

# Book of Moses Essays #43: Moses 1: A Literary Masterpiece. Many-Great Waters and Moses' Mission to Baptize (Moses 1:25-26)

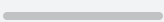


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Book of Mormon Central Staff, Matthew L. Bowen and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

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In the immediately preceding set of *Essays*,<sup>[1]</sup> we focused on the narrative of Moses 1 and its interpretation. However, beginning with this *Essay*, we will turn our attention to some of the beautiful and meaningful ritual allusions and literary details of the chapter.

One of the most striking and neglected motifs in the Book of Moses — and for that matter in the Old Testament — is that of baptism. The truth that baptism was taught from the beginning as part of the doctrine of Christ constitutes one of the most precious teachings of the Pearl of Great Price.<sup>[2]</sup> As we have discussed elsewhere,<sup>[3]</sup> the Book of Moses describes how the name, titles, and aspects of the mission of Jesus Christ were known since the time of Adam and Eve. Vestiges of these ancient teachings survive in Jewish and early Christian tradition.

The Book of Moses situates references to baptism within the Primeval History between the creation of the Earth (including the creation of the “great waters”<sup>[4]</sup>) and the “uncreation” and “re-creation” of the Flood.<sup>[5]</sup> Heading up the descriptions of the events of Creation and the retrospective references to baptism is the heavenly ascent of Moses.<sup>[6]</sup> Following the defeat and expulsion of Satan (a motif that precedes baptism in some ancient Christian sources<sup>[7]</sup>), Moses’ interview with God resumes and God promises him, “thou shalt be made stronger than the many waters; for they shall obey thy command even as if thou wert God.”<sup>[8]</sup>

Below, we give an overview of the references to “many waters” and “great waters” in scripture and show how similar symbolism is associated with the bronze “sea” of Solomon’s temple. Then we will show how Moses, Enoch, and John the Baptist reenact this same symbolism as they fulfill their mission to baptize.

## Many-Great Waters in Scripture and in the Symbolism of the Bronze Sea of Solomon’s Temple

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The “many waters” or “great waters” found throughout scripture correspond to the “great waters” gathered together as “Sea” (including, oceans, rivers, lakes). In fact, the Moses account of creation describes them as such: “And I, God, made the firmament and divided the waters, yea, **the great waters** under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament, and it was so even as I spake.”<sup>[9]</sup> Likewise, the creation account in the Book of Abraham designates the “gathered” waters on the earth as “Great Waters.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Isaiah’s use of the phrase *mê tēhôm rabbâ* (“waters of the great deep” or “waters of the mighty Tehom”) is semantically and conceptually associated with the phrase *mayim rabbîm* (“many waters”<sup>[11]</sup> or “mighty waters”<sup>[12]</sup>). Herbert G. May long ago connected Isaiah 51:9-10 with texts like Habakkuk 3:15<sup>[13]</sup> where Habakkuk uses “many waters” (*mayim rabbîm*) in parallel with the sea (*yām*, cf. the Ugaritic/Canaanite deity Yamm): “Thou didst walk through

the sea with thine horses, through the heap [surging] of great waters [many waters, *mayim rabbîm*].” He also notes that in Habakkuk 3:15 the “many waters” are “associated with the ‘rivers’ and the ‘sea’ which Yahweh fights and conquers with divine power and authority, even as Baal struggled with the Sea and River in the Ugaritic myth.”<sup>[14]</sup>

In the Book of Mormon, the collocations “many waters”<sup>[15]</sup> and “great waters” both appear.<sup>[16]</sup> Moreover, Nephi defines the Lehi name Irreantum<sup>[17]</sup> in terms of the “many waters” that they beheld from the shores of the land Bountiful on the Arabian peninsula—waters which separated them from their final destination in the land of Promise and that they would thus need to cross.

