph/all his household
E	2 Nephi 4:13–5:34	Laman and Lemuel angry/wars and contentions
F	2 Nephi 6–11:1	words/things "Jacob spake"
G	2 Nephi 11:2–8	"the words of Isaiah"
F*	2 Nephi 12–24	Lord's house established/Zion founded
E*	2 Nephi 25:1–6	"Isaiah spake/hath spoken"
D*	2 Nephi 25:7–31:1	"mine own prophecy/my prophesying"
C*	2 Nephi 31:2–21	"the doctrine of Christ"
B*	2 Nephi 32:1–8a	"ponder in your hearts"
A*	2 Nephi 32:8b–33:15	Nephi "must speak/commanded to seal" words

Table 5. Themes of Table 4 text units in 2 Nephi.

A Lehi's final testimony and call *to his family* to repentance.
B The Spirit — Jacob redeemed — in the service of God.
C Lehi's explanation of *the way of salvation* based on "the things which [he] had read."
D Lehi's last blessings (prophecies) *to his people.*
E Historical detailed interlude on the founding of "the people of Nephi," "my soul delighteth/grieveth."
F Jacob's teachings witness of Christ.
G Nephi's witness of Christ.
F* Isaiah's prophecies witness of Christ.
E* Historical interlude — the education of "my people" — "my soul delighteth/delighteth."
D* Final restatement of Nephi's prophecies — *to all people.*
C* Nephi's detailed explanation of *the way or doctrine* of Christ based on what he learned from the Father and the Son directly.
B* The Spirit — the Holy Ghost will show you what to do.
A* Nephi's final testimony and call *to all people* to repentance.

59. See Reynolds, "Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts," 182–83.

Applying the four basic principles of Hebrew rhetoric to 1 and 2 Nephi shows that Nephi has presented this material in three highly structured chiasms. The first two are made parallel to each other in 1 Nephi as Lehi's account and Nephi's account respectively, each providing proofs of Nephi's thesis that the Lord delivers his covenant people when they are faithful and pointing repeatedly to the constant danger of murmuring or hardening one's heart against the revelations of the Lord which prevents that deliverance — as the Jews in Jerusalem are destroyed and carried away captive.[60]

The third chiasm organizes the principal teachings and prophecies of 2 Nephi and elevates Nephi's thesis to a higher level, featuring explanations of the plan of salvation and the gospel/doctrine of Christ as the means by which the Lord's covenant people can be delivered from their common enemy, the devil, and receive eternal life. The primary intent of both Lehi and Nephi is to bring their people and eventually all peoples who will receive their message to Jesus Christ that they might receive the salvation he has prepared for them. For example:

Lehi: "I have none other object save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls" (2 Nephi 2:30).

Nephi: "And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish" (2 Nephi 11:6).

Wherefore my soul delighteth to prophesy concerning him, for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name" (2 Nephi 25:13).

And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not. And Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul. And if ye do this, ye shall in no wise be cast out" (2 Nephi 25:29).

"For none of these iniquities come of the Lord. For he doeth that which is good among the children of men. And he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men. And he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness. And

60. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline."

> he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen. And all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33).

A secondary theme is the transition at the center of the book from the claim that the plan of salvation and the gospel enable the salvation of covenant Israel to the clearly universalized teaching that they equally enable the salvation of all peoples — both Israelites and Gentiles.[61]

> And the way is prepared *for all men* from the foundation of the world if it so be that they repent and come unto him. For he that diligently seeketh shall find, and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded to them by the power of the Holy Ghost as well in this time as in times of old and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore the course of the Lord is one eternal round. (1 Nephi 10:18–19)

Nephi makes the same point even more directly in 2 Nephi.

> For behold, I say unto you: As many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off. For the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, which is the Holy One of Israel. (2 Nephi 30:2)

Nephi's Blueprint

It may be tempting for some readers to breeze past 1 Nephi 10:2–14, since it is presented as a list of topics Lehi discussed with his family in connection with the account of his great vision of the tree of life — discussions that Nephi has not recorded here in any detail. But the list soon turns out to be of great importance as it includes all the topics of the revelations and teachings that will be presented by Nephi in his two books. In other words, Lehi's teachings to his family, based on his vision of the tree of life, provide Nephi with a guide or a table of contents for the rest of his writings. The remainder of 1 Nephi and all of 2 Nephi will consist of expansions of the topics on this list. And most of these will be seen to be drawn directly from the great tree of life vision. Gardner noted the similarity between Nephi's reporting of his own prophecies, which have sometimes been interpreted as commentaries on the Isaiah

61. See Reynolds, "Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts," 184.

chapters, and the tree of life vision: "The elements of this vision are so closely aligned with those of Nephi's vision of the tree of life that it is virtually certain that it is that vision he is referring to."[62]

Another Explanation of this Record

Another reason that the list in Chapter 10 can be too readily disassociated from the tree of life vision is that Nephi inserts another explanation of the Small Plates (1 Nephi 9:2–6) between the account of the vision and Lehi's preaching to his family based on that vision in Chapter 8 and this more detailed listing of the topics included in that preaching to his family.[63] This insertion can be confusing to modern readers unless they recognize that it is required by Nephi's chiastic rhetorical structuring and serves as a wrap-up for Lehi's account. As can be seen in Table 2, the insertion about the records in chapter 9 matches up as the chiastic parallel of the discussion of the record in Chapter 1.

This rhetorical move also allows Nephi to make Chapter 10 into the beginning of his own account, following the account of his father in chapters 1–9. The artificiality of this division is not concealed, for Nephi first announces that he is moving on to his own account in verse 1 and immediately circles back in verses 2–16 to finish out the account of his father's teachings. This is made explicit as Nephi uses the same phrasing in verse 2 to introduce the longer list of things that were summarized at the end of chapter 8:

> And he *did exhort them* then with all the feeling of a tender parent that they would hearken to his words, in that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them and not cast them off. Yea, my father *did preach unto them*. And after that he had preached unto them and also prophesied unto them of many things, *he bade them to keep the commandments* of the Lord. (1 Nephi 8:37–38)

Nephi's Own Account

Nephi refers to these closing lines of chapter 8 as he begins his own account in Chapter 10: "For behold, it came to pass that after my father had made an end of *speaking the words of his dream* and also of *exhorting them to all diligence*, he spake unto them …" (1 Nephi 10:2). The attached

62. Brant Gardner, "Nephi as Scribe," *Mormon Studies Review* 23, no.1 (2011): 53.

63. See the explanation in Reynolds, "Nephi's Small Plates," 114–15.

appendix assembles and sorts all the passages Nephi will incorporate into this writing that detail the sixteen topics Nephi lists in 1 Nephi 10:2–15 as a summary of Lehi's teaching to his company at the time he told them about his tree of life vision. By starting out his own account with a listing of the contents of what Lehi taught his family based on his vision, Nephi makes that listing structurally parallel to Lehi's first visions as described in chapter 1, as displayed in Table 1 above as items numbered 2 in each column.

Chapter 10 as a Table of Contents for 1 and 2 Nephi

In 1 Nephi 10:2–15 Lehi first tells his family about the tree of life, but then goes on to teach them about sixteen or possibly seventeen other prophecies and teachings that Nephi lists with very brief descriptions. See the following Table 6 for a listing that identifies the numerous passages in 1 and 2 Nephi where each of those prophecies or teachings is mentioned or presented in some context. An appendix follows this list and provides a paraphrase for each of those passages. First (1), Lehi confirms the prophecies of the coming destruction of the Jews and Jerusalem and their subsequent captivity in Babylon. He then mentions (2) their future return from captivity to the land of inheritance. Lehi then tells them (3) that in 600 years from the time they left Jerusalem "a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews, yea, even a Messiah, or in other words, a Savior of the world" (1 Nephi 10:4). Lehi also spoke (4) of the other prophets who had testified about this coming Messiah. He taught them (5) about the need for a redeemer, because "all mankind was in a lost and in a fallen state," reminding us again of his detailed explanations of the fall and the needed redemption recorded in 2 Nephi 2. This points to the plan of salvation that Lehi expands on in 2 Nephi 2 and that Jacob features in 2 Nephi 9–10. The more lengthy and detailed section that Nephi reports from Lehi's teaching to his family focused (6) on the baptism of the Messiah and the prophet that would come before him to prepare the way. Nephi's threefold repetition of accounts of the baptism of the Messiah and the prophet that would baptize him (1 Nephi 10:7–10) constitutes a powerful link between Lehi's vision, the version of that vision given to Nephi (1 Nephi 11:26–27), and Nephi's presentation of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 31:4–9).

Following Lehi's long description of the baptism of Christ, he spoke to his children (7) about "the gospel which should be preached to the Jews," and about (8) the subsequent "dwindling of the Jews in unbelief." After (9) their slaying of the Messiah, he would (10) "rise from the dead"

and (11) manifest himself "by the Holy Ghost unto the Gentiles." He spoke then (12) about the Gentiles and the house of Israel, comparing them to an olive tree whose branches would be broken off and "scattered upon all the face of the earth." Lehi then explained to his family that (13) it was necessary that their family be led to their own land of promise to fulfill the word of the Lord and that eventually (14) both their descendants and the rest of the house of Israel would be scattered upon all the face of the earth. Finally, (15) he prophesied that the Gentiles would receive the fullness of the gospel, and in due course (16) the remnants of the house of Israel would "come to the knowledge of the true Messiah."

Table 6. Lehi's 17 themes. (Isaiah passages are in bold type.)

	Content Description of the Prophecy	Text Occurrences
1.	Destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews, and Babylonian captivity	1 Nephi 1:4, 13, 8–19, 7:13; 2 Nephi 6:8; **13:1–15:25**, **16:1–18:22**, **19:8–20:11**, 25:10
2.	Future return from captivity	2 Nephi 6:9, **20:12–34**, 25:11
3.	Future coming of Jesus Christ	1 Nephi 1:9–10, 19, 10:17, 11:7, 19:7–8; 2 Nephi 6:9, **21:1–22:6**, 25:12, 20–30
4.	Other prophets testify of the coming Messiah.	1 Nephi 19:10–12; 2 Nephi 9–10, 11:2–4, **19:1–7**, 25:18–19
5.	The need for a Redeemer and the plan of redemption/salvation	1 Nephi 1:14, 3:4, 15:26–36, 16:1–5, 17:36; 2 Nephi 1:13, 15, 2:1–30, 9:4–39, 10:23–25, 11:5–7, 33:11–15
6.	A prophet will prepare the way for the Messiah and baptize him.	1 Nephi 10:7–10, 11:27; 2 Nephi 31:4–12
7.	The gospel of Jesus Christ to be preached	1 Nephi 8:2–35, 11:31, 15:24–25, 4:16–35; 2 Nephi 9:23–24, 31:9–32:6, 33:1–10
8.	The dwindling of the Jews foretold	1 Nephi 11:35, 12:7–8, 19:13–14, **20:1–22**
9.	The Messiah to be slain	1 Nephi 11:32–33, 19:9–10; 2 Nephi 6:9, 10:3–5, 25:13, 26:3–8
10.	Resurrection of the Messiah	2 Nephi 9:6, 25:14, 26:1–3
11.	Messiah to be made manifest to the Gentiles by the Holy Ghost	1 Nephi 13:12–33; 2 Nephi 10:8–18
12.	House of Israel compared to an olive tree	1 Nephi 15:7–18, 19:24, **21:1**
13.	Nephites will be led to a land of promise.	1 Nephi 2:2–7, 2:20, 3:5, 8, 7:2, 13, 17:12–13–14, 23–47; 2 Nephi 1:3–9, 16–29, 4:2–9, 5:5–29, 10:19:22
14.	Israel to be scattered (including Lehi's seed)	1 Nephi 2:21–24, 12:13–23, 15:19–20, 22:3–5; 2 Nephi 1:10–12, 6:10–11, 25:14–15, 26:10–11
15.	Gentiles to receive the fullness of the gospel	1 Nephi 13:33–7, 14:1–14, **21:22–23**, 22:6–9, 22:20–22; 2 Nephi 6:6–7, 12–13, **12:1–4**, 26:12–28:32, 30:1–3

	Content Description of the Prophecy	Text Occurrences
16.	Remnants of Israel to be gathered — to come to the knowledge of the true Messiah	1 Nephi 6:4, 13:38–42, 14:15–17, 19:15–17, **21:14–21**, **24–26**, 22:24–28; 2 Nephi 3:1–4:2, 6:14–7:3, 8:1–25, 9:1–3, **12:5–22**, **24:1–3**, 25:16–17, 29:1–14, 30:4–7
17.	End of the world prophecies	1 Nephi 14:18–30, 22:13–19, 22:23; **2 Nephi 23:1–22**, **24:4–27**, **29–32**, 30:8–18

This seventeenth line of prophesying surfaces eight times in Nephi's writings but is not included on the list of teachings of Lehi to his people in Chapter 10. Lehi was doubtless fully aware of it. At the end of his own vision, Nephi reports that he was shown events pertaining to the end of the world. He will come back to that topic seven additional times in his writings, while respecting the command that he (and presumably Lehi) had received not to write what he had seen. All eight of Nephi's references to the end of the world are included in the Appendix 1 as item 17. Three of these are in materials quoted from Isaiah, and one is Nephi's paraphrase of "the prophet," which in context might easily be taken as another reference to Isaiah. People often ask why Nephi has included such lengthy excerpts from Isaiah's writings. This listing suggests that Nephi saw Isaiah as one who had seen the same visions and received the same prophecies as had he and Lehi. Isaiah provides an impeccable, independent witness. As indicated by the bolding in this list, Nephi invokes Isaiah 18 times in support of 9 of these Nephite prophecies.

Time and Eternity

Book of Mormon interpreters and Latter-day Saint writers in general often struggle to understand the connections and distinctions between such basic elements of prophetic teachings as the plan of salvation, the Abrahamic covenant, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Nephi used all these concepts repeatedly and confidently in his writings. And it is in the great tree of life vision that we can find guidance on how the terms are both distinguished from and integrated with each other in his teachings.

One key to an understanding of these biblical and Book of Mormon teachings is to recognize the three different *time frames* they bring with them — usually without making those differences clear. A visual image is provided for each of these, as well as a verbal explanation, as indicated below in Table 7.

We see first the eternal perspective of God, who sees the end from the beginning. In his heavenly council, decisions were made to create this earth, to provide a plan of salvation that would make human salvation

possible, and to provide a way by which individuals could qualify for eternal life in their own mortal lifetimes.

Second, we see the past, present, and future of the world and its people in relationship to God. Specific peoples have from time to time been chosen to be God's covenant people, to receive his prophets and teachings, and to provide an example to all the world of the ways in which he will bless and discipline his covenant people through their cycles of rebellion and obedience.

But third, and in the final analysis, salvation turns out to be an individual matter, and eternal judgment will come to every individual and will be based on the response of individuals to the gospel invitation to repent and come to Christ. That is the timeframe that matters most to each human being while in this mortal probation. The salvation history on display in the history and prophesied future of God's covenant peoples provides them with a surrogate or model that teaches individuals how to relate to their god as they strive to endure to the end.

In the Book of Mormon, as in the ancient world generally, this was verbalized as *the doctrine of the two ways*.[64] It divides into two doctrines. The positive version is the gospel or doctrine of Christ, which teaches the only way by which one can return to God — the way of light and life. The negative version is the way of the devil, of darkness, of death, that leads to hell or eternal damnation. The tree of life vision presents these dramatically as the "straight and narrow path" and the iron rod that leads to the tree in contrast to the "strange paths" and "forbidden ways" that lead to the great and spacious building or the filthy river.

