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Abstract: Loss, pain, and suffering are too often, it seems, co-sojourners through our lives. To one degree or another, we all become familiar with these elements of a life lived in an imperfect world. It is inevitable — and virtually universal — that such companions foster questions about the meaning of life and whether there is a God who is the author, director, and finisher of that meaning. For those who conclude that God is real and has part in our lives, suffering can have or acquire eternal significance, enhanced by the personal realization that God, too, suffers and has suffered. In the Christian paradigm, God shares our suffering and we, in turn, share in His. In the depths of our sorrow we have, literally, a “co-sufferer” sharing our journey. As Christians, we are called upon to take upon ourselves the name of Christ. This act not only gives us a new name, but may require us to bear loss, pain, and suffering as did Christ — to acquire the “marks of Jesus” in our own lives. Indeed, for some, such bearing may be a key part of becoming what God plans for us to become.

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearsers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.1

During a recent visit to the campus of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, I took the opportunity to drop by the bookstore of the Duke Divinity School. Spending more than 60 seconds in a bookstore is extremely dangerous for me; it’s a rare bookshop in which I can’t find at least something that interests me, and usually many things. Unsurprisingly, therefore, I emerged with a book: *Pascal’s Wager: What Is It To Be Human*, by Ray Barfield.2

I’ve always been interested in the famous “wager” proposed by the great French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–1662); it even figures somewhat in a book manuscript that I’ve been tinkering with, on and off, over the past few years.

For those who might be unfamiliar with it, the Wager, which is outlined in Pascal’s posthumously published *Pensées* (or “Thoughts”), runs essentially as follows:

1. Either God exists or he doesn’t.
2. Reason cannot conclusively prove or disprove his existence.
3. Each person must decide or wager, one way or the other. Wagering isn’t optional. (Not to decide is, itself, to decide.)
4. If God exists, the potential gains for acting on that correct assumption are infinite (e.g., salvation and eternal life in heaven).
5. If God doesn’t exist, the losses from having acted on an incorrect assumption are finite (e.g., some pleasures foregone, some luxuries missed) and won’t matter in the long run, anyway, because the mistaken person will no longer exist.
6. Therefore, a rational person will wager that God exists (and particularly so because there is at least some actual evidence for God’s existence).3

1. Isaiah 53:2–7. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations in this essay come from the King James Version.
3. The Wager is discussed in Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, III.233. There are numerous editions.
The subtitle of Barfield’s little book (it’s only 56 pages long) suggested a new approach to the topic. Similarly, the author’s unusual background hinted at a potentially different vantage point from which to look at it: Professor Barfield is a pediatric oncologist at the Duke University School of Medicine as well as a Christian philosopher who teaches at Duke’s Divinity School. He holds both a medical doctorate and a doctorate in philosophy from Emory University in Atlanta.

Dr. Barfield’s slim volume is adapted from a 2011 lecture that he delivered at the University of Oklahoma under the auspices of the Veritas Forum, which, a note on the back cover of Pascal’s Wager explains, “hosts university events that engage students and faculty in discussions about life’s hardest questions and the relevance of Jesus Christ to all of life.” It includes not only Professor Barfield’s lecture but a transcript of the audience questions that followed his formal presentation and of his answers to them.

I won’t be reviewing the book here, nor pretending to offer an exhaustive or even balanced summary of its contents. What I want to do, instead, is to highlight some remarks from Dr. Barfield and to comment upon them and then to bring it into a kind of conversation with yet another book that I read upon my return to Utah from that trip to North Carolina (and elsewhere).

On the day following our return, I learned that the still relatively young daughter of a friend, neighbor, and member of our ward had suddenly and unexpectedly died while we were gone. And, later that same day, another friend was horrified to find his even younger daughter dead in her apartment. These two shocking stories led me to turn to a book that had long been on my list of must-reads.

Among the most eminent living Christian philosophers, Nicholas Wolterstorff (b. 1932) taught for 30 years at Calvin College in Michigan before becoming the Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale University from 1989 to 2001. While also serving as a visiting professor at various universities in Europe, England, and the United States, and helping both to establish the Society of Christian Philosophers and to launch its journal, Faith and Philosophy, he also delivered the prestigious Gifford Lectures at Scotland’s St. Andrews University and published extensively not only in the philosophy of religion but on subjects ranging from aesthetics through epistemology, metaphysics, and political philosophy to the philosophy of education.