Using similar symbology, Jacob, the brother of Nephi, understood Isaiah’s mythic telling of the exodus event in Israel’s salvation history as a metaphor for the Savior’s atonement and his bringing to pass the resurrection of the dead. Jacob connected the primordial deities or sea “monsters” of Isaiah 51:9-10 with Mot and Sheol<sup>[18]</sup>—i.e. personified and deified Death and Hell: “O how great the goodness of our God, **who prepareth a way for our escape** from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, **death and hell** [cf. Mot and Sheol]” (2 Nephi 9:10); “And because of **the way of the deliverance of our God**, the Holy One of Israel, this death [cf. Mot], of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead.”<sup>[19]</sup> And both Nephi and Jacob understood Isaiah’s mythic language as ritual language, equating “the way” (Heb. *derek*) through the “sea” (*yām*) in the Exodus as envisaged in Isaiah 43:16 and 51:9-11 with the “the way” of “the doctrine of Christ” or the covenant path, which included the ordinance of baptism.<sup>[20]</sup>

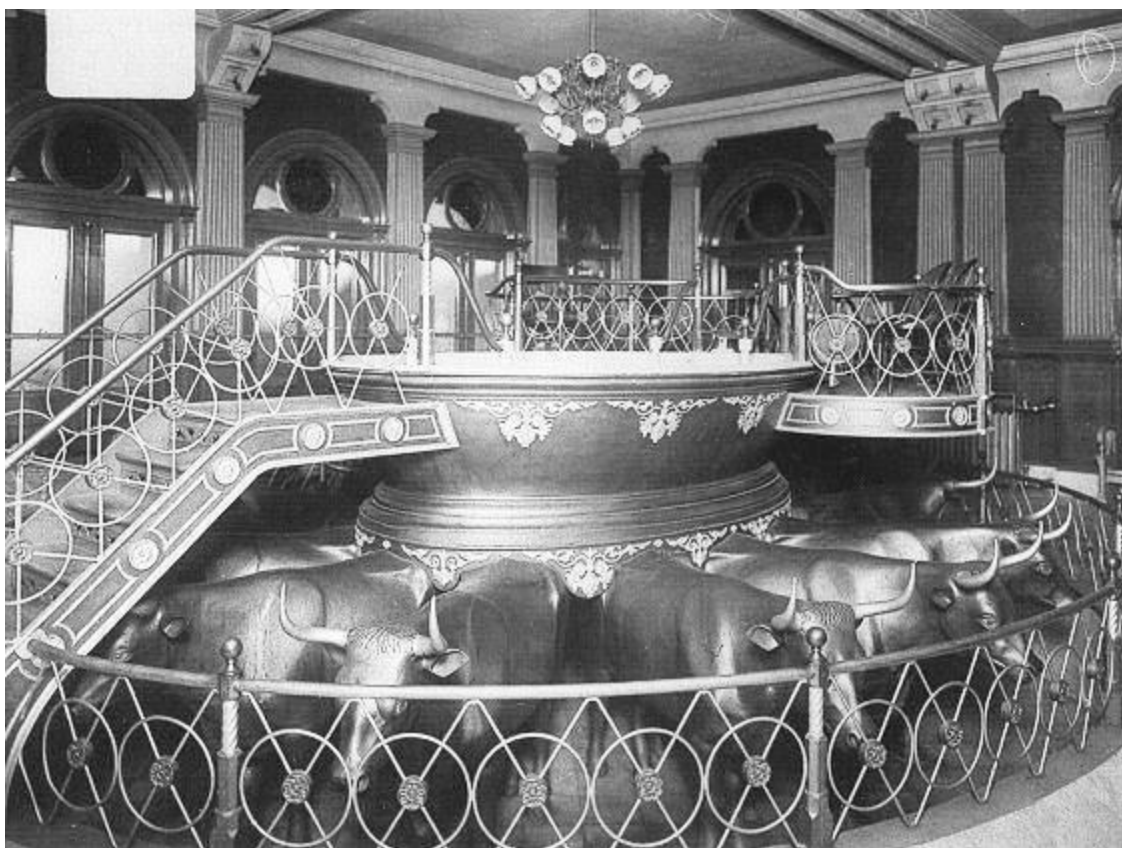


Figure 2. Baptismal Font in the Salt Lake Temple, ca. 1912

“Sea” (*yām*, or divinized Yamm) defeated by Yahweh in the Exodus appear to find their ritual and architectural realization in the bronze sea (or “brazen sea” *yām hannēḥōšet*),<sup>[21]</sup> also called the molten sea (*yām mûṣāq*)<sup>[22]</sup> that stood in the outer court of Solomon’s temple. Regarding that bronze sea, David Calabro asserts: “While there is no evidence that the temple laver was used as a baptismal font, it was definitely large enough to suggest such a use, and Joseph Smith’s specifications for a baptismal font modeled after the Solomonic laver for the Nauvoo Temple show that he understood it in this connection.”<sup>[23]</sup> The purification that preceded entry into the holy place in the temple corresponds to baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost in what Nephi called the doctrine of Christ.<sup>[24]</sup>

## Moses’ Mission in Drawing Israel Out of Many-Great Waters

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The dual etiology for Moses’ name given in Exodus 2:10 and Moses 1:25-27 both looks forward to his divinely appointed mission in which he will be “made stronger than many waters” and defeat “the Sea” (Hebrew *yām*, cf. the Canaanite deity Yamm) during the Exodus<sup>[25]</sup> and also backward to the Creation of the “great waters” by “the word of [God’s] power.”<sup>[26]</sup> A comparison of Moses 1:25-26 to Exodus 2:10, the Song of David parallel text, and Isaiah 63:11 helps us recognize and more fully appreciate the interrelationship between the name Moses and the act of “drawing” or “pulling” Israel out of the Sea (*yām*, cf. Yamm) or “many waters”:

Exodus 2:10; Psalms	Moses 1:25-26
18:16 [MT 17] / 2	
Samuel 22:17; Isaiah	
63:11	

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And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name **Moses** [*mōšeh*]: and she said, Because I **drew him out** [*měšītihû*] **of the water**. (Exodus 2:10)

He sent from above, he took me[:] **he drew me out** [*yamšēnī*] **of many waters** [Heb. *mayim rabbîm*] (Psalm 18:16/2 Samuel 22:17)

Then they [He] remembered the ancient days **Him** [He] **who pulled** [*mōšeh*] His people out [of the water] Where is He who brought them up from **the Sea** [*yām*, cf. deified Yamm]? (Isaiah 63:11, njps)

And calling upon the name of God, he beheld his glory again, for it was upon him; and he heard a voice, saying: Blessed art thou, **Moses** [Egyptian, "begotten"; Heb. *mōšeh* "drawer" or "puller"] for I, the Almighty, have chosen thee, and **thou shalt be made stronger than many waters** [Heb. *mayim rabbîm*] for **they shall obey thy command even as if thou wert God**. And lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days; for **thou shalt deliver** my people from bondage, even Israel my chosen. (Moses 1:25-26)

Each one of these texts attests the name Moses (Hebrew "drawer," "puller"; cf. Egyptian "begotten" < *ms[i]*),<sup>[27]</sup> the verb *mšy* (or both), and the image of birth/delivery from water. The phrase "many waters" in the Song of David<sup>[28]</sup> and Moses 1:25 constitutes an important lexical link between these two texts. Realizing that the Psalms were the hymnal of the Jerusalem temple would suggest a ritual dimension to Psalm 18:16 ("He sent from above, he took me[:] **he drew me out of many waters** [*mimmayim rabbîm*"]) and the similarly-worded Psalm 144:7: "Send thine hand from above; rid me, and **deliver me out of great waters** [*mimmayim rabbîm*]." The image of the divine "hand from above" may, in addition, suggest a symbolic or ritual gesture.

Significantly, the term *mayim rabbîm* could also be translated as "mighty waters."<sup>[29]</sup> Thus, one way of reading the Lord's promise to Moses's calling to deliver Israel is that he would be made mightier than "mighty waters" through his priesthood.