Table 7 lists these three timeframes, their visualizations, and their verbalizations.

Table 7. Timeframes visualized and verbalized.

	Timeframe	**Visualization**	**Verbalization**
1.	Eternity	Divine council	Plan of salvation
2.	Salvation history	Olive tree allegory	Abrahamic covenant
3.	Individual lifetimes	Tree of life vision	Doctrine of two ways

Nephi's list of the sixteen teachings of Lehi to his people draws on all three of these timeframes in a way that integrates them fully. (1) From the eternal perspective, there was a divine council before the creation of

64. See the comprehensive development of these doctrines in Noel B. Reynolds, "The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017), 49–78.

this world which adopted the plan of salvation, including the creation and the atonement, and which included a final judgment that will bring all peoples back into that same eternal timeframe. (2) In multiple dispensations of the gospel, God has established his covenants with successive peoples, the most prominent of which has been the covenant with Abraham, which animates the salvation history not only of Israel, but also the nations of the Gentiles, as explained to Nephi and Lehi in their visions. Most of the teachings on Nephi's list address different dimensions of that salvation history, and the visualization of the allegory of the olive tree is provided to help understand how apostate Israel can one day be grafted back into the mother tree. (3) But the visualization of the tree of life and the straight and narrow path supports the third timeframe as it portrays individuals — even different members of Lehi's family — facing the choice between the two ways — whether to turn away from the attractions of a fallen world — forbidden paths and the great and spacious building — or to pursue the way of salvation — the gospel path and the iron rod that Christ has provided.

As a side note, it is generally recognized that the decisions of fourth century and later councils of the Christian churches adopted Greek philosophical concepts of divinity that placed God beyond any human timeframes. These theological moves have never been reconciled with the traditional timeframes embedded in Bible prophecies and teachings, nor is it likely that they ever can be. The German theologian Oscar Cullmann devoted much of his career to this issue, arguing that the gospel taught by the Primitive Christians could not be divorced from these salvation histories and individual lives without destroying the essence of its message.[65]

The Book of Mormon consistently conveys this combination of timeframes laid out in the visions of Lehi and Nephi. The *goodness of God* is repeatedly cited to explain the plan of salvation, how we got here in the first place, and how we can be blessed at a final judgment. The salvation history of Israel, of the Nephites and Lamanites, and of the Gentile nations is taught constantly to show how God has worked and will work with all peoples to provide individuals with the gospel and the opportunity to live their own lives in a way that can prepare them for eternal life. The Nephite prophets understood from the beginning that the peoples of all nations could receive all the blessings promised to

65. Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson, rev. ed. (1962; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018).

Abraham by repenting and coming to Christ in the manner prescribed in his gospel.

In a 2011 article, Daniel L. Belnap demonstrated how Lehi's vision provided the Nephite peoples with a foundational cultural narrative that served them much as the Israelite exodus served the ancient Hebrews to "define themselves and their place in the greater cosmos."[66] Matthew L. Bowen has added strong evidence for the millennium-long reappearance of key associations in that vision in the writings of Nephite prophets.[67] I would propose that Nephi's use of that vision as a blueprint for his writings and its integration of these three timeframes also contributed to establishing the Nephite prophets' shared vision as a cultural narrative that shows up repeatedly in their writings throughout their dispensation.

The more a reader reflects on this list of prophecies and revealed teachings that Nephi provides at the center of 1 Nephi, the more astonishing it appears. On the one hand, Nephi names or summarizes 16 topics (teachings and prophecies) that Lehi took up with his family as he spoke to them after describing his vision of the tree of life at the first camp in the wilderness, all of which will be presented multiple times and in much more detail elsewhere in 1 or 2 Nephi. On the other hand, the same list serves as a comprehensive guide to the teachings and prophecies of all the Nephite prophets and Jesus Christ who will teach the Nephites and Lamanites over the next ten centuries. This extraordinary teaching session between Lehi and his emigrant company as they prepare to launch themselves into the Arabian wilderness provides the complete packet of Book of Mormon prophecies and teachings, including what Jesus will teach the Nephites when he appears to them after his resurrection. That body of revelation will be available to the Nephites for almost a thousand years; and Lehi's and Nephi's great vision or visions that feature the tree of life appear to be the original source for it all.

Conclusions

Three hypotheses are proposed in this paper. First, Nephi's final writing in his Small Plates was organized using the principles of Hebrew rhetoric as these had evolved in those same scribal schools before the Babylonian

66. Daniel L. Belnap, "'Even as our Father Lehi Saw': Lehi's Dream as Nephite Cultural Narrative," in *The Things Which My Father Saw*, 214.

67. Matthew L. Bowen, "'That Which They Most Desired': The Waters of Mormon, Baptism, the Love of God, and the Bitter Fountain," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020): 261–98.

exile. Nephi designed a formal rhetorical structure that divided his material into two books — both organized chiastically in a way that determined the two-book structure.

Second, both books can be understood as expansions of the brief account of the great vision of the tree of life in which Nephi and Lehi were called as prophets, seeing the heavens opened, seeing the past and future implementation of the plan of salvation and the shape of salvation history as it would unfold for their descendants, for the house of Israel, and for the Gentiles. As Nephi's summary of the things Lehi taught his family as part of his report on the tree of life vision shows, the principal teachings and prophecies in Nephi's two books do come from that same great vision. And the visualizations provided in the vision chapters help the Nephites understand the plan of salvation, the salvation histories of the scriptures, and the gospel of Jesus Christ — which is frequently referred to thereafter as "the straight and narrow path" or "the way."

Third, we can see that this experience of seeing the heavens opened and of being brought into the heavenly council where they were taught the plan of salvation, the gospel of the Lamb, and the prophecies outlining a salvation history for their own descendants, the Gentile nations, and the rest of the house of Israel prepared Lehi and Nephi with the necessary other-worldly perspective and understanding to be the prophets that would launch the Nephite dispensation. Having received the same great vision, Lehi and Nephi were able to stand together and provide a double witness to the goodness of God, his teachings and plans for all of humanity in this earthly probationary estate, and the coming judgment and possibility of eternal life for all. They also understood what was at stake in the lives of their family members and descendants who would not listen or soften their hearts to be guided by the Spirit on that path that leads to the Lord.

So interpreted, the great vision of the tree of life provided Nephite and Lamanite prophets with the perspective and teachings to call Lehi's descendants to repentance and to teach them the right way over a span of almost a thousand years. The experiences of Lehi and Nephi and the record they would leave would become the primary means by which the true gospel would be restored to the Gentiles, to Lehi's distant descendants, and to the house of Israel in the last days. When we grasp the full scope of that early vision, we can see how it provides the divinely revealed basis for the Lord's work with his people throughout the period recorded in the Book of Mormon as well as for the last days, when the

gospel would be revealed again to the Gentiles and to all the house of Israel.

Appendix:
Charting Book of Mormon Teachings and Prophecies per 1 Nephi 10:2–14

This article explains that the list of topics Nephi reports from Lehi's account of his great vision provided Nephi with a table of contents for all of 1 and 2 Nephi. This appendix substantiates that claim by taking each item from Nephi's list in 1 Nephi 10:2–14 and listing all the passages distributed throughout Nephi's writings where that item is addressed, together with a brief description of the passage.

1 Nephi 10:2–4

1. **Destruction of Jerusalem and Captivity of Israel**

a.	1 Nephi 1:4	Many prophets warned that Jerusalem would be destroyed.
b.	1 Nephi 1:13	Lehi read of the coming destruction and captivity.
c.	1 Nephi 1:8–19	Lehi warned Jerusalem of the coming destruction.
d.	1 Nephi 7:13	Nephi promised that the prophecies of Jerusalem's destruction will be fulfilled.
e.	2 Nephi 6:8	The Lord showed Jacob the captivity of Jerusalem after Lehi's departure.
f.	2 Nephi 13:1–15:25	Isaiah's summary of the judgments of God against Israel and prophecies of its coming destruction and captivity
g.	2 Nephi 16:1–18:22	Israel's transgressions and punishments
h.	2 Nephi 19:8–20:11	The coming destruction and captivity of Israel
i.	2 Nephi 25:10	Nephi confirmed the destruction and captivity of those at Jerusalem as prophesied.

2. **Return of Captive Israel**

a.	2 Nephi 6:9	The Lord showed Jacob that Israel would return.
b.	2 Nephi 20:12–34	Israel will be rescued from Assyria and return.
c.	2 Nephi 25:11	They shall return and possess the land of Jerusalem and be restored to their lands.

3. Coming of the Messiah among the Jews, a Savior of the World

a.	1 Nephi 1:9–10	Lehi in vision saw the coming the Messiah.
b.	1 Nephi 1:19	Lehi testified of the coming Messiah.
c.	1 Nephi 10:17	The Son of God is the coming Messiah.
d.	1 Nephi 11:7	Nephi commanded to bear witness of the Son of God.
e.	1 Nephi 19:7–8	"[T]he very God of Israel" will come "in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem" — according to the angel.
f.	2 Nephi 6:9	The Lord showed Jacob that the Lord would manifest himself to the Jews in the flesh.
g.	2 Nephi 21:1–9	A rod from the stem of Jesse to come forth and with righteousness and faithfulness will reprove the earth.
h.	2 Nephi 21:10–22:6	Israel will be gathered home in the last days.
i.	2 Nephi 25:12	The Father of heaven and earth will manifest himself to them.
j	2 Nephi 25:20–30	Nephi's longest prophecy of the coming Christ "whereby man can be saved." "[T] he right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not." Christ is the Holy One of Israel.

1 Nephi 10:5–6

4. Prophets Who Foretold the Coming Messiah

a.	1 Nephi 19:10	Zenoch, Neum, and Zenos prophesied the coming of the Lord in his ministry to the Jews.
b.	1 Nephi 19:11–12	Zenos foretold the destructions that will occur when the Savior is crucified.
c.	2 Nephi 9–10	Jacob explains why Christ must come to make the plan of salvation effective.
d.	2 Nephi 11:2–4	In this rhetorical center point of his second book, Nephi explains his reasons for including the prophecies of Jacob and Isaiah. Isaiah, Jacob, and Nephi have all seen their Redeemer and prophesy the future coming of Jesus Christ. Nephi delights in proving the truth of the coming of Christ.

e.	2 Nephi 19:1–7	Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Lord.
f.	2 Nephi 25:18–19	The prophets have spoken of one Messiah who would come 600 years after Lehi left Jerusalem.

5. Plan of Salvation — Mankind in a Lost and Fallen State Needing a Redeemer

a	1 Nephi 1:14	Lehi saw that the eternal goodness and mercy of the Lord would not allow any faithful person to perish.
b.	1 Nephi 3:4	Lehi saw the goodness of God in his vision.
c.	1 Nephi 15:26–36	A great gulf and the sword of God's justice separates the wicked from the righteous in this life and the next, as there will be a judgment, and the wicked will go to the hell of the devil and the righteous to the kingdom of God.
d.	1 Nephi 16:1–5	Nephi exhorts his brothers to keep the commandments that they might be lifted up at the last day.
e.	1 Nephi 17:36	"[T]he Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited, and he hath created his children that they should possess it."
f.	2 Nephi 1:13	Lehi calls his wicked sons to repentance–to shake off "the sleep of hell" and the chains that bind them and not be "carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe.
g.	2 Nephi 1:15	Lehi testifies that "the Lord hath *redeemed* my soul from hell.
h.	2 Nephi 2:1–30	Lehi's great discourse on the plan of redemption given as part of a final father's blessing to his son Jacob.
i.	2 Nephi 9:4–39	Jacob's great discourse on the plan of redemption and the consequences for those who accept the gospel and for those who persist in sins.
j.	2 Nephi 10:23–25	Jacob summarizes the plan of redemption in an appeal to his brethren to choose *the way of eternal life*.
k.	2 Nephi 11:5–7	Nephi delights in the covenants of the Lord and his "great and eternal plan of deliverance from death."

l.	2 Nephi 33:11–15	Nephi's final words testify of a coming judgment and of salvation in the kingdom of the Father.

1 Nephi 10:7–10

6. A Prophet Coming to Prepare the Way for the Messiah and His Baptism

a.	1 Nephi 10:7–10	Lehi's account
b.	1 Nephi 11:27	Nephi's account
c.	2 Nephi 31:4–12	Nephi explains Christ's baptism as an exemplar.

1 Nephi 10:11

7. The Gospel of Jesus Christ to be Preached

a.	1 Nephi 8:2–35	Lehi reports his vision of the tree of life as a visualization symbolic of what individuals must do to be saved.
b.	1 Nephi 11:31	Nephi saw Jesus's ministry of miracles.
c.	1 Nephi 15:24–25	The iron rod is "the word of God," and if the people would "hearken" to it, keeping the commandments, they would not perish or be led into destruction by the "temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary."
d.	2 Nephi 4:16–35	Nephi's psalm expressed his desires to be free of temptation and his great trust in the Lord, the rock of his righteousness.
e.	2 Nephi 9:23–24	Jacob gives both positive and negative versions of the gospel message as part of the great plan.
f.	2 Nephi 31:9–32:6	Nephi shares the doctrine of Christ as taught to him by the Father and the Son.
g.	2 Nephi 33:1–10	Nephi has written the gospel or the words of Christ, which speak against pride and sin, but which offer eternal life. All will be blessed or cursed depending on whether they accept this message and endure to the end.

8. The Dwindling of the Jews

a.	1 Nephi 11:35	Nephi saw that the house of Israel fought against the apostles.
b.	1 Nephi 12:7–8	Nephi saw the coming of Christ to the Nephites.

c.	1 Nephi 19:13–14	After crucifying their god, the Jews will be "scourged by all people" and "they shall wander in the flesh and perish," having "become a hiss and a byword" and being "hated among all nations."
d.	1 Nephi 20:1–22	Isaiah rehearses the calling and covenant God made to Israel and the promises given to the obedient. Nevertheless, "there is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked."

9. Slaying the Messiah

a.	1 Nephi 11:32–33	Nephi saw Jesus would be slain by the people.
b.	1 Nephi19:9–10	Jesus will suffer smiting, scourging, spitting and be crucified.
c.	2 Nephi 6:9	Jacob was shown that the Jews would crucify him.
d.	2 Nephi 10:3–5	Jacob was told that the Jews would crucify their god.
e.	2 Nephi 25:13	They will crucify him.
f.	2 Nephi 26:3–8	Destructions of Nephites at the time of Christ's death enumerated.

10. Resurrection of the Messiah

a.	2 Nephi 9:6	As death has passed on all men, there must be "a power of resurrection.
b.	2 Nephi 25:14	After three days, he will rise from the dead.
c.	1 Nephi26:1–3	Christ shall have risen from the dead. Signs will be given of his death and resurrection.

1 Nephi 10:12–14

11. Messiah made manifest to the Gentiles by the Holy Ghost

a.	1 Nephi13:12–33	Nephi sees the Holy Ghost blessing the Gentiles and bringing them to his promised land.
b.	2 Nephi 10:8–18	The future Gentiles will be blessed upon this land and be numbered among the house of Israel.