Perhaps Nicholas Wolterstorff’s most widely known book, though, is one that he would desperately rather never have written. On
11 June 1983, his 24-year-old son Eric was killed in a mountain-climbing accident in the Kaisergebirge, a mountain range located between the Austrian towns of Kufstein and St. Johann in Tirol. Devastated by grief, Wolterstorff poured his soul into a series of vignettes and intensely personal meditations that, years later, were published in book form as *Lament for a Son* — a meditation entirely worthy to be placed alongside C.S. Lewis’s 1961 memoir of *A Grief Observed*.4

“Though it is intensely personal,” he explains,

I decided to publish it in the hope that some of those who sit beside us on the mourning bench for children would find my words giving voice to their own honoring and grieving. What I have learned, to my surprise, is that in its particularity there is universality. Many who have lost children have written me. But many who have lost other relatives have done so as well, along with many who have experienced loss in forms other than the death of relatives or friends. The sharply particular words of *Lament*, so I have learned, give voice to the pain of many forms of loss.5

As I read Nicholas Wolterstorff’s agonizing account of his grief at Eric’s death, I began to sense a dialogue between *Lament for a Son* and *Pascal’s Wager*. In this little essay, I’ll transcribe some of that dialogue as it presented itself to my mind, and then offer some additional thoughts that came to me in the wake of reading the two books. Among other things, the thought that pain and suffering are absolutely personal and intensely subjective, while, at the same time, universal and our common lot in mortality, is a theme that impressed itself upon me in particular ways.

I.

Predictably, given the text upon which he’s reflecting, the question of whether there is or is not a God, of whether reality is deeply personal or fundamentally impersonal, is at the heart of Ray Barfield’s remarks in *Pascal’s Wager*. But inevitably, given his background, his approach is also palpably different.

“In the experiences of beauty and love,” says Barfield,


5. Ibid. 5.
the placeholder for the range of thoughts, feelings, and actions that emerge is gratitude. Is there or is there not someone to thank? With suffering, a question arises, but it’s the question whether or not there is someone to blame.

If the universe is not created, suffering is still suffering, but it’s not reasonably thought of as inflicted or maliciously permitted, and it provokes no question of why.

But if there’s a God responsible for the universe and sufficiently involved to merit prayer, the character of suffering is very different. As they say, now it’s personal. Everything that was uniquely and newly attractive about beauty and love in a universe created by God now presses us to ask whether the gains are worth the price.6

It’s not surprising, of course, that a philosopher who also specializes in the medical treatment of children afflicted with cancer would find himself reflecting on the meaning or lack of meaning of pain, sorrow, and suffering. Surely these things must be on his mind almost daily. And it’s from such things that his discussion of Pascal’s Wager proceeds. Whereas Pascal has often been viewed as breaking new ground in probability theory and decision theory, Barfield comes to the discussion from the experience of pain and sorrow and of thanksgiving and relief — perhaps his own but certainly that of others with whom (and on whom) he’s worked as a physician.

“Even if love were an illusion,” he says, “even if all love was finally nothing more than one more version of how chemicals can combine in an accidental, material universe,” there would still be a deeply human “wanting it to be more than that, the desire for something real beyond the accident of molecular combination.”7

However, while many believe in a significance to human acts and to humanity itself that transcends matter in motion, atoms and the void, others do not. And it may or may not be a simple matter merely of data, logic, and analysis. Perhaps they cannot. Or, at least, even if they’re not actually incapable, they find it insuperably difficult. Personality and temperament, individual history, varying experience, even prejudices, psychological quirks, character, and intellectual capacities or incapacities almost certainly play a significant role.

7. Ibid., 16.
In the end, there are two kinds of thinkers. Those who say upon hearing the description of the many materially describable pieces and processes underlying the appearance, ‘This is all there is,’ and those who say, ‘No, it’s not.’ The former can say to the latter, ‘Show me why I should accept the idea of something more,’ and though many arguments can be offered, offered indeed on both sides, one who starts as a materialist will attempt to account for these central experiences as merely material events, not yet explained but explainable, while one who starts as a theist will say that these experiences are most fully illuminated when we reject the prospect that the determined material universe is all there is, and propose instead [a] creator.

The theist will say that love makes more sense, truth makes more sense, value, morality, beauty, longing, joy, hope, music, mystery, and goodness all make more sense in a universe that’s not merely accidental matter. It’s not an argument that such a thinker offers (although there are plenty of arguments), nor is it an argument that the materialist offers for the baseline and controlling belief that finally love, value, morality, beauty, longing, joy, hope, music, mystery, and goodness are temporary, accidental parts of a purely material universe.

At this deep level, it seems to me simply not to be about argument.8

Certainly, many atheistic materialists find meaning in their lives, in service, in raising children, in sacrificing for causes larger than themselves. Or, perhaps more accurately, they choose meaning for, or ascribe meaning to, such things. However, Barfield asks, what is the meaning of that meaning? In the end, there is none. Human minds and, hence, human purposes will eventually die, disappear, reach extinction, and, in a purposeless, materialistic, unconscious universe, it will ultimately be as if they had never existed.9

Barfield leaves no doubt that he rejects the view that humanity is merely “a transient, though conscious vapor”; human minds, personalities, and souls are more, in his judgment, than “a conscious but transient, accidental vapor on a speck in the middle of an

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8. Ibid., 18–19.
9. See the discussion at Barfield, *Pascal’s Wager*, 46–47.
incomprehensibly massive universe.” 10 Admittedly, though, he cannot prove his belief to the satisfaction of all others. But, he points out, his belief cannot be proven false, either.