Indeed, it is Moses' power in the priesthood that allows him to overcome the waters, as described by Hugh Nibley: "This is the *de profundis*. That's the 130th Psalm. ... 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord'"<sup>[30]</sup> With similarity to the Egyptian myth of Osiris,<sup>[31]</sup> the "final test is the baptism. ... Moses is delivered from the waters and comes out."<sup>[32]</sup> In the typology of such tests, the righteous are raised in glory while the wicked drown and perish:<sup>[33]</sup>



| Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

Moses experiences something similar to Jonah the prophet who, when swallowed by the fish “for three days and three nights,”<sup>[34]</sup> and “in the midst of the seas [*yāmmîm*; cf. Yamm]; and the floods [*wēnāhār*, literally, ‘and the river’] compassed [him] about,”<sup>[35]</sup> he cried “out of the belly of hell [*mibbeten šē’ôl*].”<sup>[36]</sup> Assaulted by Satan’s rage, “Moses began to fear, and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell [*Sheol*]. Nevertheless calling upon God, he received strength...”<sup>[37]</sup> Just as the Lord answered Jonah’s prayer and “brought [his] life up from corruption,”<sup>[38]</sup> Moses defeats Satan through the Lord’s “strength”—strength which the Lord subsequently promises would reside in Moses himself: “thou shalt be made stronger than many waters; for they shall obey thy command as if thou wert God.”<sup>[39]</sup>

### “Because There Were Many Waters There”

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Figure 3. Dramatization of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River

The foregoing provides the necessary backdrop for understanding the symbolism of the place where John the Baptist encountered his disciples: “And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was **much water** [Greek *hydata polla*, **many waters**<sup>[40]</sup>] there: and they came, and were baptized.”<sup>[41]</sup>

This statement, like so many words and images in the gospel of John, constitutes a double entendre. To be sure, John baptized in Aenon or ‘*ēnayim* (“double spring”)<sup>[42]</sup> because “water was abundant there” (nrsv)—meaning there was water sufficient to completely

immerse an individual. However, it appears that John also wished to draw a connection between the waters of baptism and the “many waters” (*hydata polla* = *mayim rabbîm*) in the extant scriptural tradition and to draw upon the Old Testament symbolism and typology of that image.<sup>[43]</sup> If the collocation “many waters” seems too dramatic<sup>[44]</sup> as a description for the springs in Aenon, which are near the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized<sup>[45]</sup> (though the river itself remains unmentioned in John 3),<sup>[46]</sup> perhaps this should be taken as further evidence that John is using the description evoke the “many waters”/“great waters” passages from Psalms 18:16; 29:3; 32:6; 77:19; 93:4 107:23; 144:7.<sup>[47]</sup>

Jesus baptism was much more than a ritual ablution. He was baptized in the river Jordan, because baptism requires “many waters” that are “overcome” or “defeated” by divine power (priesthood power) as an essential aspect of the typology and symbolism.

## Conclusion

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In the figure of Moses a salient aspect of baptism’s symbolism thus emerges: the one who baptizes acts “as if [the baptizer] wer[e] God.”<sup>[48]</sup> The baptizer, having earlier been “drawn from the water”<sup>[49]</sup> and “made stronger than the many waters”<sup>[50]</sup> draws or pulls *others* and, in terms of ritual, “ma[kes them] stronger than the many waters.”<sup>[51]</sup> The “many waters” or “great waters” ultimately obeyed Moses’ “command even as if [he] wer[e] God,” obeying the same divine authority with which one baptizes—namely, the authority through which one “draws” or “pulls” (*mōšeh*) from the “many waters.”

In light of the pattern exemplified in Moses 1, it is no surprise that Enoch later states that the Lord specifically called him to baptize: “And he gave unto me a commandment that I should baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, which is full of grace and truth, and of the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of the Father and the Son.”<sup>[52]</sup>

Adapted and updated from Bowen, Matthew L. “‘Thou Shalt Be Made Stronger than the Many Waters’: The Interlingual Meaning of Moses and Its Implications for Moses 1:25-26 and John 3:23 (Unpublished manuscript).” 2020.

## Further Reading

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## Notes on Figures

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*Figure 1.* Photograph by Matthew L. Bowen.