12. House of Israel Compared to an Olive Tree with Branches Broken Off

a.	1 Nephi15:7–18	On request, Nephi explains the analogy of the olive tree Lehi had shared, pointing to the apostasies of the Jews and Lehites, the restoration of the gospel to the Gentiles and linking the eventual fulfillment of the covenant of Abraham that in his seed all kindreds of the earth be blessed.
b.	1 Nephi 19:24	Nephi tells his brethren that they are a branch broken off from the house of Israel.
c.	1 Nephi 21:1	Because of wickedness, the house of Israel "are broken off and are driven out." They are "broken off" and "scattered abroad."

13. Nephites to be Led to a Land of Promise

a.	1 Nephi 2:27	Lehi departs Jerusalem because of a dream.
b.	1 Nephi 2:20	Nephi was promised a land choice above all others.
c.	1 Nephi 3:5	Lehi reminds his wife he has obtained a land of promise.
d.	1 Nephi 3:8	Sariah knows that the Lord commanded Lehi to flee.
e.	1 Nephi 7:2	Lehi commanded to get Ishmael's family to go with him.
f.	1 Nephi 7:13	Nephi tells Ishmael and company that they will obtain a land of promise if they will be faithful.
g.	1 Nephi 17:1213	The Lord had told Nephi that if they would keep his commandments he would make raw food sweet, be their light in the wilderness and prepare the way before them, leading them to a promised land.
h.	1 Nephi 17:14	After all this help, Lehi's company would arrive at the promised land and would know the Lord is God, that he delivered them from destruction, and that he "did bring [them] out of the land of Jerusalem."

i.	1 Nephi 17:23–47	Nephi's long speech comparing their situation in the wilderness with Moses and the Israelites being delivered out of Egypt, both being led to a promised land and needing to obey the Lord's commandments.
j.	2 Nephi 1:3–9	Lehi spells out details of the promises the Lord has made to him and his posterity for this promised land as a land of liberty.
k.	2 Nephi 1:16–29	Lehi warns his sons to repent so that many future generations would not be cursed. If they will follow Nephi's inspired leadership, Lehi's first blessing will rest on them. If not, it will be transferred to Nephi.
l.	2 Nephi 4:2–9	Lehi reminds the children of Laman and Lemuel that they will be blessed or cursed in this promised land depending on whether they keep the commandments the Lord has given them.
m.	2 Nephi 5:5–29	Nephi is warned to take his people into a new wilderness, and they establish a righteous community under his leadership. Nephi summarizes the ways in which the Lord prospered them and cursed the Lamanites for their rebellion.
n.	2 Nephi 10:19–22	The Lord consecrated this promised land to Lehi's seed, and the Lord will remember them in the end.

14. Israel to be Scattered (Including Lehi's Seed)

a.	1 Nephi 2:21–24	Lamanites will have no power over righteous Nephites.
b.	1 Nephi 12:13–23	Nephi saw the future destruction of his people and the dwindling of the Lamanite remnant in unbelief.
c.	1 Nephi 15:19–20	Nephi spoke to his brothers about "the restoration of the Jews in the latter days" and rehearsed the words of Isaiah who taught about that restoration and declared that they would never be confounded or scattered again.

d.	1 Nephi 22:3–5	Nephi cites Isaiah's prophecy that Israel will be scattered among all nations and will be "hated by all men" because they did "harden their hearts" against the Holy One of Israel.
e.	2 Nephi 1:10–12	Lehi foretells the calamities that will come to his descendants if they "reject the Holy One of Israel." They will be "scattered and smitten."
f.	2 Nephi 6:10–11	Jacob is shown that Israel would be smitten and afflicted, scattered and smitten and hated.
g.	2 Nephi 25:1415	Jerusalem will be destroyed again, and the Jews scattered among all nations.
h.	2 Nephi 26:10–11	Rebellious Nephites will be destroyed.

15. Gentiles to Receive the Fullness of the Gospel

a.	1 Nephi 13:33–7	Nephi sees that the Gentiles will be given the gospel through the Nephite record.
b.	1 Nephi 14:1–14	Blessings and challenges faced by believing Gentiles who will embrace the restored gospel.
c.	1 Nephi 21:22–23	The Lord will lift his hand to the Gentiles and set up his standard to his people Israel. The Gentiles will be a nurse to Israel and bring her in their arms that they may know he is the Lord.
d.	1 Nephi 22:6–9	The Lord will "make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations" by making known "his covenants and his gospel" to the Gentiles and through them to Israel.
e.	1 Nephi 22:20–22	"The Lord will surely prepare a way for his people."
f.	2 Nephi 6:6–7	Jacob reads Isaiah to the people, prophesying of the day when the Gentiles would bring the house of Israel back to their god.
g.	2 Nephi 6:12–13	The Gentiles will be saved and wait for the coming of the Messiah.
h.	2 Nephi 12:1–4	Zion established in the tops of the mountains.

i.	2 Nephi 26:12–28:32	Nephi provides a lengthy and detailed account of how the Nephite record will facilitate the restoration of the gospel to the Gentiles and the challenges they will face in the world in their day.
j.	2 Nephi 30:1–3	The gospel will be restored to the Gentiles.

16. Remnants of the House of Israel to be Gathered Again — to Come to the Knowledge of the True Messiah

a.	1 Nephi 6:4	Nephi's intent is to persuade men to come to Israel's God and be saved.
b.	1 Nephi 13:38–42	Through restored scriptures, Gentiles, descendants of Lehi, and then Jews will be convinced that Jesus is the Eternal Father and Savior of the world.
c.	1 Nephi 14:15–17	Nephi beheld wars and rumors of wars poured out on the great and abominable church — "preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants ... [with] the house of Israel."
d.	1 Nephi 19:15–17	Zenos prophesied the day would come that Israel would "remember the covenants" made to their fathers when "all the people which are of the house of Israel" will be gathered in and "all the earth shall see the salvation of the Lord," and "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall be blessed."
e.	1 Nephi 21:14–21	Scattered Israel will not be forgotten and will "gather themselves together."
f.	1 Nephi 21:24–26	The Lord will deliver Israel from the oppression and captivity of the mighty, and "all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."
g.	1 Nephi 22:24–28	The time cometh speedily when the righteous will be led up and the Holy One of Israel will reign in dominion and might and power and great glory. He gathers his children from the four quarters of the earth, and they will dwell safely in him.

h.	2 Nephi 3:1–4:2	Lehi's blessing to his son Joseph focused on the future fulfillment of the ancient prophecy to Joseph of Egypt that through records kept by his descendants, a restoration of the covenants to the house of Israel would come about.
i.	2 Nephi 6:14–7:3	Isaiah foretells the gathering of Israel in the last days.
j.	2 Nephi 8:1–25	Isaiah prophesies the future glory of redeemed Israel.
k.	2 Nephi 9:1–3	Jacob affirms the prophecies of the restoration of Israel.
l.	2 Nephi 12:5–22	The house of Jacob will be called to "walk in the light of the Lord" in the last days.
m.	2 Nephi 24:1–3	The restoration of Jacob to his own land
n.	2 Nephi 25:16–17	After many generations, Jews that are persuaded to believe in Christ will be restored from "their lost and fallen state."
o.	2 Nephi 29:1–14	The gathering of Israel will be effected by bringing forth the books of the Nephites, the Bible, and the records of the lost tribes. Israel will be gathered home and the Lord's covenant to Abraham fulfilled.
p.	2 Nephi 30:4–7	Through the Gentiles, the gospel will be restored to Lehi's seed and to all the house of Israel. "As many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightsome people."

17. Prophecies of the End of the World[68]

a.	1 Nephi 14:18–30	Nephi was told not to write the things he saw "concerning the end of the world" as these would be written by John.
b.	1 Nephi 22:13–19	The fall of the great and abominable church, Satan to lose his power over the hearts of the children of men, and the proud and the wicked shall burn as stubble as the Lord delivers the righteous. "[T]he righteous shall not perish."
c.	1 Nephi 22–23	All they who work iniquity and belong to the kingdom of the devil will be brought low, according to the prophet (Isaiah?).

68. Although not included in Nephi's 16-element list, these prophecies constitute a significant repeated feature in Nephi's composition.

d.	2 Nephi 23:1–22	The destruction of the wicked in the last days
e.	2 Nephi 24:4–27	The defeat of Satan and his powers
f.	2 Nephi 24:29–32	The poor and the needy shall lie down in safety. The Lord has founded Zion and the poor shall trust in it.
g.	2 Nephi 30:8–10	The wicked will be destroyed by fire, and the Lord will spare his people.
h.	2 Nephi 30:11–18	Nephi's prophecies about the millennium

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A Comet, Christ's Birth, and Josephus's Lunar Eclipse

Charles Dike

Abstract: *A comet seen by the Chinese in 5 BC has been considered by some authors as a possibility for the Star of Bethlehem. This article starts with that premise and argues that Book of Mormon evidences reinforce that likelihood. The comet path can account for all events surrounding the Star of Bethlehem. Based on typologies in the scriptures, eyewitness reports, and the comet's timing, the date of Christ's birth can be determined. A proposal can then be made as to when and why the wise men began travelling to Jerusalem. The comet left a trail of debris the wise men saw on the night they located the house where Jesus was. The wise men and Joseph and Mary left Judea in mid-June of 5 BC and the slaughter of the innocents occurred later in that month. Using Josephus's "Antiquities," this article then argues strongly that Herod's death occurred sometime after a lunar eclipse on September 15, 5 BC and before the next Passover. This serves also to support his death in the spring of 4 BC, contrary to some scholars who opt for a 1 BC death. This study reaffirms the reality of the Star of Bethlehem.*

In this paper, I propose that Jesus Christ was born in March of 5 BC and that the wise men visited him in mid-June of 5 BC. This hypothesis[1] hinges on a comet seen by the Chinese in that month. The claim is that the appearance of the comet marked the day of Christ's birth and thus is the celestial apparition we refer to as the Star of Bethlehem.

The observers of the comet only left us with the month and year of the first observation, the length of time the apparition was seen, and a single celestial position. The information we have is summarized as follows:

1. While others have suggested possible causes for the night without darkness in 3 Nephi 1, none rise to the level of what could justifiably be called a hypothesis.

1. A single position (B1950 right ascension = 20 hours 20 minutes, declination = -15°). At the birth of Christ, the right ascension was 18 hours 27 minutes, declination = -19°.[2]
2. The approximate galactic coordinates (l = 30°, b = -25°).[3]
3. A lunar period wherein the comet first appeared (5 BC, March 9 to April 6).
4. A brief description (*hui-hsing*) indicating a tailed comet.
5. The length of time for the comet's visibility (70+ days).[4]

Others have also considered this comet as a contender for the Star of Bethlehem. Sir Colin Humphreys, a physicist, proposed that the 5 BC apparition the Chinese saw was a comet that first appeared during the Passover season. He felt that Christ could have been born in the Passover season, and he briefly mentioned that 10 Nisan (the day when Passover lambs were chosen for sacrifice) would be an apropos birth date and would fit with the words and prophecies of John the Baptist and the Apostle John.[5] I agree with much of his view. Humphreys did not address the two necessary positions of the comet, however. We know the apparition was observed for over 70 days, but there is no record showing that it moved to or from its stated location. Comets must move from

2. Right ascension and declination are the celestial coordinates to describe locations in the sky, similar to coordinates used to describe location on the Earth, with latitude corresponding to declination and longitude corresponding with right ascension. For a discussion of how celestial coordinates work, see Bob King, "Right Ascension & Declination: Celestial Coordinates for Beginners," *Sky and Telescope*, February 26, 2019, https://skyandtelescope.org/astronomy-resources/right-ascension-declination-celestial-coordinates/.

3. Galactic coordinates, also analogous to longitude and latitude, are described in COSMOS — The SAO Encyclopedia of Astronomy, s.v. "Galactic Coordinate System," https://astronomy.swin.edu.au/cosmos/G/Galactic+Coordinate+System. See also Wikipedia, s.v. "Galactic Coordinate System," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galactic_coordinate_system.

4. David H. Clark and F. Richard Stephenson, *The Historical Supernovae* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1977), 46. One translation reads, "In the second year of the period of *Ch'ien-p'ing* [reign period of Emperor Ai of the Han dynasty] the second month [March 10–April 7, 5 BC], a *hui-hsing* appeared in *Ch'ien-niu* for more than 70 days." Mark Kidger, *The Star of Bethlehem: An Astronomer's View* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 234. Because of a comet's movement, it cannot stay in the same place in the sky for 70 days. The comet would have been first seen there or last seen there. I opt for the latter. A *hui-hsing* is a "broom star" and is usually considered to be a tailed comet.

5. Colin Humphreys, "The Star of Bethlehem, A Comet in 5 BC and the Date of Christ's Birth," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43, no. 1 (1992): 53.

a point of first visibility to a point of final visibility. Why are there not two positions?

The first we learn of the 5 BC comet is from the *Chhien (Ch'ien) Han Shu* (*History of the Former Han Dynasty*) written by Pan Ku (c. 100 AD).[6] The reference is from a history, not an astronomy text. Pan Ku would not have seen the comet and may have made a scribal error, a possibility that has been considered. The text most commonly copied appears to be from the *Wên Hsien Thung Khao*, a compendium written in 1254 AD by Ma Tuan-Lin.[7] This hypothesis proposes that the first position of the comet was lost, and the single location in that record is the final position of the comet before it lost visibility. The first position is based on scriptural typology and relies on the comet's rising heliacally with the sun. Making this change completely reconciles scriptural information with second-hand secular reports.[8]

The Comet of 5 BC

This section of the article will first present a chronology of the events involving the comet I consider the Star of Bethlehem. I will describe the characteristics of a generic comet and describe several possible light sources that might have played a role in the Nephites' night without darkness — some of these light sources probably did not have a significant presence on that night.

6. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Ban Gu," by Glen W. Baxter, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ban-Gu. Ban-Gu is also known as Pan Ku. Also see a paper by Ho Peng Yoke, which shows that Pan Ku wrote about the 5 BC comet in the *Chhien Han Su*. Ho Peng Yoke, "Ancient and Mediaeval Observations of Comets and Novae in Chinese Sources," *Vistas in Astronomy* 5 (1962): 148, https://doi.org/10.1016/0083-6656(62)90007-7.

7. Most of the comets on Ho's list come from the Wên Hsien Thung Khao. Ho, "Observations of Comets and Novae," 127.

8. Though he discusses the possibility that the Star of Bethlehem was a comet, Mark Kidger favors an opposing view — that it was a nova because of the single position. (See Kidger, *Star of Bethlehem*, 240–46.) Kidger chose a nova because he couldn't find a radio footprint expected from a supernova (ibid., 164). A nova is unlikely to appear as a morning star, then eventually disappear, and then reappear for a single day. Nephi didn't spot the apparition until after the night without darkness. If the nova was so bright during that night, then certainly the rest of the world would have experienced the same thing for more than a day or two. A nova would have been described more like a second sun rather than "great lights in heaven" by Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 14:3). Additionally, Kidger's nova violates the claim by the magi that they saw the apparition rising heliacally. A fixed star/nova cannot resolve all the issues.