If all were darkness with absolutely nothing suggesting the possibility that there’s more — that there’s a God — that would be easy. Or if all were light, with clear and absolute, unwavering signs of a creator God everywhere we look, that would be easy.11

Barfield does think, however, that belief — or even the simple openness to belief — can enable us to see things differently, and perhaps to see different things. (The maxim of St. Anselm of Canterbury [1033–1109] comes to mind: *Credo ut intelligam.* “I believe so that I may understand.”)12

The very habit of approaching different parts of lived experience with the mere openness to the possibility of God may itself be a condition for seeing certain qualities in the world, certain parts of what’s real about the world.13

Bach’s concertos do not themselves compel us towards conclusions regarding their origin, meaning, and purpose. But if we begin in a strict materialist universe with a kind of reductive naturalism, our starting point will lead us to devise theories and explanations that account for Bach’s brain producing this music and our own brains hearing the music. Writing a concerto is just another interesting (interesting to us, at least) manifestation of determined chemical reactions that are, as chemical reactions go, qualitatively no different than a reaction in a beaker when a teaspoon of sugar dissolves in water (though the reactions in Bach’s brain are more complex).14

But just as Barfield isn’t concerned to demonstrate that God is real and doesn’t think it possible to do so by objective evidence beyond a reasonable doubt, so, likewise, that isn’t Blaise Pascal’s focus, either.

11. Ibid., 24.
Pascal is not in the business of proving God’s existence, and people frequently get confused about this point. He is in the business of attending to probabilities — the stakes in a gamble — and the answer to the biggest gamble we have, namely, how we should live our lives.

Pascal wants to say that if it’s even possible that there’s more to the universe and myself than atoms in the void, and if it might be the case that this possible more is God, then it approaches certainty that I should include this in my life planning as I answer the question, What should I do?15

In a very significant sense, Pascal’s concern is a practical one. We must act. We have no alternative. But how should we act? Our concept of the nature of the universe, of whether (in some sense) it’s personal or not, will strongly affect our answers to that question.

Either there’s a God or there’s not. No matter how much you strain your reasoning abilities, [Pascal] wants to say, you will not be able to prove with certainty the truth of the question, one way or the other.

But you are in the game, and you don’t have a choice about whether you’re in the game because here you are, alive, spending your time with no choice on whether you spend it. So consider the options.16

If you’ve ever hesitated to get on a roller coaster, worried over what’s ahead, but finally sit in the seat and buckle yourself in, then you know the feeling that there’s no way to do anything but ride the ride to the end. We are all most assuredly and irrevocably strapped in, and there’s no way off the ride except to ride it to the end.17

II.

How does this work in the real world? Barfield cites two passages from the apostle Paul to illustrate his answer to that question:

I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor

15. Ibid., 24–25. Italics in the original. Compare page 29, on the purpose or intended result of Pascal’s Wager: “It’s not an argument to feel a certain way.”
16. Ibid., 27.
17. Ibid., 34.
height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.\textsuperscript{18}

Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed, day by day, for this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure because we look not at what can be seen, but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.\textsuperscript{19}

“St. Paul’s ‘slight momentary affliction,’” Barfield notes, “included injustice, imprisonment, hunger, whipping, snakebite, shipwreck, and so forth.” Nevertheless, he continues, Paul wasn’t intending to minimize those trials, nor to “pretend them away.” The words spoken by Jesus on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,” are “at the center of the Christian story.”\textsuperscript{20}

The universe, understood in a Christian light, is not a place without suffering or a place in which suffering is minimized or trivialized. Pain, whether emotional or physical, isn’t \textit{maya} or “illusion.” It’s utterly real, and, in a real sense, no less painful for Christians than for other theists or for unbelievers. “There’s no less suffering in such a universe,” Barfield rightly comments.\textsuperscript{21} On a theistic understanding, however — certainly on a Christian one — such suffering can have or at least acquire eternal meaning, even if we can’t always discern that meaning and even when (thank you very much!) we would prefer to do without it.

It’s not necessary to go back to the apostle Paul and the first century, however, to see serious pain and suffering. It’s all around us. Everywhere. Every day. Even in quiet and prosperous neighborhoods. Nicholas Wolterstorff, to choose an example, was and remains a convinced Christian, but his agony is no less real because of his belief in eternal life and in the resurrection of Jesus.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} Romans 8:38–39, cited at Barfield, \textit{Pascal’s Wager}, 14. For this quotation and the succeeding one, I’ve been unable to identify the translation that Barfield is using.


\textsuperscript{20} Barfield, \textit{Pascal’s Wager}, 15.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{22} In fact, he was surprised at how little comfort he found, in the immediacy of his pain right after Eric’s death, in the promise of an eventual reunion at some distant future time. See Wolterstorff, \textit{Lament for a Son}, 31–32.
“We took him too much for granted,” writes Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Lament for a Son*.