*Figure 2.* Photo by C. R. Savage Co., Salt Lake City, Utah, published in J. E. Talmage, *House of the Lord* (1912), p. 262 Plate 11. Public Domain. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Salt\\_Lake\\_temple\\_baptismal\\_font.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Salt_Lake_temple_baptismal_font.jpg) (accessed July 25, 2020).

*Figure 3.* The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17), *The Life of Jesus Christ Bible Videos*, about 2:14. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/bible-videos/videos/the-baptism-of-jesus?lang=eng> (accessed July 25, 2020).

## Endnotes

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[1] *Essays* #31-42.

[2] Moses 6:53, 60, 65-66; 7:11; 8:24.

[3] See *Essays* #15.

[4] Moses 2:7.

[5] See, e.g., D. J. A. Clines, Noah's Flood 1; J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, God's Image 2, pp. 252-336.

[6] Moses 1.

[7] See, e.g., J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, By the Blood Ye Are Sanctified, pp. 144-146.

[8] S. H. Faulring *et al.*, Original Manuscripts, OT1 Moses 1:25, p. 85. See also T. A. Wayment, Complete JST of the OT, Moses 1:26, p. 3.

[9] Moses 2:7.

[10] Abraham 4:10: "And the Gods pronounced the dry land, Earth; and the gathering together of the waters, pronounced they, Great Waters; and the Gods saw that they were obeyed"; Abraham 4:22: "And the Gods said: We will bless them, and cause them to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas or *great waters*; and cause the fowl to multiply in the earth."

- [11] Numbers 24:7; Psalm 18:16 [MT 17]/1 Samuel 22:17; Psalm 29:3; 93:4; Song of Solomon 8:7; Isaiah 17:13; Jeremiah 51:13; Ezekiel 19:10; 43:2.
- [12] Psalms 32:6; 77:19 [MT 20]; 107:23; 144:7; Isaiah 23:3; Jeremiah 41:12; 51:55; Ezekiel 1:24; 27:26; 32:13; Habakkuk 3:15.
- [13] H. G. May, *Some Cosmic Connotations*, p. 10.
- [14] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- [15] 1 Nephi 13:10, 12-13, 29; 14:11-12; Ether 2:6; 6:7; and possibly Mosiah 8:8 and Mormon 6:4.
- [16] 1 Nephi 17:17; Omni 1:16; Ether 6:3. In 1 Nephi 17:17.
- [17] P. Y. Hoskisson *et al.*, *What's in a Name? Irreantum*, pp. 92-93.
- [18] See especially D. Belnap, *I Will Contend*.
- [19] M. L. Bowen, *Messengers of the Covenant*, pp. 123-127.
- [20] See especially 2 Nephi 31:13-18, 21. On Nephi's identification of the "doctrine of Christ" as "the way," see N. B. Reynolds, *This Is the Way*; see also N. B. Reynolds, *Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways*.
- [21] 2 Kings 25:13; Jeremiah 52:17; 1 Chronicles 18:8.
- [22] 1 Kings 7:37.
- [23] D. Calabro, *Joseph Smith and the Architecture*, p. 172.
- [24] J. T. Parker, *Doctrine of Christ*, p. 173. See also his broader discussion of the correspondence between the doctrine of Christ, Lehi's Dream, Nephi's Vision, and the temple in pp. 172-175.
- [25] Exodus 10:19; 13:18; 15:4, 22; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2; 1 Nephi 4:2, 17:26; Helaman 8:11; Doctrine and Covenants 8:3. The definite article in "*the* many waters" is omitted in the canonized version.
- [26] Moses 1:32, 2:1, 5. See *Essay #39* and J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 60-61, n. 32a; pp. 93-94 n. 1d; pp. 102-103 n. 5c. Nicholas Frederick observes (N. J. Frederick, *Line Within Line.*, p. 336): While "word" is written in lower-case in Moses 1:32, when the phrase "word of my power" occurs again in Moses 2:5, the original JST manuscripts record a reading of "Word of my power" [S. H. Faulring *et al.*, *Original Manuscripts*, OT1, p. 86. The term "word" is in lower case in OT2, p. 595], perhaps suggesting that Joseph viewed "Word" or "word" as something more than just a spoken command, closer to the Johannine Logos.
- [27] M. L. Bowen, *Most Desirable*, pp. 23-24.
- [28] Psalm 18:16 [MT 17]; 1 Samuel 22:17.
- [29] Cf. Exodus 15:10 "mighty waters" (*běmayim 'addîrîm*); Isaiah 43:16 "mighty waters" (*ûběmayim 'azzîm*).
- [30] H. W. Nibley, *Teachings of the PGP*, 18, p. 219. See Psalm 130:1.
- [31] Cf. the text of the Shabaka stone as described by Nibley in, e.g., J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, p. 515.
- [32] H. W. Nibley, *Teachings of the PGP*, 10, p. 118.
- [33] Exodus 15:10. See Exodus 14:27-30; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2; Hebrews 11:29; 1 Peter 3:18-21.
- [34] Jonah 1:17 [MT 2:1].