The chronological order of events is outlined as follows:

1. March 15, 5 BC, a comet arrives at the sun, unseen by Earth's inhabitants.
2. March 18/19, the night without darkness occurs in the locality of the Nephites.
3. March 19, the comet appears first in the Americas (but likely only to those considered to have astronomical skills). Christ is born in Bethlehem. In Jerusalem, lambs are set apart at roughly the same time that Christ is born.
4. Then the wise men see the comet at their sunrise because they have the requisite skills to see it.
5. The comet goes unnoticed in Jerusalem at sunrise.
6. March 22, the vernal equinox occurs.
7. March 23, Passover is celebrated and a total lunar eclipse occurs at Jerusalem during the meal.
8. The wise men journey to Jerusalem. They can, like the Chinese, observe the comet as they travel.
9. The wise men meet with Herod near the middle of June.
10. About June 12, the Earth arrives at the point where the comet had crossed the Earth's orbit 8 weeks previously. The wise men see the comet with its tail and debris field lit by the sun.
11. The wise men visit the Christ child and deliver the gifts, possibly on June 13.
12. In the middle of June, the wise men head east, and Joseph and Mary head to Egypt.
13. About the end of June, Herod begins killing the innocents.[9]
14. Shortly after that, Herod captures 40 seditious men who destroyed Herod's golden eagle at the temple gate.[10] The

9. One reviewer asked why Herod would kill all children under two if the comet was only seen 4 months before. This is a reasonable question. Herod's behavior here and in other instances seems geared to create outrage. It may also be possible that he added a significant "safety margin" in case of error in the calculation. For example, one scholar has argued that an earlier astronomical event, a triple conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter around October of 7 BC, could have been the sign of Christ's birth. If so, Herod's murderous command would also target those born at that time. See David W. Hughes, "The Star of Bethlehem," *Nature* 264 (December 1976): 513–17.

10. William Whiston, ed., *The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1895), 423–26, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=yul.11159737_000_00&view=1up&seq=1&skin=2021. The number 40 occurs occasionally in

report of these men by Josephus becomes important in the chronology, and it is for this reason that I mention it.

15. The men face a trial at roughly the beginning of September and are condemned to death.
16. September 11 (Yom Kippur), Herod replaces the high priest for the Day of Atonement.
17. September 15 (Sukkot), Herod burns the 40 men to death on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Josephus reports that a lunar eclipse occurs on the night the men died.[11]
18. Herod's bad health takes an immediate turn for the worse. He dies before the next Passover.

Comet Basics

The nucleus of a comet is a conglomeration of rock, dust, and ice. This ice can be a lot of different materials — water, hydrogen cyanide, carbon dioxide, ammonia, formaldehyde, methane, carbon monoxide, or a host of other compounds. As the comet approaches the sun, these ices turn to gas. As shown in Figure 1, the gas forms a blue tail, the typical color of a gas tail. Because the gas is blown away from the comet by the solar wind, the tail always points away from the sun. At the same time, an environment of gas and dust forms around the nucleus: it is called the "coma." This is the orb that observers see in space. The coma can be massively larger than the nucleus, and its size is dependent on the location and the composition of the comet. Besides expelling gases, the comet also kicks off dust and rock. The dust tail is usually the most visible component of the comet because of its size.[12] The very lightest dust is affected by the solar wind (note the change of direction of the debris dust based on the wind direction in Figure 1). The heavier pebbles, rocks, and boulders are not as impacted by the wind. These fall behind the nucleus in a train. At times, this train is visible and is called an "anti-tail" because it tends to point in the opposite direction of the tail.

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ancient writings and is often a symbolic number. The number here is unlikely to be precise.

11. Whiston, *Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*, 425.

12. Generally, the coma would be the brightest area of the comet due to its density, but the tail, while less dense, supplies a larger area to reflect the sun's light. The Hale-Bopp comet apparition in the summer of 1995 serves as an example.

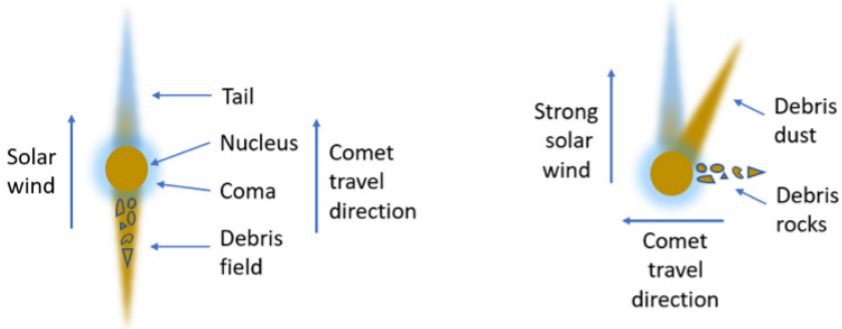

Figure 1. Comet components.

What we claim about the path of the 5 BC comet is that it departed the sun at roughly a 4.5-degree angle to the ecliptic heading for a destination near the star Algedi (Alpha Capricorni). Algedi is a rather small to average double star, but its location is useful as a general target for the comet. We can only determine the exact location where the comet was last seen within a 10-degree circle.[13] The center of that circle is at -19 degrees declination, and Algedi is near -16.5 degrees.

A Sungrazer

On about February 15, 5 BC, the comet crossed Earth's orbit heading toward the sun. By March 15, the comet was behind the sun. It had approached the sun from a direction such that it remained undetected by people on Earth. The comet was a *sungrazer*, passing within about ten sun radii of the sun itself at its perihelion, and perhaps it was much closer. It was also prograde, meaning it orbited the sun in the same direction as most of the planets.

Sungrazers become more fragile than other comets because of the strong gravitational field gradients (exacerbated by their incredibly high velocities) and extreme temperatures they pass through when circling the sun.[14] As is common for sungrazers, I propose that the 5 BC comet left significant debris in its path after perihelion. To match the description in the scriptures, the comet may have been immense — possibly much larger than Halley's Comet, which has a radius of 10 km — which is typical of a "great comet."[15] These sungrazers can be much brighter as

13. Kidger, *Star of Bethlehem*, 274.

14. Wikipedia, s.v. "Sungrazing comet," last modified February 25, 2022, 5:29 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sungrazing_comet.

15. The term "great comet" is a generic term applied to exceptionally bright and/or large comets.

they depart from the sun than they are on their approach. Outgassing from the comet during and after its encounter with the sun makes the coma grow. This would have made the comet visible in the daytime.[16] New comets, and this may be one, can be exceptionally bright because they have never gone through degassing before. For the purposes of this investigation, the comet was somewhat brighter than Venus. The average individual would not have been able to see the comet when it was close to the sun. Several comets through history have been visible with the naked eye as close as 5 degrees from the sun.[17] I do not claim that the 5 BC comet was one of these. I believe it could be seen only by astronomers on March 20, 5 BC in the Americas and then later by the wise men. At this time the comet would have been closer than 5 degrees from the sun. The comet might have not been seen for a few days after that by the average individual, but it would have been seen.

Only a sungrazer coming from the general direction of Algedi and returning toward Algedi will allow all the constraints imposed on the comet movement to be met. Also, by definition, sungrazers must be the fastest moving comets simply so that they can escape the sun's gravity. This comet was traveling at 300 km/sec at perihelion, perhaps faster. For a comparison, comet Lovejoy (C/2011 W3) produced a speed of 565 km/sec at perihelion.[18]

Also, the Great September Comet of 1882 followed a characteristically similar path in that it nearly avoided being spotted as it approached the sun. It then became bright enough to be seen in the daytime and remained visible with the naked eye for four months after perihelion.[19] The 5 BC comet was only observed for two and a half months.[20]

Light Sources

Four natural light sources could impact the night without darkness: zodiacal light, the gegenschein, aurorae, and meteors. A comet passing between the Earth and sun could supply materials that would greatly

16. David J. Eicher, *Comets!: Visitors from Deep Space* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 8.

17. Colin R. Nicholl, *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the True Star of Bethlehem* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 103.

18. Wikipedia, s.v. "C/2011 W3 (Lovejoy)," last modified April 18, 2022, 20:25 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C/2011_W3_(Lovejoy).

19. Wikipedia, s.v. "Great Comet of 1882," last modified July 7, 2021, 20:33 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Comet_of_1882.

20. The comet holding the record for longest naked-eye visibility is Hale-Bopp in 1996. It was seen for 569 days.

increase the illumination of Earth. My conclusion is that meteors, at best had a small role in the night without darkness.

The Zodiacal Light

Zodiacal light is due to forward-scattering from the interplanetary dust between the sun and the Earth. The zodiacal light is so named because its center is on the ecliptic (where the zodiac constellations are).[21] Figure 2 shows the zodiacal light with the "pillar" along the ecliptic. In the spring, the zodiacal light usually appears as a "false dusk." In the fall it is more typically seen as a "false dawn."[22]

On the evening of the night without darkness, the space between the sun and the Earth was inundated with dust and gases from the comet, thus producing something resembling the zodiacal light but far brighter, the primary commonality being that the light is forward-scattered. First, we see the dust between the sun and Earth, and later the dust will move beyond the Earth to play the major role in keeping the night as bright as day.

The Gegenschein

The gegenschein ("counter-shine")[23] is similar to zodiacal light except that its light is due to back-scattering to the Earth by interplanetary dust that is beyond the Earth. The dust tail could have added to the interplanetary dust, thereby increasing the luminosity of the gegenschein. This additional light is always opposite the sun (the antisolar point). Under normal circumstances, interplanetary dust is sparse, and individual small particles are trapped where the solar wind suspends them from falling into the sun. This precise mechanism would not play a significant role: a similar occurrence would. Once the tail of the 5 BC comet passed beyond the Earth, the backscattering from the much larger and denser particles and gases would be responsible for the night without darkness.

21. Wikipedia, s.v. "Zodiacal light," last modified April 15, 2022, 16:31 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zodiacal_light.

22. Debra Byrd and Bruce McClure, "Zodiacal Light: All You Need to Know," *EarthSky* (blog), September 6, 2021, https://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials/everything-you-need-to-know-zodiacal-light-or-false-dawn.

23. Wikipedia, s.v. "Gegenschein," last modified June 9, 2022, 23:05 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gegenschein.

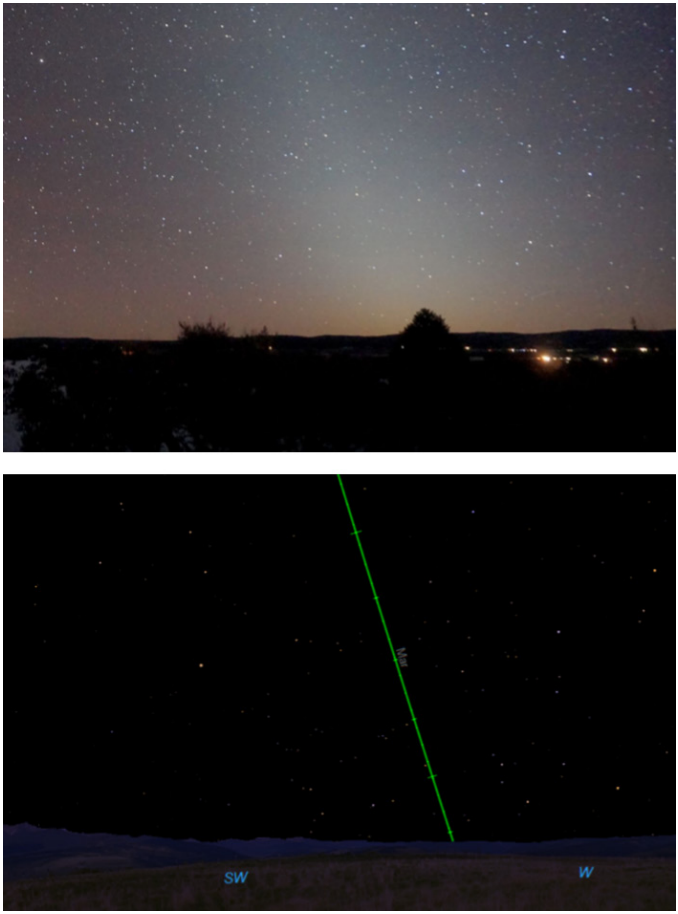

Figure 2. The top image is the zodiacal light captured by Mike Lewinski on 01/27/2019 06:57 pm at Tres Piedras, New Mexico.[24] The bottom image shows the ecliptic as determined by Starry Night Enthusiast 7 for the same time and location.

On the night of May 19–20, 1910, the Earth passed through the gas tail of Halley's Comet.[25] The dust tail missed the Earth by about 385,000 km (the average distance to the moon). Kidger says that astronomers have determined that the comet "has gone around the Sun perhaps 3,500 times in its history."[26]

24. Mike Lewinski, "Tres Piedras, New Mexico," *EarthSky* (blog), January 27, 2019, https://earthsky.org/earthsky-community-photos/entry/14688/.
25. Eicher, *Comets!*, 44.
26. Kidger, *Star of Bethlehem*, 117.

Eicher writes, "If Earth really did pass through the comet's tail, would a 'supertail' glow spanning 360° be visible? Amazingly, a passenger on a ship in the Mediterranean Sea claimed to have seen a large, faint glow like the Gegenschein, some 45° high and 60° wide with a 'pillar of light' at its center."[27] The 5 BC comet would have such a "supertail," but this article proposes that the coma of the 5 BC comet was stripped from the nucleus and driven directly across the Earth.

One challenge this hypothesis faces is demonstrating that the light sources discussed could have produced enough light to cause a night without darkness. An attached appendix argues that the unique situation with the comet tail on that night could have created a situation where there was 1,000,000 times more dust in the vicinity of the Earth than is normal. This would impact the brightness of the zodiacal light and gegenschein by six orders of magnitude.

An Aurora

Aurorae are natural lights in the sky caused by disturbances in the Earth's magnetosphere which are caused by the solar wind. The lights are caused by ionization of charged particles that rain into the upper atmosphere from the magnetosphere. Usually, these lights are seen near the Earth's polar regions — Aurora Borealis near the north pole and Aurora Australis near the south pole. Aurorae rarely reach the lower latitudes, and they are not normally capable of generating the brightness of the light Nephi_3 witnessed. On the night without darkness, the comet tail would add its own charged particles, which would intensify an aurora and allow it to appear at lower latitudes. The aurora could have produced some of the "great lights in heaven" (Helaman 14:3). The Carrington event, likely caused by a coronal mass ejection, in 1859 produced aurorae as far south as the Caribbean.[28]

27. Eicher, *Comets!*, 44. The passenger stated that this was like the Gegenschein. I believe it was the zodiacal light.

28. In 1859 an interplanetary CME swept across the Earth. This is known as the Carrington Event. Some of the phenomena that occurred at that time are recorded at Wikipedia, s.v. "Carrington Event," last modified June 2, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrington_Event. This event generated massive aurorae. One reviewer noted that he/she was unaware of any coronal mass ejection as bright as what would be needed for a CME in the scenarios considered here. Granted, modern astronomers have not seen anything like the CME plus comet tail combination that may have occurred at Christ's birth, for this was a highly unusual event. The most dramatic CME in modern history would be the Carrington event of 1859. But I would propose that the obviously unusual nature of the Star of

Coronal Mass Ejection

A coronal mass ejection, while not a light source, can play a role in producing light on Earth. "A coronal mass ejection (CME) is a significant release of plasma and accompanying magnetic field from the Sun's corona into the solar wind. CMEs are often associated with solar flares and other forms of solar activity, but a broadly accepted theoretical understanding of these relationships has not been established."[29] "When the ejection is directed towards Earth and reaches it as an interplanetary CME (ICME), the shock wave of traveling mass causes a geomagnetic storm that may disrupt Earth's magnetosphere, compressing it on the day side and extending the night-side magnetic tail."[30] The solar storm would cause a disruption in the sun's magnetic field and in turn cause the Earth's magnetic field to buckle. This we observe as both radio interference and aurorae (Northern and Southern Lights).[31]

Carolin Crawford, in a video lecture showed videos of a comet passing near the sun and another of comets falling into the sun; both of these produced solar flares.[32] Comet SOLWIND1 hit the sun on August 30–31, 1979, and the corona brightened.[33]

Scientists are not willing to state that comets passing by or falling into the sun can trigger a CME. Sometimes the sun's photosphere will erupt violently when a comet is present, while at other times nothing happens. The 5 BC sungrazing comet passing in front of the sun and the CME could have occurred simultaneously. The Earth engulfed by the CME wave would be ringed by the aurorae and from space would

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Bethlehem must necessarily involve highly unusual but not impossible events. My argument is that the mechanisms proposed here, while unusual, could still have been possible and may help provide useful explanatory power for events observed in two hemispheres.