Perhaps we all take each other too much for granted. The routines of life distract us; our own pursuits make us oblivious; our anxieties and sorrows, unmindful. The beauties of the familiar go unremarked. We do not treasure each other enough. He was a gift to us for twenty-five years. When the gift was finally snatched away, I realized how great it was. Then I could not tell him. … I didn’t know how much I loved him until he was gone.23

It is the *neverness* that is so painful. *Never again* to be here with us — never to sit with us at table, never to travel with us, never to laugh with us, never to cry with us, never to embrace us as he leaves for school, never to see his brothers and sisters marry. All the rest of our lives we must live without him. Only our death can stop the pain of his death.24

There’s a hole in the world now. In the place where he was, there’s now just nothing.25

It’s so wrong, so profoundly wrong, for a child to die before its parents. It’s hard enough to bury our parents. But that we expect. Our parents belong to our past, our children belong to our future. We do not visualize our future without them. How can I bury my son, my future, one of the next in line? He was meant to bury me!26

Ray Barfield suggests that, if you want easy explanations for human loss and suffering, if you seek neat little stories punctuated with smiley faces and decorated with pretty butterflies, Christianity isn’t a very promising place to find them:

A faith that has at its center the Son of God dying on the cross at the hands of the Roman army after asking God to let this cup pass, and crying out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” is not a faith that’s likely to have

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24. Ibid., 15.
25. Ibid., 33.
26. Ibid., 16.
simple, formulaic responses to our personal experience of suffering and prayerful lament.27

Though a physician specializing in an area rife with suffering and loss, Barfield is speaking here as a philosopher of religion. Nicholas Wolterstorff, though a highly accomplished philosopher of religion, speaks as a bereaved parent:

“I cannot fit it all together,” he admits.

I cannot fit it together at all. I can only, with Job, endure. I do not know why God did not prevent Eric’s death … . I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and resurrecter of Jesus Christ. I also believe that my son’s life was cut off in its prime. I cannot fit these pieces together. I am at a loss … . To the most agonized question I have ever asked I do not know the answer. I do not know why God would watch him fall. I do not know why God would watch me wounded. I cannot even guess.28

As Joseph Smith did from captivity in Liberty Jail,29 Wolterstorff cries out in his anguish:

How is faith to endure, O God, when you allow all this scraping and tearing on us? You have allowed rivers of blood to flow, mountains of suffering to pile up, sobs to become humanity’s song — all without lifting a finger that we could see. You have allowed bonds of love beyond number to be painfully snapped. If you have not abandoned us, explain yourself.

We strain to hear. But instead of hearing an answer we catch sight of God himself scraped and torn. Through our tears we see the tears of God.30

Plainly, as with Joseph, his faith reasserts itself in spite of his despair. Strikingly, too, as in Joseph’s case, he’s reminded, amid his own pain and hopelessness, of the suffering of Jesus.31

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“God is appalled by death,” Wolterstorff writes. “My pain over my son’s death is shared by his pain over my son’s death. And, yes, I share in his pain over his son’s death.”

This awareness that God, too, suffers, that he’s not the literally apathetic “Unmoved Mover” of Aristotle and of the classical theism that flows from Aristotle, plays a major role in Wolterstorff’s reflections on his own grief:

For a long time I knew that God is not the impassive, unresponsive, unchanging being portrayed by the classical theologians. I knew of the pathos of God. I knew of God’s response of delight and of his response of displeasure. But strangely, his suffering I never saw before.

God is not only the God of the sufferers but the God who suffers.

Christians know this because they understand that Jesus Christ is the perfect representation of the Father, and because Jesus himself died upon the cross — unjustly, painfully, and young. Moreover, although he was “the resurrection, and the life,” Jesus too sorrowed at loss, bereavement, and pain. He mourned the death of Lazarus because he loved him. John 11:35 (“Jesus wept”) is well known as the shortest verse in the Bible. It’s less known, however, as one of the Bible’s most significant passages. But it is precisely that. Why? Because it demonstrates the Savior’s personal care for humanity and shows him, though divine, to be emotionally involved with us.

In that regard, however, the account given in Moses 7, in the Pearl of Great Price, is perhaps even more remarkable:

And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it, saying: How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains? And Enoch said unto the Lord: How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?

33. Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, 81. The classic source for the doctrine of the Unmoved Mover is Book 12 of Aristotle’s Metaphysics.
34. See, for example, John 1:1, 18; 5:19; 8:28; 14:9; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3.
35. See John 11:25–26, 35–36.
How is it possible for God to weep? For centuries, classical Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologians have agreed that it isn’t. Such behavior would be unworthy of him. God’s emotions seem, it’s true, to be on display throughout the scriptures, but the passages describing them have typically been dismissed as metaphorical, as symbolic of something else.

Recent biblical scholarship, however, is reconsidering the emotions of God. The sections of the book of Jeremiah that precede the Babylonian captivity, to choose from among many possible examples, are absolutely replete with images and divine statements that depict God as deeply caring, worried even, about the punishment that he himself has to impose upon his people. He is no distant, uninvolved, unemotional monarch. He loves Israel.

For those who accept the Bible and the scriptures of the Restoration, Heavenly Father is not only a being with emotions but a God who, because he is perfect and perfectly embodied, feels more deeply than we can even begin to imagine. “God is love,” says John. He not only has and enjoys an emotional life, but the most perfect emotional life possible. His love is richer, deeper, than any love we can imagine. In fact, God “so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Accordingly, however, he also felt enormous sorrow and pain at what was done to his Son, just as he feels pain and sorrow for his children — as well as boundless love and, if possible, joy for them both.