[35] Jonah 2:3 [MT 2:4].

[36] Jonah 2:2 [MT 2:3].

[37] Jonah 2:1 [MT 2:3], 6 (same as in MT).

[38] Moses 1:21-22

[39] Moses 1:25.

[40] Revelation 1:15; 14:2; 17:1; 19:6.

[41] John 3:23.

[42] M. W. Newheart, Aenon, writes: “It is uncertain as to where Aenon was, but two sites are often mentioned. The first is 6-8 mi. south of Scythopolis, in the southwestern corner of the DECAPOLIS. Eusebius (*Onomasticon* 40:1) and Jerome (Epistle 73) both support this location. The second suggested site is on the eastern side of the Jordan, in Perea. This suggestion is supported by a 6th cent. map on a church floor in MEDEBA, which places Aenon opposite BETHBARA” (capitalization in original). He further notes: “Also from the 6th cent. Is the tradition from the pilgrim guide Antonius that there was a cave on the eastern location where John baptized and Jesus stayed at the time of his baptism.”

[43] See, e.g., Psalms 18:16 [LXX]; 144:7.

[44] Samuel Zinner (personal communication, notes in possession of authors) remains unconvinced that John’s use of *hydata polla* constitutes an echo of Hebrew Bible *mayim rabbîm* passages. He asks, “would we not expect at least a river (even granted that the Jordan is there, but unmentioned)?” We answer: not necessarily. We recall Jeremiah’s description of the pools of Gibeon in Jeremiah 41:12 as “great waters”/“many waters” (*mayim rabbîm*; LXX Jeremiah 48:12, *hydatos pollou*). Zinner further suggests that “the many waters of John [3] hint at Ezekiel 1’s many waters, since the river Jordan’s etymology can be associated with the descent to the chariot. The descent of a dove at Jesus’ Jordan baptism is of a piece with this. To this we would add that if Jordan can be understood in as “descent” or “place of descent” we can detect additional wordplay in Jordan in Nephi’s vision of the tree of life, which includes a vision of Jesus’s baptism and the descent of Holy Ghost and other heavenly beings (1 Nephi 11:16, 26-27, 30; study forthcoming).

[45] See Matthew 4:13-17; Mark 1:9.

[46] John earlier mentions John the Baptist’s baptizing activities in “Bethabara beyond Jordan” in John 1:28. Cf. 1 Nephi 10:9.

[47] LXX Psalms 17:17 (=Psalms 18:16 [17]); 28:3 (=29:3); 31:6 (=32:6); 92:4 (=93:4); 106:23 (=107:23); 143:7 (=144:7) all employ forms of *hydata polla* (*hydatōn pollōn*, *hydasi pollois*) to translate Hebrew *mayim rabbîm*.

[48] S. H. Faulring *et al.*, Original Manuscripts, OT1 Moses 1:25, p. 85.

[49] Cf. Exodus 2:10.

[50] S. H. Faulring *et al.*, Original Manuscripts, OT1 Moses 1:26, p. 85.

[51] Ibid., OT1 Moses 1:25, p. 85.

[52] Moses 7:3.