29. Wikipedia, s.v. "Coronal Mass Ejection," last modified June 8, 2022, 17:14 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronal_mass_ejection.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Carolin Crawford, "Comets: Visitors from the Frozen Edge of the Solar System," December 12, 2013, video, produced by Gresham College, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBjnlfLxhEI, 53:50. Time 20:00–25:00 is of most interest; see especially 21:00–21:30, 23:10–23:30, and 23:50–24:10. Note that the comet that survived did not linger near the sun like the 5 BC model. The comet passed within about 6 solar radii.

33. Gary W. Kronk, "C/1979 Q1 Solwind 1," August 30, 1979, Cometography, José J. Chambó, http://cometography.com/lcomets/1979q1.html.

appear to shine. We could have the CME wave working in concert with the comet tail on the night of March 19 to brighten the sky.[34]

CMEs can travel at widely different speeds across space. The Space Weather Prediction Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports that CMEs can reach Earth from the sun in as little as 15–18 hours. The same report states that "larger CMEs can reach a size comprising nearly a quarter of the space between Earth and the Sun by the time it reaches our planet."[35]

The NOAA indicated that a CME could be as large as 30+ million kilometers thick when it reaches the Earth. By the time the back edge of the CME passes the Earth, the CME could be much thicker — the backside moving slower than the front edge. It might be possible for the CME to engulf the Earth for 10 or so hours. The reflected light off of the CME would brighten the backside of Earth. The night without darkness could have been caused by the CME elements near the Earth, it could have been caused by the backscattering from the wavefront that had already passed the Earth, or it could have been a combination of the two. I have chosen to only describe the backscattering as the cause of the night without darkness.

The dashed line marked "3–17" in Figure 3 shows the expected coma/tail of the comet before the CME explosion. At perihelion, the CME would be generated and, roughly 24 hours later, would arrive at Earth. The CME, travelling at four or five times the solar wind, would flatten the coma around its wavefront. "CMEs travelling faster than the background solar wind speed can generate a shock wave. These shock waves can accelerate charged particles ahead of them — causing increased radiation storm potential or intensity."[36] The CME travelling much faster than the comet itself could effectively drive the coma ahead of the shock wave. If the CME, shown in Figure 3 as a continually expanding ball on 3–18 and 3–19, hit Earth directly on, then one would expect a thick wall of dust to appear beyond the Earth for some time. This would light up the whole night sky until the CME and solar winds drove the dust deeper into space.

34. Naval Research Laboratory, "Coronal Mass Ejection and Huge Sun Diving Object," August 16, 2019, LASCO/NRL SOHO, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jApb_tb-BME. This video shows a comet hitting the sun followed by a CME.

35. "Coronal Mass Ejections," Space Weather Prediction Center, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, https://www.swpc.noaa.gov/phenomena/coronal-mass-ejections.

36. Ibid.

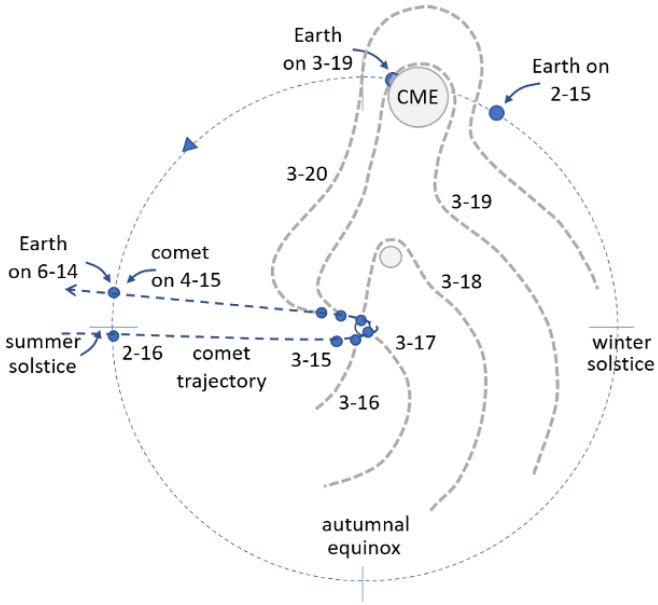

Figure 3. The tail of the comet over time. February 16 (2–16), the comet crosses Earth's orbit. April 15 (4–15), the comet moves beyond 1 AU leaving the sun.

Figure 3 also shows how the CME has stretched and smashed the tail such that the dust is a thin but wide sheet between the CME and the Earth. The flattened portion of the tail would be on the order of 50 million km long. As it crosses Earth's orbit the tail is much like a ribbon, very long, maybe many Earth diameters wide and with a thickness possibly less than the diameter of the Earth. At sunset (March 18 at about 6:30 PM American time) the distance from the Earth to the "ribbon" as shown in Figure 4 is close, but it cannot be drawn to scale. The distance could be much further from the Earth but closing fast.[37] The same holds for the view at sunrise. The ribbon would not be dense; however, the total illumination would be sufficient to keep the sky as bright as day from horizon to horizon in the location of the Nephites. I refer back to Eicher's statement: "If Earth really did pass through the comet's tail, would a 'supertail' glow spanning 360° be visible?"[38]

37. Earth moves at about 30 km/sec along its orbital path. The CME in this demonstration would be moving in the vicinity of 2000 km/sec and expanding in diameter as it moved away from the sun. For this intent and purpose, the Earth would appear to be standing still relative to the CME. Refer to "Coronal Mass Ejections," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

38. Eicher, *Comets!*, 44.

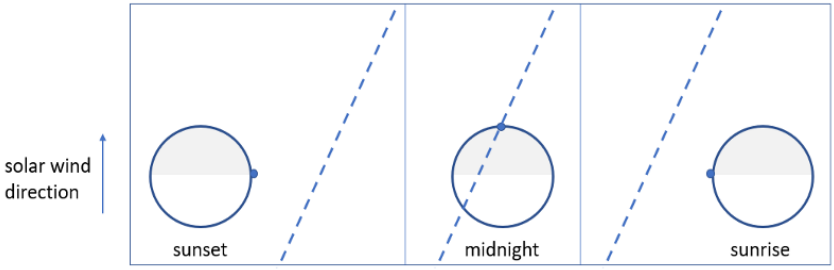

Figure 4. Earth in three different positions relative to the comet tail throughout the night without darkness. The small dark dot represents an American location. The dashed line is the flattened tail.

The Angle at Which the Coronal Mass Ejection Hit the Earth

If the CME were to pass in front of the Earth's orbit, then Asia, Europe, and Africa would see the brightness before the Americas. If the CME were to hit the Earth directly, they would see the brightness at the same time as the Americas. We have no indication in history from these continents of an event of this nature. Because of this, I propose that the CME caught planet Earth from the rear as the sun was setting in the Americas.

An angle of about 25 degrees for the dust tail/wave front crossing the Earth as shown in Figure 4 is reasonable to produce the desired results; however, some "tuning" of the speed and direction of the CME allows for a wide range of possible angles. I observe that the 25-degree angle (or any angle in the range of 15 to 45 degrees) serendipitously reduces the potential light impact on western Europe because of the directionality of what amounts to a wall of light. The Atlantic Ocean serves to provide a distance barrier of roughly 90 degrees. The angle of the wall of light is not so favorable for China at sunrise in the Americas, but it doesn't need to be, because the Pacific Ocean provides the distance barrier at about 180 degrees.

Beginning at sunset for the Nephites, a greatly enhanced false dusk Zodiacal light caused by forward-scattering would be manifest. A diffuse "pillar" would appear along the ecliptic similar in angle to the image in Figure 2. Back-scattering would add to the light in the western sky. Perhaps in the east the horizon would be dark.

As the night moved on, the collimation would improve to the point that, at midnight (Figure 4), the source of the reflected light might appear as a narrow pillar of light. At this point, though, the total luminescence of the sky would rival the sun. The pillar could have been running from

the eastern to the western horizon because of the density of the wall of dust.[39] After that, the pillar would begin to diffuse until by sunrise, the lighting would be similar to the lighting at the previous sunset.

On the Luminosity

Third Nephi 1:19 states "that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was mid-day." This discussion will assume that when the sun went down the light was the equivalent of direct sunlight at about 2,000 to 111,000 lux.[40] As a matter of definition, lux is a measure of how much light falls on a particular surface per square meter — in this case, the Earth. A full moon can deliver 0.25 lux on a good night.[41] Simple math shows that the sky actually has room for over 128,000 moons. If each moon area could produce 0.25 lux then the night would be at 32,000 lux at mid-day.[42] The moon is a sphere, so much of its light is scattered into space.[43] A dense wall of dust would reflect much more light to Earth, even a blinding light — and heat with it. The dust cloud was not particularly dense in the morning because the Nephites were able to see the sun at its rising. The comet (nucleus and a newly reformed coma) itself would now be rising with the sun even as the tail had swept across the Earth. (See Figure 3 for the position of the comet relative to its tail.)

A wall of interplanetary dust delivered by the comet's tail and the CME plasma is sufficient to keep an area of the Earth bright enough to validate "the night without darkness" statement. Given what we have here, I can find no solution to the night without darkness other than the massive dust, plasma, and gases provided by the comet and the CME. Further, at the lower end of the numbers given, there could have been a pillar of light as thin as perhaps 3 or 4 degrees in the sky in the late-night hours running in an east-west direction (along the ecliptic) and passing nearly overhead. The sky would be blue, but the light would

39. The pillar of light might move some of the observers to recall the pillar of fire in Exodus 13:21 and Nehemiah 9:12, 19. "[T]he pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go."

40. Wikipedia, s.v. "Daylight," last modified May 11, 2022, 23:50 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daylight.

41. Christopher C. M. Kyba, Andrej Mohar, and Thomas Posch, "How Bright is Moonlight?," *Astronomy & Geophysics* 58, no. 1 (February 2017): 1.31–1.32, https://doi.org/10.1093/astrogeo/atx025.

42. The moon's angular size averages about 30 arcminutes.

43. Mike Luciuk, "How Bright Is the Moon?," Asterism.org, Amateur Astronomers, Inc., April 12, 2019, https://asterism.org/2019/04/12/how-bright-is-the-moon/.

be diffuse, so there would be almost no shadows on the ground. The lack of shadows likely would have made the night appear deceptively bright.[44]

Figure 11 shows the P17/Holmes comet. The perfectly white center is the coma, the nucleus would be a dot in the center of the coma. The coma of any comet is far brighter than the moon on a per area basis. Imagine that coma passing beyond the Earth. Night would turn to day.

The Chronology on the Ground

In the western hemisphere the sun set on the evening of March 18, but the sky did not darken all night long. After a night without darkness, if the comet appeared to emerge from the sun, then the first observers (astronomers) might see an odd bulge in the sun as it rose. Nephi only indicates that the new star appeared, the star might have become visible to him that day as it moved farther from the sun or later (3 Nephi 1:21).

On this Jerusalem afternoon (morning for Nephi) a child would be born in Bethlehem. The Paschal lambs were being set apart. This day was the tenth day of Abib (now called Nisan) on the Jewish calendar: this year that day fell on March 19, 5 BC.

There is a possibility that the shepherds at the birth of Christ saw a massive false dusk that night because of the unusual amount of dust between the Earth and the sun. Luke 2:9 states, in the same context, that "the glory of the Lord shone round about them." The glory of the Lord always indicates that light is present.

Several hours after the Nephite sunrise (13–15 hours? The initial location is unknown), the wise men watched the sun rise in the east with the comet's coma some 3 or 4 degrees to the south (see Figure 5). The coma might have had a line that seemed connected to the sun. This would be the glowing debris field dutifully following the comet — the anti-tail. The comet, with its coma shining, looked like a new sun being born. The glowing line would be reminiscent of an umbilical cord. The tail would also likely be visible to observers using the astronomers' tool. The wise men saw that comet for the first time on the morning after the Jews set apart the Paschal lambs for the Feast of the Passover.

44. One reviewer asked if a supernova would be a more likely source to provide the brightness required for the Star of Bethlehem. Factors ruling out a supernova or a nova are discussed in footnote 8. A fixed star, whether a nova or supernova, cannot fit the observations adequately.

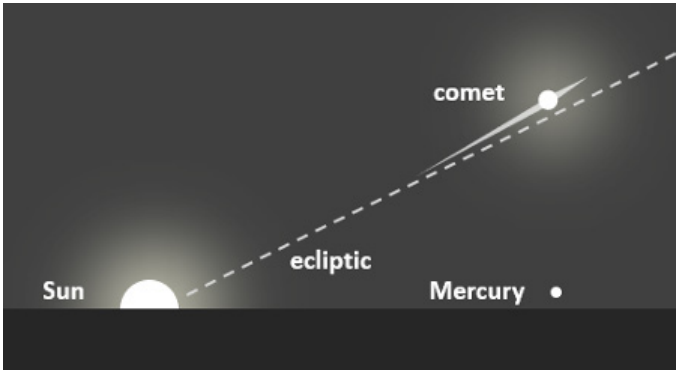

Figure 5. First view of the comet by the wise men as it pulled away from the sun's glare on the morning of March 20, 5 BC, as seen through a glass, darkly. What would be seen of the comet would be its coma and tail. Any trailing debris could also have comas. I don't believe Mercury would be visible, but its location is correct.

The Darkened Glass and Sun Spots

I believe the wise men, like Nephi$_3$, were well acquainted with scriptures and prophecies regarding the birth of the King of the Jews. As importantly, they were competent astronomers who knew, through prophecy, to expect the comet to manifest itself as a birth. Armed with this knowledge, they would have looked toward the sun through an astronomer's tool — a smoked piece of glass or obsidian[45] (just like multitudes of Americans did on August 21, 2017, when viewing a total solar eclipse) — and were able to discern the comet moving beyond the sun. This might mean that the wise men saw the 5 BC comet several days earlier than the Jews, who would not have been looking for it. Obsidian glass disks were available in the middle east at least from the 7th century BC. If this was a common astronomical tool, then we must assume that the wise men had that tool available to them when they saw the star of Bethlehem rising in the east for the first time.[46]

45. Obsidian filters are available today for cameras and for the same purpose. See one example at D1, a retail store selling the filters. "Phantom 4 Pro ND8 Filter (Obsidian)," D1, https://www.d1store.com.au/products/phantom-4-pro-obsidian-nd8-filter.