Nicholas Wolterstorff finds this all astounding, overwhelming, and, in a real sense, inconceivable:

What does this mean for life, that God suffers? I’m only beginning to learn. When we think of God the Creator, then we naturally see the rich and powerful of the earth as his closest image. But when we hold steady before us the sight of God the Redeemer redeeming from sin and suffering by suffering, then perhaps we must look elsewhere for earth’s closest icon. Where? Perhaps to the face of that woman with

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38. 1 John 4:8.


40. As did Enoch. See Moses 7:28–40.
soup tin in hand and bloated child at side. Perhaps that is why Jesus said that inasmuch as we show love to such a one, we show love to him.41

Wolterstorff suggests that there is a remarkable “identity in suffering” between God and the oppressed, the abused, the poor, the sorrowful, and the sick.

We’re in it together, God and we, together in the history of our world. The history of our world is the history of our suffering together. Every act of evil extracts a tear from God, every plunge into anguish extracts a sob from God. But also the history of our world is the history of our deliverance together. God’s work to release himself from his suffering is his work to deliver the world from its agony; our struggle for joy and justice is our struggle to relieve God’s sorrow.42

Viewed in this light, Christ’s teaching in the New Testament regarding the giving or withholding of help to the needy definitely does take on deeper meaning: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”43 So, too, does King Benjamin’s teaching that “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.”44

Very plainly, however, understanding that God, too, has emotions and experiences pain yields up no neat theological propositions, delivers no precise doctrinal formulae. And it doesn’t actually lessen our pain. It simply tells us that, in our deepest depths, we have a divine co-sufferer.

Nonetheless, Wolterstorff deems his sorrow precious. “Some do not suffer much,” he says, “for they do not love much. Suffering is for the loving. If I hadn’t loved him, there wouldn’t be this agony.”45 “Grief,” he writes, “is existential testimony to the worth of the one loved. That worth abides. So I own my grief. I do not try to put it behind me, to get over it, to forget it. I do not try to dis-own it.” A friend, he says, once described Lament for a Son as a “love-song.” “That took me aback. But Yes, it is a

41. Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, 82. He has previously referred, on page 72, to “one of those mothers one sees in poverty posters, soup tin in hand, bloated child alongside, utterly dependent for her very existence on the largesse of others.”
42. Ibid., 91. It would be worthwhile to consider Wolterstorff’s suggestion here in conjunction with Moses 1:39: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”
43. Matthew 25:40; see the entire passage, Matthew 25:34–46.
44. Mosiah 2:17.
45. Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, 89.
love-song. Every lament is a love-song. Will love-songs one day no longer be laments?"\textsuperscript{46}

Not only does Wolterstorff hold onto — “own” — his grief. He rejects easy answers and smooth explanations, palliatives that would lessen the ache of his loss:

Not even the best of words can take away the pain … Please: Don’t say that it’s not really so bad. Because it is. Death is awful, demonic. If you think your task as comforter is to tell me that really, all things considered, it’s not so bad, you do not sit with me in my grief but place yourself off in the distance away from me. Over there, you are of no help. What I need to hear from you is that you recognize how painful it is. I need to hear from you that you are with me in my desperation. To comfort me, you have to come close. Come sit beside me on my mourning bench.\textsuperscript{47}

Wolterstorff became acutely aware of what he calls “the solitude of suffering.” “We say, ‘I know how you are feeling.’ But we don’t.”\textsuperscript{48} Suffering, once again, is both universal and very particular, distinctly individual.

And yet, Latter-day Saint scriptures assure us, there is One who really does know, who really does understand. Christ, they say,

\begin{quote}
ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Alma, testifying early in the first century BC prophesied of Christ that

\begin{quote}
he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God. And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 5–6. Italics in the original.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 25.
And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.50

In the meantime, though,

We are surrounded by death. As we walk through the grasslands of life it lurks everywhere — behind, to the left, to the right, ahead, everywhere in the swaying grass. Before, I saw it only here and there. The light was too bright. Here in this dim light the dead show up: teachers, colleagues, the children of friends, aunts, uncles, mother, father, the composers whose music I hear, the psalmists whose words I quote, the philosophers whose texts I read, the carpenters whose houses I live in. All around me are the traces and memories of the dead. We live among the dead, until we join them.51

So, in the midst of all this dimness, death, and pain, does Nicholas Wolterstorff, the distinguished Christian philosopher, the bereaved and despairing father, lose his trust in God? He realizes that despairing disbelief was a real possibility in his loss.

“Faith,” he writes, “is a footbridge that you don’t know will hold you up over the chasm until you’re forced to walk out onto it.”52

Why don’t you just scrap this God business, says one of my bitter suffering friends. It’s a rotten world, you and I have been shafted, and that’s that.53

Wolterstorff cites the prophet Isaiah and, yes, Blaise Pascal:

Truly, you are a God who hides yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior.54

50. Alma 7:10–12.
51. Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, 79.
52. Ibid., 76.
53. Ibid., 76.
54. Isaiah 45:15, cited at Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, 75. I haven’t identified the translation that he uses here.
A religion which does not affirm that God is hidden is not true. *Vere tu es Deus absconditus* — truly you are a hidden God.55

But his faith did sustain him. Recall Ray Barfield’s summation of the ambiguous world in which we find ourselves:

If all were darkness with absolutely nothing suggesting the possibility that there’s more — that there’s a God — that would be easy. Or if all were light, with clear and absolute, unwavering signs of a creator God everywhere we look, that would be easy.56

Responding to the kind of question posed by his bitter and suffering friend, Wolterstorff writes that he *can’t* simply “scrap this God business”:

I’m pinned down. When I survey this gigantic intricate world, I cannot believe that it just came about. I do not mean that I have some good arguments for its being made and that I believe in the arguments. I mean that this conviction wells up irresistibly within me when I contemplate the world. The experiment of trying to abolish it does not work. When looking at the heavens, I cannot manage to believe that they do not declare the glory of God. When looking at the earth, I cannot bring off the attempt to believe that it does not display his handiwork.

And when I read the New Testament and look into the material surrounding it, I am convinced that the man Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead. In that, I see the sign that he was more than a prophet. He was the Son of God.57

“At this deep level,” says Ray Barfield, “it seems to me simply not to be about argument.”58

“I shall look at the world through tears,” Wolterstorff writes. “Perhaps I shall see things that dry-eyed I could not see.”59 And, if Ray Barfield is correct, his faith will help him to see, as well:

55. An unidentified passage from Pascal, presumably from the *Pensées*, cited at Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 75.
57. Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 76.
The very habit of approaching different parts of lived experience with the mere openness to the possibility of God may itself be a condition for seeing certain qualities in the world, certain parts of what’s real about the world.60

Already, as he remarks at several points in Lament for a Son, Wolterstorff recognizes that he’s been stretched and made more aware, that he’s become more sensitive and empathetic, through the anguish that he’s been forced to endure. “In the valley of suffering, despair and bitterness are brewed. But there also character is made. The valley of suffering is the vale of soul-making.”61

Still, he cries out, “Will love-songs one day no longer be laments?”62 To which the answer is, “Yes.”

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.63
And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.64

“All your losses will be made up to you in the resurrection,” the Prophet Joseph Smith testified, “provided you continue faithful. By the vision of the Almighty I have seen it.”65

III.

In the meantime, though, we’re resident aliens in a world of ambiguity, injustice, pain, and loss.66 What are we to make of the sorrows and struggles, the defeats and betrayals and bereavements that we experience in this “vale of soul-making”? Or, to put the question another and perhaps better way, what are they to make of us?

60. Barfield, Pascal’s Wager, 30.
61. Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, 97.
62. Ibid., 6.
64. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2.
We’re all familiar with the New Testament account of “Doubting Thomas,” who, after the resurrection of Christ, demanded a personal demonstration before he would surrender his understandable reluctance to believe that a man who had been cruelly and brutally killed had come back to glorious, physical life.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

“The wounds of Christ are his identity,” writes Nicholas Wolterstorff, commenting on this very passage.

They tell us who he is. He did not lose them. They went down into the grave with him and they came up with him — visible, tangible, palpable. Rising did not remove them. He who broke the bonds of death kept his wounds.

And, truly, there is a powerful sense in which a person’s history, and perhaps especially that person’s history of suffering and struggle and sorrow, defines and identifies him or her. (Christ is, significantly, “a man of sorrows.”) As Wolterstorff puts it,

If someone asks, “Who are you, tell me about yourself,” I say — not immediately, but shortly — “I am one who lost a son.” That loss determines my identity; not all of my identity, but much of it.

68. Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, 92.
69. Isaiah 53:3.
70. Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, 6.
In the New World, the Nephites had a comparable experience (in larger numbers) with the risen Savior. Again, his wounds identify him to them, or, rather, confirm to them his identity:

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto them saying:
Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.

And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:
Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.71

It is also necessary for us to identify with Jesus. Otherwise, since “no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom” and since, in and of ourselves, we are unclean, we have no hope of entering back into the presence of God.72 Only he has the innate right to be there.

“Take upon you the name of Christ,” the Lord commanded Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer in a revelation given in June 1829 at Fayette, New York.73 And, indeed, candidates for baptism into the Church of Jesus Christ must “witness before the church that they … are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ.”74 And they certify their willingness to do so in the public act of baptism, which is done before the Lord, before witnesses, and before the community of the Saints.75

However, it must be noted that, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks has remarked concerning the ordinances of baptism and the sacrament,

71. 3 Nephi 11:13–17.
72. The reference is to 3 Nephi 27:19. See also 1 Nephi 10:21; Moses 6:57.
74. Ibid., 20:37; 2 Nephi 31:13; Moroni 6:3.
75. 2 Nephi 31:13.
what we witness is not that we take upon us his name but that we are willing to do so. In this sense, our witness relates to some future event or status whose attainment is not self-assumed, but depends on the authority or initiative of the Savior himself.76