46. Polished "mirrors" of obsidian are known to have existed at least seven centuries before Christ. Some were disks polished on both sides and about 5/8 inch thick. A demonstration shows that when held up to the sun, the disk acts as a filter, allowing the safe observation of sunspots and eclipses. Typical disks are shown in Stuart Campbell et al., "The Mirror, the Magus and More: Reflections

The Comet's Travel

Table 1 shows the results of an estimation of the comet's location and speed at six locations from 0.1 AU to 1 AU. From the perspective of people on Earth, while the comet was separated from the sun by 3 degrees, it was roughly 14 hours beyond the point where it completed the transit of the sun. That is the location the wise men would have seen it. At 16 degrees from the sun, I suspect Herod's astronomers would have spotted the comet. Curiously, this would be close to the Passover meal day. Twenty-six days from the spotting by the wise men, the comet crossed the Earth's orbit at 3.64 Mkm/day (~42.1 km/sec). If my assumptions are correct, the 5 BC comet would have been brighter than Venus but far from the brightest of the great comets, some of which have been seen with the naked eye within 5 degrees of the sun.[47] Venus can sometimes be seen as a morning star with difficulty.[48]

Distance beyond the edge of the sun	Day count beyond the edge of the sun	Degrees separating the comet and sun	Estimated Date
0.1 AU	1	5°	March 20, 5 BC
0.2 AU	2.7	10°	March 22, 5 BC
0.3 AU	5.0	16°	March 24, 5 BC
0.4 AU	7.5	22°	March 27, 5 BC
0.5 AU	10	27°	March 29, 5 BC
1.0 AU	27	58°	April 15, 5 BC

Table 1. The angular separation of the sun and comet in degrees as the comet traversed the inner solar system.

on John Dee's Obsidian Mirror," *Antiquity* 95, no. 384 (December 2021): 1547–64, https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2021.132. Zoltan Simon argues that these disks were used long before the time of Christ and in the same general area. See Zoltan A. Simon, "Astronomy and Ancient Eclipse Art — Is It a Science?," *Art Humanities Open Access Journal* 2, no. 5 (2018): 283, https://medcraveonline.com/AHOAJ/astronomy-and-ancient-eclipse-artndashis-it-a-science.html.

47. Nicholl, *Great Christ Comet*, 103.

48. Starry Night Enthusiast 7 by Simulation Curriculum is a computer program designed for amateur astronomers, available at https://starrynight.com/Enthusiast7/index.html. It shows that Venus's apparent magnitude on April 1, 5 BC (Julian), at noon was -4.31. It was likely visible. The apparent magnitude of the sun is -26.7. The comet would have to move away from the sun far enough so that the background would be less bright than the comet in order for the comet to be seen with the naked eye. For that reason, I suspect the comet had an initial apparent magnitude of about -10.

Figure 6 was created to give a visual chronology of the comet path. After 86 days from first being spotted by the wise men and having traveled 315 million kilometers, it was spotted one last time. Observe that there are only 7 days from the time the comet first disappeared and the brief appearance. The comet was hidden by the distance, compounded by the coma of the comet shrinking as it traveled further away from the sun.

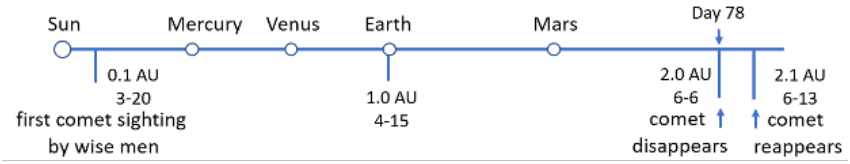

Figure 6. Timing of the comet as it traverses the inner solar system.

The comet crossed Earth's orbit heading for the sun on February 16. The dashed line in Figure 7 represents its unseen path. As it sped across Aquarius it was hidden by the sun's glare and the distance to Earth. The solid line is the visible transit across the constellations. Sometime after passing through Aquarius the comet disappeared in Capricorn. For discussion purposes the Chinese and the wise men lost track of the comet when it was directly on the same right ascension as Algedi. That was the last the Chinese saw of the comet. The wise men saw it again a few days later. Figure 7 indicates that the comet was heading toward Algedi at a rate understood by the astronomers. When the comet disappeared and then reappeared briefly later in an area anticipated by the wise men, they could confidently claim it was the star that they saw in the east and had watched it for close to 80 days. The comet would be expected to be about 7 degrees to the right of Algedi after 7 days. The apparent move to the right is due to parallax — the Earth is moving right to left relative to the comet.

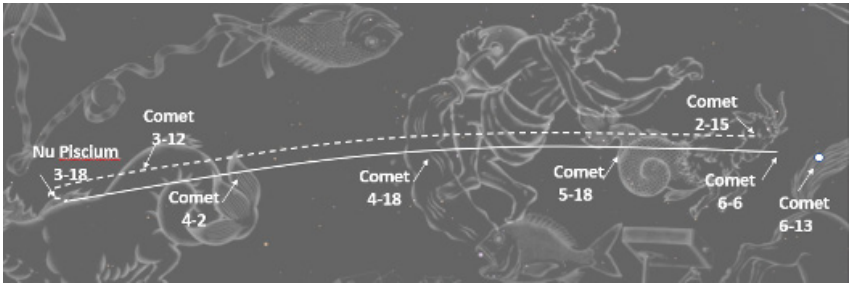

Figure 7. The comet travelling across the constellations.

The minimal date for the Chinese to see the comet disappear is 71 days after March 19. That puts the disappearance no sooner than May 30. The maximum date, because the end of the lunar cycle was April 6, was about June 24 (assuming roughly 78 days of visibility). There is a 25-day window in the whole year that allows my hypothesis to work. My solution places the final sighting by the Chinese on June 6, plus or minus 5 days. A perfect fit.

As the Earth rotates around the sun, the comet heads further away from the sun. By April 15 it crosses Earth's orbit. On June 6 (6–6) the comet arrives at the two AU mark. On that day in Figure 8 the comet would appear to be below Algedi at the same right ascension. The comet is now 300 million kilometers from the sun. Because of the temperatures in space, some of the materials that were gases have solidified and returned to the nucleus. Then, in the night hours of June 12/13, in the same spot that the comet crossed Earth's orbit on April 15, the wise men looked toward Algedi and saw their comet reappear.

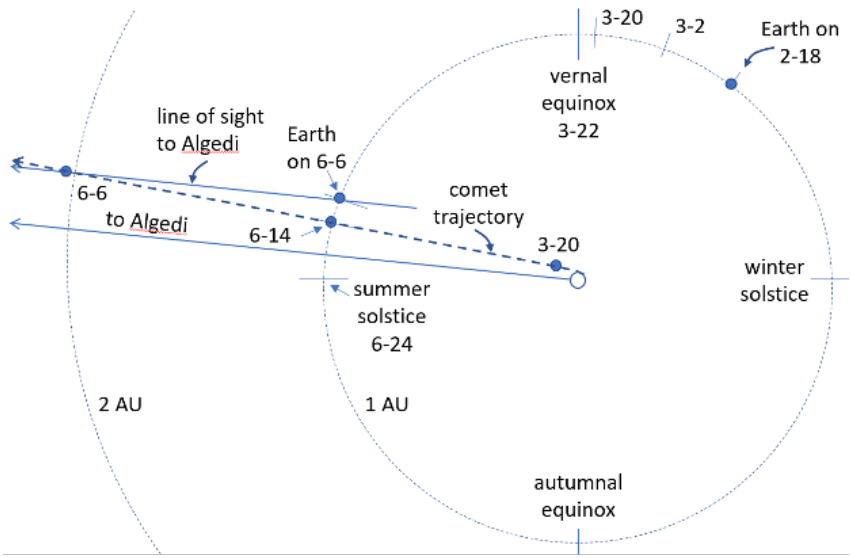

Figure 8. Movement of the comet relative to the movement of Earth.

Earth passes within 12 Mkm of the path on that night (Figure 9). The wise men may have seen faint traces in the evening as the comet began to become more visible, or they may have noticed the brightening later. At 5:30 in the morning, the sky is beginning to lighten. Sunrise is at 5:28. The comet is setting. Algedi will follow at 7:07. The comet must have reached an apparent magnitude of -1 or so as it was setting

(in astronomy "magnitude" is a logarithmic measure of brightness in which lower numbers are brighter, with the sun having a magnitude of -27 and the brightest star in the sky, Sirius, having a magnitude of -1.46, while the faintest stars the human eye can see have a magnitude around 6[49]). Because the wise men knew where to look and because the angular separation of the sun and comet is roughly 140 degrees, seeing the comet would be easy. I expect that this comet, like the Holmes comet (see Figure 11), subtended over roughly three arcminutes at its maximum.

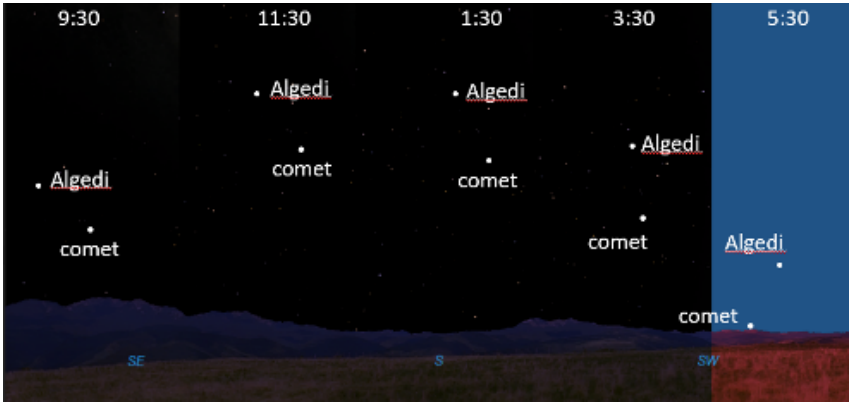

Figure 9. Panorama in five steps over 8 hours showing the comet's relationship to Algedi on the night of June 12/13, 5 BC.

The comet was never far from visibility before its brief reappearance. Figure 10 shows three different views of a comet all from the same distance from the observer. As the angle of approach shrinks to 0 degrees, the visual image increases, because more of the tail material aligns along the visual axis causing the area around the comet to become denser and causing more light to be reflected to Earth. In our case, as the Earth passes under the trail, the size of the apparition grows to the point of visibility. Because the 5 BC comet was likely a first-time visitor and a sungrazer, one would expect it to have a long and large tail.

The most conservative view is to assume at 1 degree from perfect alignment, the comet is just below the visibility threshold. That allows the comet to increase brightness constantly for about 24 hours before it disappears again below the horizon at Jerusalem at about 5:30 AM.

49. See Bruce McClure, "What is Stellar Magnitude?," *EarthSky* (blog), March 9, 2022, https://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials/what-is-stellar-magnitude/, and Wikipedia, s.v. "Magnitude (Astronomy)," last modified April 6, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnitude_(astronomy).

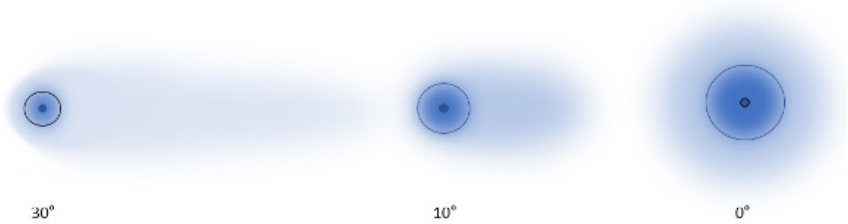

Figure 10. Three different angles of a comet in flight. The circle on each is the optical boundary. In this illustration, the tail is assumed to be too faint to be visible beyond that circle.

Under the right circumstances, this brief reappearance of a comet that seems to stand over a specific point is a given. Someone in Tehran or Rome could have seen the comet brighten in the predawn hours if they had been looking in the general direction of Algedi. It would hold no meaning for them. Once the Earth had passed under the comet trail, the comet brightness would begin decreasing, at the rate that it had earlier increased.

What we have is a tube thinly populated with dust and gases about 50,000 km wide at a distance from Earth of 160 million kilometers and a tail that is effectively half a million kilometers long. The photograph of the Holmes comet (Figure 11) is basically identical to the 0-degree angle shown in Figure 10. That bright center is not solid; it appears so only because of the density of the coma and the length of the tail. The nucleus would be a minuscule speck in the middle of the bright center. Because of the collimation, the center acts much more like a disk than a sphere when the sun's light hits it, and that greatly increases the apparent magnitude of the comet.

Holmes went from an apparent magnitude of 17 to 2.8 in 42 hours. This is an increase in brightness of 500,000 times.[50] I propose that the 5 BC comet went from 6.5 (just below visibility) to -1 (a bright star, almost as bright as Sirius) in 24 hours. This is an increase of 300 times and, because of its angular separation from the sun, is bright enough to be seen at dawn by someone looking for it. The wise men saw the comet shortly after sunset and watched it grow during the night. The 5:30 time in Figure 9 shows the position of the comet at sunrise. Holmes' brightness increase was amplified by the growth in its coma. I am not

50. Eicher, *Comets!*, 24. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comet_Holmes and https://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap071026.html. Each magnitude difference is a factor of 2.512 times in brightness. Thus, a change of 14.2 magnitudes is a change of about 500,000 times in brightness; see McClure, "What is Stellar Magnitude?"

Figure 11. This Holmes comet photograph is by Mikkel Steine; Blaker, Norway; Oct. 30, 2007, https://spaceweather.com/comets/holmes/30oct07/Mikkel-Steine1.jpg.

suggesting the same thing happened to the 5 BC comet, though that can't be discounted. I think the collimation is enough to account for the increased apparent magnitude.

> Although large telescopes had already shown fine-scale cometary details, naked-eye observers saw Holmes as merely star-like until October 26 [2007]. After that date, 17P/Holmes began to appear more comet-like to naked-eye observers. This is because during the comet's outburst, its orbit took it to near opposition with respect to Earth, and because comet tails point away from the sun, Earth observers were looking nearly straight down along the tail of 17P/Holmes, making the comet appear as a bright sphere.[51]

I am claiming the same orientation for the 5 BC comet as Holmes. Curiously, the outburst occurred at 2 AU for Holmes. That is close to the same distance, 2.1 AU, from the sun where the 5 BC comet was last spotted. Holmes' apparent diameter, before the outburst, was 3.3 arcminutes.

51. Wikipedia, s.v. "Comet Holmes," last modified May 23, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comet_Holmes.

The Historical Record Mingled with Scripture

Numerous scriptures deal with the birth of Jesus. In the following sections, I examine these scriptures and discuss them relative to the historical record.

Samuel's Prophecy of Christ's Birth

Roughly five years before Christ was born, a prophet named Samuel appeared on a wall of a city in the Americas and castigated the inhabitants for their unrighteousness. On that day, Samuel prophesied the birth of the Son of God.

> And behold, he said unto them: Behold, I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name.
>
> And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day.
>
> Therefore, there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising of the sun and also of its setting; therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born.
>
> And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you. (Helaman 14:2–5)

People around the world saw Halley's comet in September, 12 BC. This was a short seven years before the star appeared and less than two years before Samuel prophesied that "there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld." (Helaman 14:5) This new star was to be far different than Halley's comet. Part of the difference would be the timing of the appearance of the star — the comet appearing to exit the sun and being bright enough to be seen in the daylight. The initial sighting of the 5 BC comet may have been when its coma was at its largest. Halley's comet would have first appeared dimly in the night sky and grown larger as it approached the Earth.

> And it came to pass that the words which came unto $Nephi_3$ were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came …
>
> For they knew that the prophets had testified of these things for many years, and that the sign which had been given was already at hand; and they began to fear because of their iniquity and their unbelief. And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was midday. And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again, according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given.
>
> And it had come to pass, yea, all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets. (3 Nephi 1:15, 18–20)

$Nephi_3$ makes a simple statement regarding the star: "And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word (3 Nephi 1:21)." The statement allows the Nephites to first observe the star in the daytime immediately following the night without darkness. If the statement is taken at face value, the Nephites may have seen the star before the Jews in Jerusalem saw it, but that is uncertain. However, if the wise men saw the comet rising heliacally, then when the Nephites saw the sun rising, the comet would also be rising.