Actually doing so is necessary for our salvation, since, in the end, those who “shall be found at the right hand of God … shall be called by the name of Christ.”77

And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.78

As the Nephite prophet Alma reminded his audience,

Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd.79

As it was explained to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer in June 1829,

Wherefore, if they know not the name by which they are called, they cannot have place in the kingdom of my Father.80

When, in his postresurrection appearance among the Nephites, Christ was told of disputes about the name of the Nephite church, he asked,

Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day;
And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day.81

77. Mosiah 5:9.
79. Alma 5:38.
80. Doctrine and Covenants 18:25.
81. 3 Nephi 27:5–6.
Baptism, as is generally recognized, represents death, burial, and rebirth to a new identity. “Therefore,” writes Paul to the Romans,
we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.82

Or, as Joseph Smith taught in a letter that was dated 6 September 1842 at Nauvoo, Illinois, and that is now included in the scriptural canon of the Latter-day Saints,
The ordinance of baptism by water, to be immersed therein in order to answer to the likeness of the dead, that one principle might accord with the other; to be immersed in the water and come forth out of the water is in the likeness of the resurrection of the dead in coming forth out of their graves … Consequently, the baptismal font was instituted as a similitude of the grave, and was commanded to be in a place underneath where the living are wont to assemble, to show forth the living and the dead, and that all things may have their likeness.83

“It is a faithful saying,” writes Paul to Timothy. “For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.”84

That truth is eloquently represented in the simple ordinance of baptism.
In the sacrament, worshippers partake of symbols of Christ’s broken body and his shed blood, and, in so doing, they testify “that they do always remember him.”85 This is enormously important, as Nicholas Wolterstorff would surely agree:
One of the profoundest features of the Christian and Jewish way of being-in-the-world and being-in-history is remembering. “Remember,” “do not forget,” “do this as a remembrance.” We are to hold the past in remembrance and not let it slide away. For in history we find God. … And when

82. Romans 6:4.
84. 2 Timothy 2:11–12.
85. Doctrine and Covenants 20:79; Moroni 5:2. Compare 20:77; also Moroni 4:3.
memory … fails, then humanity is diminished to the point of disappearance.  

But it’s not only a question of “remembrance.” Partakers of the sacrament also “witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son.” Once again, they’re testifying to their willingness to assume his identity, something that they must do so in order to be saved. If we do not identify with Christ, we are barred from heaven. It is striking, though, that the element of the identity of Christ that is emphasized in the sacrament — as it is in the various forms of Christian communion that descend from the earliest Christian ordinance — is not his teachings or his miracles but his bodily suffering in the atonement.

I want to suggest here not only that taking upon ourselves the name of Christ is profoundly important but that it’s not merely a verbal fiction and that it is connected very specifically with, among other things, the physical pain incurred during his atoning sacrifice. In some really powerful sense, we are to become genuinely identified with Jesus. Only so can we enter into the Kingdom of Heaven — he, not we, being worthy to do so. Consider the graphic, even vivid, language used by Jesus:

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

This passage can easily be connected with the emblems of the sacrament, but it strongly suggests that there is more at play here than merely a tepid commitment to remember him, important though such memory is.

One of the most puzzling statements in the Pauline corpus of writings in the New Testament is this one, from the apostle’s letter to the Galatian Saints:

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86. Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, 28, 30. Anybody familiar with cases of Alzheimer’s disease knows that, as the illness grows more severe, this is increasingly so. For a significant Latter-day Saint reflection on the spiritual and religious importance of community memory, see Louis Midgley, “The Ways of Remembrance”; http://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1111&index=16.
87. Doctrine and Covenants 20:77; Moroni 4:3.
From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. 89

The Greek word that’s translated in the King James Version as marks is stigmata. The word itself is clear enough, but, as Otto Betz confirms, “The question what Paul meant by the marks of Jesus in his body cannot be answered with any certainty.” 90

They are typically understood as the scars left by his beatings and persecutions. 91 If this interpretation is accurate, Paul seems to be claiming what one commentator describes as a Leidensidentität, an “identity in suffering,” between himself and Jesus. 92 This is surely one way of identifying with the Savior, and, since some form of identification with him is plainly required for our salvation, it’s important to consider: Do we all need to be physically scarred by the lashes of anti-Christian persecutors in order to be saved?

That seems unlikely.

The term stigmata is sometimes rendered as “brandmarks” or “brands.” 93 “The [Greek] word stigmata did not mean what this word means in English today,” writes Father Joseph Fitzmyer, referring to the

89. Galatians 6:17
wounds, corresponding to those received by Christ at his crucifixion, 
that have been claimed by certain Catholic saints (e.g., the twelfth-
thirteenth century St. Francis of Assisi and the modern Padre Pio). “In 
antiquity stigmata often designated the branding used to mark a slave or 
an animal as someone’s possession.”

In the ancient Near East outside of Israel, such branding was also 
done in religious contexts. “When a man was given the sacred mark,” 
Otto Betz explains,

he was dedicated to the god and became his servant, but 
he also came under its protection, so that he should not be 
molested. This led to a different estimation of stigmata from 
that of the [Greeks]; what the latter found contemptible was 
carried in the East with pride.