The consensus among scholars is that Herod the Great's death occurred early in 4 BC. While this dating is not uncontested, it will be used here.[52] This article lends some technical support for the timing of Herod's death in 4 BC. Given that Herod died in 4 BC and the comet appeared in the spring of 5 BC, Christ would have been born near Passover in 5 BC. Colin Humphreys thinks that Christ might have born on the day the lambs were set apart and that the Passover that year was in April; I think that Humphreys missed the Passover by one lunar cycle, and Christ was born on March 19, 5 BC. The Passover meal that year was eaten in the late evening on March 23.[53]

52. "The generally accepted date for the death of Herod the Great is the spring of 4 BC although other dates have also been suggested (e.g., 5 BC, 1 BC and 1 AD)." Colin Humphreys, "A Comet in 5 BC," 41.

53. Humphreys, "A Comet in 5 BC," 41.

Arguments from John the Baptist; from $Nephi_1$ the son of Lehi, in the Book of Mormon; from $Nephi_3$ the son of $Nephi_2$; and from Ezekiel[54] in the Old Testament support the date of March 19, 5 BC. Some members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have considered April 6, 1 BC, as the birth date because this is the date that the church was organized. Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 states that this was 1830 years "since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh." Scholars in the Church generally agree that the statement on the date of the founding of the Church is not intended as a prophetic statement about the date of Christ's birth.[55] The Book of Mormon appears to support the position that Christ was born shortly after the commencement of the 92nd year of the reign of the Judges (3 Nephi 1:4) and in the Passover season. That places his birth in the spring but does not confirm the April 6 date.[56]

Lamb of God and Passover

John the Baptist was the individual that applied the label "Lamb of God" to his cousin Jesus in the New Testament (John 1:29). What scant evidence we have implies that the Baptist knew the birth date of Christ and used that to propose that Jesus was the Lamb.[57] The Baptist must have been familiar with a tradition that has since been lost.

In the Book of Mormon, $Nephi_1$ used the term "Lamb of God" 600 years before the birth of Christ — this was before his brother Jacob learned the term "Christ."[58] The primary role of the Lamb of God is to be sacrificed in the temple, but there are chronological aspects to this title. The lamb will be born in the spring. It must be set apart 4 days before being sacrificed. It must be the meat course at the Paschal meal. It must

54. Ezekiel had a sunrise vision on the tenth day of the first month. In it he saw the glory of the Lord returning sometime in the future. Margaret Barker interprets this as Ezekiel seeing the birth of Christ. See Margaret Barker, *King of the Jews: Temple Theology in John's Gospel* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Literature, 2014), 303.

55. Jeffery R. Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Christ," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2010): 5–38, https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/dating-the-birth-of-christ/.

56. The Church was founded one or two days before the Jews' Passover meal in the year 1830, the Jewish date being Wednesday, April 7–Thursday, April 15, 15–22 Nisan, 5590. The Lord's Supper was one day earlier than the Jews' Passover.

57. Humphreys, "A Comet in 5 BC," 53.

58. $Nephi_1$ only learned the name "Christ" 30 or 40 years after he arrived in the Americas and after a temple was built (2 Nephi 10:3).

also be part of the flock of the slaughter (Zechariah 11:4) — the flock destined for the temple.

The Book of Mormon states that by the Nephite calendar — and this would be a liturgical calendar — Christ was born 4 days before the Nephite Passover meal.

> Now it came to pass that there was a day *set apart* by the unbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions should be put to death except the sign should come to pass, which had been given by Samuel the prophet. (3 Nephi 1:9)

I propose that 3 Nephi 1:9 used the term *set apart* purposely. An eyewitness, $Nephi_3$, knew from earlier prophets the birth day of Christ. Probably those prophets had testified that Christ would be born at the setting apart of the lambs. I think the unbelievers also knew this and saw a particularly fitting, bitter irony in making that the day when the believers would be destroyed.

The Nephites tracked the seasons in a manner probably similar to the Jews. That is, the Nephites studied the solstices and equinoxes. Their Passover was also eaten on the first full moon after the vernal equinox. The Nephite priests tracked the heavens to time the holy days. But observe what happened after Christ was born: their calendar was changed, and the beginning of the new year moved. The only rational date for the new year would be the day Christ was born. With a shift of 10 days from the old calendar, Christ had to die on the fourth day of the first month of the year. So states the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 8:5). We can state with certainty that this date was near or on a full moon immediately following the vernal equinox.

> And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land. (3 Nephi 8:5)

This storm marked the death of Christ. He was born 4 days and 33 Nephite years earlier. Based on typology, this is further evidence that Christ was born on the day that lambs were set apart before the Passover in the Spring of 5 BC. In other words, he was born on what would have been the tenth day of the month Abib. The lamb in Exodus 12:3 serves as a type: "In the tenth *day* of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb."

A challenge can be made that the actual Passover dates in Jerusalem were known to occasionally violate the standard rules of the Law of

Moses. If the Jews Passover would have been wrong for any reason then the righteous Nephites' lives were in jeopardy (3 Nephi 1:9). The correct alignment between the Jews and the Nephites is most logically determined to be when both parties met the Law of Moses standard.

The Bright and Morning Star

As stated, my hypothesis depends on the first position of the comet rising with the sun as witnessed by the wise men, and the Chinese position being where the comet was last seen. The expectations of the first century Israelites must be met and account for typology and prophecy. If, for instance, Christ is the Paschal Lamb, then they would expect his birth and death to be tied to the lambs of the slaughter (Zechariah 11:4, Jeremiah 12:3, Psalm 44:22, Romans 8:36). Jesus dying on the cross while the lambs are being sacrificed in the temple is perhaps the most common type, and we see that in the four gospels. The wise men claimed they saw the star rising heliacally (Matthew 2:2). David Hughes states, "The term 'in the east' … originally was written *en té anatolé* (Greek singular) whereas 'the east' is usually *anatolai* (Greek plural). *Anatolé* has a special astronomical significance, indicating the earliest visible rising of a star at day break (the heliacal rising), and so [Matthew 2:2] should read 'for we have seen his star appear in the first rays of dawn.'"[59] We see here that the wise men saw the star rising. Samuel prophecies something similar: "There shall a new star arise" (Helaman 14:5).

It would appear to those watching as if the sun had birthed the comet. Typologically we could equate this to "the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star" of Revelation 22:16. Germanus I of Constantinople (c. 634–733), in expounding on the birth of Christ, quoted his version of Psalms 110:3: "Out of the womb before the morning star I have begotten you."[60] This scripture is significantly different than present-day translations; nevertheless, it ties the birth of Christ to the morning star.[61] If the wise men had this passage available to them, they would be looking for a morning star to mark the birth of the Messiah. Peter calls him the day star (2 Peter 1:19). Luke calls him the dayspring (Luke 1:78). What we are looking for then is a star

59. Hughes, "The Star of Bethlehem," 513.

60. Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 99.

61. The KJV Psalm 110:3 reads, "[I]n the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth."

that first appears in the morning. Malachi 4:2, calls him "the sun of Righteousness."[62] Christ is both the Lamb and the morning star.

What the Wise Men Saw

Raymond Brown offers three possible locations for the home of the wise men: Parthia or Persia, Babylon, and Arabia or the Syrian desert. He comments, "While the thesis that the magi came from Persia became the dominant view among the Church Fathers, the thesis that they came from Arabia is the earliest attested view."[63] I favor the earliest view because there were Jewish colonies in Arabia, and gold, frankincense, and myrrh moved along trade routes in that region. What we can surmise is that the wise men were very interested in the king of the Jews, they possibly knew somewhat different scriptures than the disciples had and they were competent astronomers.[64] I note here that their use of the term "King of the Jews" implies that they were not from the tribe of Judah, but that does not mean they were not Israelites.

The wise men expected a star to mark the birth based on the vision of Balaam (Numbers 24:17): "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." The reference to a scepter both indicated a ruler and effectively described the tail of certain comets by the ancient astronomers and so it appears that Balaam may have seen a comet.[65] Expecting to see a sign on the day that the Messiah was to be born, the wise men looked to the sunrise on March 20, 5 BC, saw a comet emerging from the sun, and recognized that the Messiah had been born the previous evening.

As the wise men traveled toward Jerusalem, the comet rose earlier each day. It left the inner solar system, crossing the Earth's orbital path at the place where the Earth would be in June. By mid-May the comet could be observed rising around 11:00 PM and drawing closer to Capricornus: aiming for the head of the Sea-goat. The comet was getting dimmer as

62. See also Psalm 84:11; 3 Nephi 25:2; and Ether 9:22. Revelation 22:16 is interesting because here Jesus is calling himself the bright and morning star. This is after the evident display of a bright and morning star at his birth. This is not a prophetic statement; for the early Christians it is a reminder and confirmation of the star.

63. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary of the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 169.

64. The wise men did not know about the birth place of the King of the Jews, but they did know the birth time.

65. Nicholl, *Great Christ Comet*, 192–96. Nicholl goes deeply into Numbers 24:17 and demonstrates that the scepter-star was both literal and metaphorical.

it moved away from the sun. Near mid-June (70 plus days after its first spotting by the Chinese), it could no longer be seen. But the astronomers knew its direction of travel and apparent speed, and when it disappeared, it was in the vicinity of Algedi.

The Vernal Equinox

The first full moon — the Passover moon — occurred one day after the vernal equinox that year. The equinox occurred on March 22; therefore, Christ was born on March 19, 5 BC. We also infer from the angels visiting the shepherds at night (Luke 2:8) that Christ was born in the afternoon or early evening in Bethlehem. The eight- or nine-hour time difference between the Americas and Jerusalem indicates that from an American perspective, Christ was born in the morning. Nephi_3's eyewitness statement allows this to be correct (3 Nephi 1:21).

A remarkable event took place that Passover evening — the moon over Jerusalem rose in eclipse. This total eclipse (on March 23) lasted for 102 minutes,[66] and the partial lasted for 222 minutes. This virtually perfect total eclipse was an auspicious sight on the night of Passover. Perhaps the next morning, the average Israelite became aware of a comet with a tail rising just before sunrise.

Wherever they started from, the wise men were not under time constraints. They probably arrived at Jerusalem in early June and met with Herod for the last time near the 12th of June. In audience with Herod, the wise men asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2).

Herod was surely aware of the comet. What neither he nor his scribes and priests were aware of was when the comet first appeared. Not knowing that prevented them from drawing any significant conclusions. Herod must have had some suspicion as to when the birth star of the King of the Jews should appear because, in private, he inquired diligently about the timing (Matthew 2:7). If the word got out as to the time these astronomers first saw the star, the result could be an insurrection. Herod recognized the religious implications and made plans to destroy the child. Typology based on the law of Moses suggests that the Messiah would be born when the lambs were chosen as the paschal sacrifices.

66. Fred Espenak and Jean Meeus, "Five Millennium Canon of Lunar Eclipses: -1999 to +3000," NASA Technical Publication TP-2009–214172, January 2009, https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/5MCLEmap/-0099-0000/LE-0004-03-23T.gif.

A child born on the 10th day of the Jewish year — the day set apart for choosing the sacrifices — could be recognized as the Lamb of God.

> When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.
>
> When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (Matthew 2:9–10)

The wise men had not seen the comet for nearly a week. On that night the Earth traveled under the track of the long-departed comet. Humphreys states, "Phrases such as 'stood over' and 'hung over' appear to be uniquely applied in ancient literature to describe a comet, and I can find no record of such phrases being used to describe any other astronomical object."[67]

Having departed Jerusalem, the men and their entourage camped by the road that led southwest to Bethlehem. Perhaps in the late evening, they observed a star-like object beginning to brighten 2.5 degrees below Algedi. At about 3:30 AM (local), Algedi was in view in the southwest and dropping toward the horizon. The "star" they had seen in the east grew brighter as it settled lower. Saying that "the star, which they saw in the east, went before them" is apropos. But what caused this apparition? On about June 12, the Earth was about to cross the path of the comet as it was leaving the inner solar system.

Figure 9 shows different positions of Algedi on the night of June 12/13. At 1:30 AM, the star Algedi was past its zenith for the night. What is happening is that the Earth is rotating — causing the star to sink toward the horizon. By 5:30 AM the comet became a (relatively) bright ball over a house as the wise men looked toward Bethlehem — "it came and stood over where the young child was." They were looking down the "barrel" of the debris field and would see something similar to the comet in Figure 11.

The wise men visited the child immediately after the sighting of the apparition and could have arrived at the house essentially at day break.[68] Herod would have expected the wise men to take a couple of days to find the Christ child. Instead, they found him at their first opportunity

67. Humphreys, "The Star of Bethlehem," 36.

68. Bethlehem sits on a high plain across a valley from Jerusalem, Jerusalem being at the same elevation as Bethlehem. One can image the wise men seeing the comet light reflecting off the limestone abode some 3 or 4 miles from their camp in the early morning hour before the visit.

to search. "And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way." (Matthew 2:12)

Then Joseph had a dream: "When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt" (Matthew 2:14). It is doubtful that a lone man with a wife and infant could travel to Egypt unaccompanied. Joseph and Mary most likely immediately joined a caravan. They left Bethlehem probably within hours of the wise men's departure. Because of the generosity of the wise men, Joseph and Mary had the financial means to flee into Egypt.

The September Lunar Eclipse and Herod's Death

"Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem" (Matthew 2:16). Enraged, Herod went looking for the child and killed all the children under two years old around Bethlehem.[69] According to Josephus, Herod had another problem on his hands — sedition. This sedition occurred possibly weeks before an eclipse of the moon late on September 15, 5 BC. It was his response to this that buried the story of the slaughter of the innocents.[70]

Briefly, Herod had taken upon himself to create a golden eagle to be placed over the great gate of the temple. This image was a violation of the law of Moses and profaned the temple. Moreover, the eagle was a despised symbol of their Roman masters. Some outraged Jews decided to destroy the eagle, and so they did. But no less than 40 of these men, including the leaders, refused to retreat as Herod's soldiers approached and were captured on that day. These men were moved to Jericho; then important Jews were called to Jericho to observe the trial. The seditionists were sentenced to death. As a further punishment to the Jews, "Now it happened, that during the time of the high priesthood of this Matthias, there was another person made high priest for a single day, that very day which the Jews observed as a fast."[71]

69. Jesus would have been barely 3 months old at this time, according to my hypothesis. Some researchers consider that Herod killed the children from two years old and under because the first sign heralding his birth was the triple conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in Pisces in 7 BC. See for example, Hughes, "The Star of Bethlehem," 516. The three conjunctions were in May 29, September 29, and December 4. Herod may have assumed that the wise men had lied to him about the birth date.

70. Whiston, *Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*, 423–26.

71. Ibid., 425.

Josephus was writing a history for non-Jews. His description lacks details that would be foreign to his audience. The Passover was eaten on March 23. Based on that date, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) would fall on September 11. Yom Kippur is the most solemn day of the year for Jews and is a fast day. This is the date that the high priest was substituted: no other day would serve as a meaningful punishment. He points out that "Herod deprived this Matthias of the priesthood, and burnt [the man] who had raised the sedition, with his companions, alive. And that very night there was an eclipse of the moon." Replacing the high priest on Yom Kippur was the greatest affront to the Jews that Herod could arrange. Herod was not finished offending the Jews; he chose to burn the 40 men to death on September 15. This was the first day of Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles.[72] That night there was a total lunar eclipse over Jerusalem. Totality lasted for 99 minutes, virtually identical to the eclipse during the Passover meal but 2 hours later.[73] Because of the feast, there was a large audience to observe the eclipse.

"But now Herod's distemper increased upon him after a severe manner, and this by God's judgement upon him for his sins."[74]

Josephus suggests that the eclipse was a portend of Herod's death. It could have occurred any time after September of 5 BC until the next Passover.[75]

Conclusion

"The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1)

At one time, the Israelites understood typological constructs to be manifest literally. Christ, as the Lamb, follows the rules applied to the

72. The first day of Sukkot is treated as a Sabbath, where no work is allowed. On that year, September 15 was an actual Sabbath. The Book of Ecclesiastes was read, emphasizing the "ephemeralness of life." The death of the 40 men at Sukkot was another insult by Herod aimed at the Jews. See Wikipedia, s.v. "Sukkot," last modified May 30, 2022, 8:20 UTC, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukkot.

73. This is a strong argument for the only eclipse that Josephus mentions in his writing being on the night of September 11, 5 BC. It serves also to support his death in the spring of 4 BC, contrary to some scholars who opt for a 1 BC death.

74. Whiston, *Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*, 425.

75. There was a partial eclipse on March 13, 4 BC, visible from Jerusalem sometime after midnight. It lasted for 138 minutes. It was dramatically less impressive than the March 23 or September 15 eclipses in 5 BC. Some scholars, however, consider this to be the eclipse that preceded Herod's death before the 4 BC Passover.

flock of the slaughter. He is the morning star, and therefore, a star must appear in the morning. He is the firstborn, so he must be the firstborn lamb, and so forth. The Book of Mormon has very little typology relative to the Bible; however, it has the technical information that directs us to the biblical typology.

The Chinese provided one location for the comet. This location allows the comet to approach the sun without being seen from the Earth in order to meet the morning star typology. At the same time, this comet could account for the night without darkness and the appearance of the "star" on the day of the birth of Christ.

A comet seen by multiple groups around the world in 5 BC directs us to a single month for the nativity. Then Jewish rituals direct us to the specific day of the year. This particular day validates the firstborn typology, leading to evidence that the wise men saw a comet rising heliacally in the east.

The vernal equinox occurred 3 days after the appearance of the comet. At the Passover meal following the vernal equinox, the moon rose in total eclipse over Jerusalem. The wise men saw the comet for over 70 days based on Chinese records and interpreted it as the sign that the King of the Jews had been born. They watched the apparition travel toward a particular spot in the sky. They then saw something during one dawn near that particular spot that directed them to a specific dwelling. The comet was in a precise location at its setting to fulfill all of the prophecies concerning the Star of Bethlehem. The comet's movement, along with typology, places Christ's birth on March 19, 5 BC, and the wise men's visit at approximately June 13, 5 BC.[76]

The proposed chronology and mechanisms appear to work well for the birth of Christ, the travel time of the wise men, their finding the Christ child, and the flight to Egypt of Joseph and Mary, followed by the events around the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the eclipse mentioned by Josephus. Perhaps because of the other political outrages of Herod, the slaughter of the innocents was lost to secular history, only being recorded biblically.

What has been shown in this article is that a single comet in a fairly precise orientation and trajectory could have accounted for all the events associated in any way with the Star of Bethlehem. With many scholars

76. Kidger, *Star of Bethlehem*, 274. Kidger stated that the target was a 10-degree circle; the given information prevents a more accurate determination. Because of this, the date the wise men saw the comet over Bethlehem could be much closer to the summer solstice.

doubting the reality of the appearance of the star, the Book of Mormon presents a critical piece of evidence, the night without darkness, that may be the key to resolving all of the Star of Bethlehem issues.

Charles E. Dike *joined the Navy to see the world. That got old pretty fast so he joined the Church and got a BSEE at BYU (1977), then while raising a family, he completed an MSEE (1984). He spent roughly 35 years in design and research of integrated circuits. Much of his later work entailed on-chip security for microprocessors. Charles retired in 2014 and has been exploring technical details in scriptures since then with his primary focus on the Book of Mormon.*

Appendix: Estimating the Material Involved in Lighting the Night Sky in 3 Nephi 1:15–20

The dark wedge in Figure 12 represents the expansion of the comet dust pattern as it is driven from near the sun toward Earth. The outer circle is the orbit of Jupiter, roughly marking the boundary of the interplanetary dust cloud. Within this cloud, most dust particles range from 10 to 300 microns.

> The material producing the zodiacal light is located in a lens-shaped volume of space centered on the sun and extending well out beyond the orbit of Earth. This material is known as the interplanetary dust cloud. Since most of the material is located near the plane of the Solar System, the zodiacal light is seen along the ecliptic. The amount of material needed to produce the observed zodiacal light is quite small. If it were in the form of 1 mm particles, each with the same albedo (reflecting power) as Earth's moon, each particle would be 8 km from its neighbors. The gegenschein may be caused by particles directly opposite the sun as seen from Earth, which would be in full phase.[77]

77. Wikipedia, s.v. "Coronal Mass Ejection."

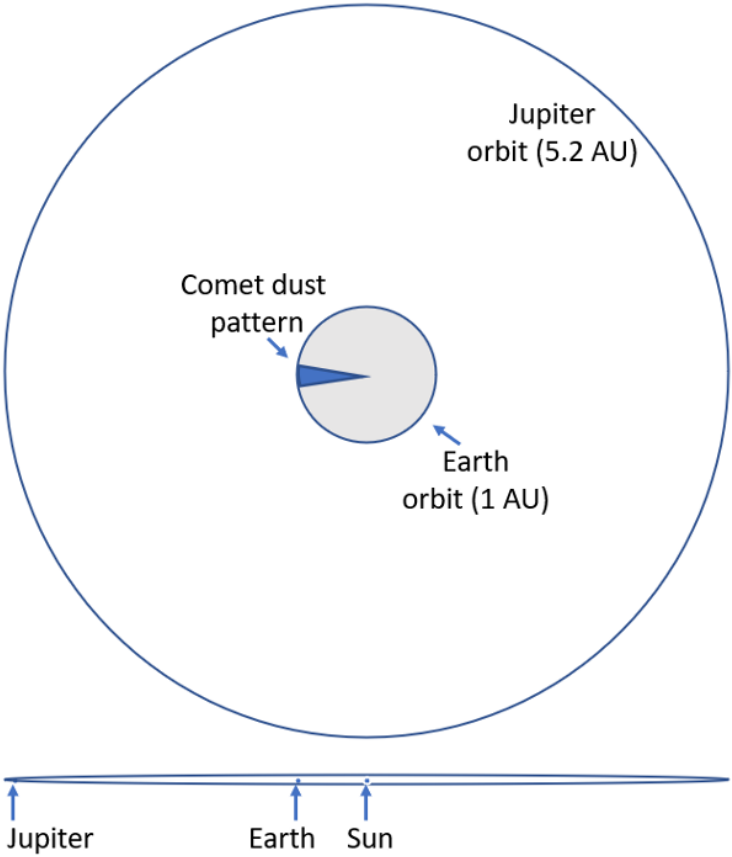

Figure 12. Interplanetary dust cloud. Top and side views.

Trying to estimate the dust added to interplanetary space is rife with assumptions that can produce gross uncertainties.

1. I will assume that the interplanetary dust discussed here is distributed throughout the solar system bounded by the orbit of Jupiter at 5.2 AU from the sun.
2. The distribution will be in the form of a disk on the ecliptic. The thickness of the disk at Earth is probably about 100 times the diameter of Earth. The diameter of the sun is about 109 times the diameter of Earth.
3. The total mass of the normally existing interplanetary dust is the equivalent of an asteroid with a diameter of 15 km and

a density of 2.5 g/cm^3. This information was taken from the Wikipedia link given.[78]

4. For simplicity, the Star of Bethlehem dust production will be the identical size to the mentioned asteroid. This assumes a "great comet" that is highly impacted by its near approach to the sun.

The interplanetary dust is not uniformly distributed throughout the solar system. The dust tends to be denser around the orbital paths of the planets, and there is an area in the sun's corona where no dust exists.[79] For the purposes of this appendix, these facts will be ignored. Figure 12 compares the disk area at 1 AU and at 5.2 AU.

A quick glance at the density of the comet dust compared to the zodiac disk suggests that the comet dust is easily one million times denser than the zodiac dust. Assume the Earth is covered in a hemisphere of comet dust with a radius of 385,000 km. Assume further that the zodiac disk is as thick as the sun's diameter. The number of these hemispheres contained within the circle defined by the Earth's orbit would be about 600,000. The comet dust density is probably greater than 600,000 times the zodiac dust density with a comparable brightness increase. The luminosity of starlight (see Table 2) implies that the one million times increase is correct within one order of magnitude. I believe having this perspective helps in visualizing the massively brighter gegenschein and zodiacal light on the night without darkness. A more rigorous approach follows.

If the hypothesis is correct and the comet dust cloud exists, then Helaman 14:4 has an interesting statement: "[F]or ye shall know of the rising of the sun and also of its setting; … nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born." The cloud is thin enough to allow the sun to be visible behind it. This is an important eyewitness observation: a cloud so dense as to be able to hide the sun would most likely reflect so much light and heat that it would be a health hazard. We saw that the zodiacal cloud is extremely sparse and the eye-witness report effectively states that the comet cloud is not completely opaque during that night.

78. Wikipedia, s.v. "Interplanetary Dust Cloud," last modified May 8, 2022, 9:12 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interplanetary_dust_cloud.

79. Lina Tran, "What Scientists Found after Sifting through Dust in the Solar System," Goddard Space Flight Center, NASA, March 12, 2019, https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2019/what-scientists-found-after-sifting-through-dust-in-the-solar-system.

The interplanetary dust around the Earth ranges in size from about 10 to 100 microns. The dust from the coma would also contain much larger particles. As a curiosity, because the gegenschein is at the antisolar point, as the sun sets in the west, the bright antisolar area in this case would appear to arise in the east and travel along the zodiacal light band (which runs nearly perfectly east-west near the vernal equinox).

How Bright was the Night?

How bright is a day? Lux is a measure of lumens; 1 lux equals 1 lumen per square meter. A 75-watt incandescent bulb produces roughly 1,000 lumens.

Illuminance	Example
120,000 lux	Brightest sunlight
20,000 lux	Shade illuminated by entire clear blue sky, midday
1,000–2,000 lux	Typical overcast day, midday
400 lux	Sunrise or sunset on a clear day (ambient illumination)
0.25 lux	A full moon, clear night sky
0.0001 lux	Starlight, overcast moonless night sky

Table 2. Examples of illuminances.[80]

Bright daylight illuminance can be measured as high as about 120,000 lux for direct sunlight at high noon. If this amount of illuminance lasted for a few hours instead of for a short time around high noon, the temperature on the ground could rise to the point that it would be a health risk. I suspect that the night without darkness illuminance ranged from 2,000 lux to 20,000 lux. From Table 2, the lower end of the illuminance has to be above 400 lux, and the top end could be satisfied with 1,000 lux (though pessimistically), so I feel the range suggested is fair. The relevant scriptures are below.

> Helaman 14:3 And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day.
>
> Helaman 14:4 Therefore, there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising

80. Wikipedia, s.v. "Daylight."

> of the sun and also of its setting; therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born.
>
> 3 Nephi 1:15 And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness.

Based on the distribution of the light from what can be described as a cloud, one would not expect to see shadows. This would likely cause the night to appear brighter than would be evidenced by the amount of illumination.

Moon Shine

The sky has room for nearly 128,000 moons at 385,000 km from the Earth. We have a total volume for the comet material of 1.7 x 10^12 cu meters. If that material were spread in a hemisphere shape with a radius of 385,000 km, this hemispherical shell would be 1.81 microns thick. From a practical perspective, this thin shell could not be made of dust — the dust particles being much larger. For the purpose of this appendix, I will assume that an average thickness of over 100 microns is needed to practically deal with dust from the comet. To simplify the mathematics, I have chosen to increase the thickness of the shell by 64 times. The thickness then becomes 116 microns on average. Doing this effectively shrinks the number of moons by 64 times so now the sky would appear to only have 2,000 moons. With each moon delivering 0.25 lux to Earth the total illumination is 500 lux.

In Table 3, 2,000 moons completely fill the sky at a distance of 48,000 km from Earth. This produces 32,000 lux on Earth, which is more than enough to account for a day as bright as mid-day.

Dust Distance from Earth	Hemisphere Area in Moons	Reflective Moon Count	Thickness of Hemisphere	Illuminance on Earth
385,000 km	128,000	2,000	116 microns	500 lux
192,000 km	32,000	2,000	116 microns	2,000 lux
96,000 km	8,000	2,000	116 microns	8,000 lux
48,000 km	2,000	2,000	116 microns	32,000 lux

Table 3. Illuminance on Earth from the cloud with a fixed thickness of dust. The albedo is 0.12.

Recall that Eicher wrote, "If Earth really did pass through the comet's tail, would a 'supertail' glow spanning 360° be visible?"[81] This exercise meets our expectations with the coma material of the new comet sweeping over the Earth. The coma would be far brighter than Halley's comet tail at the same distance from Earth simply because there is far more material.

Practically, the dust cloud would be hundreds of kilometers thick with the particles sparsely scattered through the cloud. If the dust distance were viewed as an average distance, then the illuminance would be fairly accurate.

What about the Albedo?

The Moon's albedo (reflectivity) is, on average, 0.12. If the Moon were a perfect reflector, its albedo would be 1.0. In other words, 12% of the light that hits the Moon is reflected — the Moon is a poor reflector. That is a reason why Earth receives only 0.25 lux from it on perfect conditions. If the Moon did not have the dark seas (maria) then the albedo would be 0.18.

People on Earth never see a true full moon, because when the Moon is perfectly aligned with the sun and Earth, there is a lunar eclipse. According to Mike Luciuk in an article at asterism.org, "Apollo astronauts reported that a true full Moon is about 30% brighter than what we see on Earth."[82] Adding 30% to the improved Moon brings the albedo to about 0.24. If the improved lunar number is double the average albedo of the Moon at a distance of 48,000 km, the cloud could deliver 64,000 lux.

Studies of interstellar dust have shown that an albedo of 0.60 is not unreasonable.[83] If we dare use the interstellar dust albedo of 0.60, that would deliver 160,000 lux — with a life destroying brightness and heat. If the dust had this high of albedo, we would simply need much less dust. Curiously, if an albedo of 0.5 is used — this being measured albedo for the interplanetary dust — the dust cloud would deliver a maximum of 120,000 lux. This is the same illuminance as a bright sunlit day at high noon.

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81. Eicher, *Comets!*, 44.
82. Luciuk, "How Bright Is the Moon?"
83. John S. Mathis, "Interstellar Dust and Extinction," *Annual Reviews of Astronomy and Astrophysics* 28 (1990): 37–70, https://ned.ipac.caltech.edu/level5/Mathis/Mathis4.html.

Conclusion

The dust cloud is feasible. Whether it existed is conjecture. A zodiacal light and gegenschein combination that can approach one million times brighter than nominal events is capable of producing a night without darkness. With or without adding the gases from the coma and aurorae generated from the CME the dust is sufficient to satisfy this hypothesis. And the night without darkness occurs before a star appears.