By contrast, Israelite biblical law forbade ritual tattooing or branding: 
“Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print 
any marks upon you: I am the Lord.” Moreover, says Betz, in the Old 
Testament or Hebrew Bible “the sacral sign is given a new significance. 
It is legitimate and effective only when man does not mark it on his own 
body but receives it from God as a sign of protection.”

Thus, whatever Paul meant by “the marks of the Lord Jesus,” they 
may or may not have been literally physical and could not have been self-
inflicted. Rather, they were given to him for, or as a result of, his years 
of service and suffering in faithful discipleship to Jesus — service and 
devotion that Paul urged upon others, as well:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that 
ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto 
God, which is your reasonable service.

“I am crucified with Christ,” he said. “Nevertheless I live; yet not I, 
but Christ liveth in me.” He had, in some manner, become Christ.

In the ministry of his apostleship, however, Paul was acutely aware of 
his weaknesses, Nevertheless, it seems that “the marks of the Lord Jesus” 
encouraged him and gave him hope of ultimate salvation and triumph:

7:663–664).
98. Romans 12:1.
But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.\textsuperscript{100}

When we come to the veil that separates us from God, our only hope of entering into his presence is to come under the name of Jesus. And it may be that we will identify ourselves by bearing in ourselves “the marks of Jesus” — probably not literal scars, and certainly not self-inflicted ones, but metaphorical “brand marks” conferred by God himself that demonstrate our identity with the Savior in the suffering of his atonement. For very truly, “with his stripes” — or, probably better, as a number of modern translations have it, “with his wounds” — “we are healed.”\textsuperscript{101}

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\textsuperscript{100} 2 Corinthians 4:7–10.

\textsuperscript{101} Isaiah 53:5
Within a couple of years of the Saints’ settling in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1839, Joseph Smith began secretly teaching celestial and plural marriage. The traditional timeline holds that by the end of 1840, a small number of Church members had been privately advised, and on April 5, 1841, Joseph himself was sealed to his first plural wife in Nauvoo,
Louisa Beaman. The specific chronology of this period is probably not that important. However, researchers who attempt to reconstruct the unfolding of plural marriage are wise to account for all existing historical data.

In his 2015 article, Gary Bergera advocates an 1840 sealing for Joseph Smith and his first three plural wives. His primary evidence is found on a page in the “Historian’s Private Journal.”¹ This new interpretation should not be dismissed out of hand but deserves scrutiny and evaluation for validity, and important questions emerge: How reliable is the documentation supporting 1840? What does Bergera say about the existing documents that support 1841? Does his research include all available manuscripts pertinent to this discussion?

**Discounting Joseph F. Smith’s 1869 Affidavits**

Multiple documents have been used to support 1841 as the year of Joseph’s first Nauvoo plural marriages. Among them are Joseph F. Smith’s 1869 affidavits, which Bergera acknowledges on several pages (105–07, 114–18, 121).² Within this collection are four affidavits signed by Joseph B. Noble attesting to his role as the officiator in 1841 in Joseph Smith’s sealing to Louisa Beaman.³ In addition, two affidavits were signed by Dimick Huntington — who performed the ceremonies for his sisters Presendia and Zina — in addition to two from Fanny (Dimick’s wife), who served as a witness to both. Furthermore, Zina and Presendia each signed two affidavits.

Firsthand legal attestations by participants and eyewitness are less commonly available to researchers seeking to document the timing of historical events. Nevertheless, Bergera is less impressed, alleging that Joseph F. Smith may have “ pressured” (129) the participants into signing them and may have even “composed” the text himself (128). These charges are based solely upon Bergera’s speculation. In 1869–1870, Joseph F. Smith compiled over fifty-eight affidavits and signed

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¹ This document became available to me in 2012, prior to publishing *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: History and Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013). For reasons discussed in this article, the alternative dates provided were not considered reliable, and since it provided no new information, it was not included. In retrospect, it should have at least been integrated into Appendix B, which lists evidence for the individual plural sealings.


³ Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 4 vols. MS 3423. LDS Church History Library.
testimonies, and none of the participants left any hint that the apostle composed their statements or pressured them.

**Overlooking Important Records Regarding Presendia Huntington**

When dealing specifically with Presendia Huntington’s sealing date, Bergera declares that besides the 1869 affidavits and an 1881 letter penned by Presendia specifying 1841, “there are no other sources for specifying a December 11, 1841, date for Presendia’s plural marriage to Joseph Smith” (128). This is incorrect. Apparently unknown to Bergera is a historical source from 1848, at least eighteen years earlier than the Woodruff document. On “Monday, Dec 11th, 1848,” Zina Huntington recorded in her journal: “This morning My sister Presendia moved … 7 years ago to day since Presendia was sealed to Joseph Smith.” Seven years back from 1848 is 1841. This record is the earliest dating for any of the three sealings and is from a credible source. If trustworthy, it contradicts the “Historian’s Private Journal” and may cast doubt on the other 1840 dates recorded by Woodruff. It also counters the suggestion that Joseph F. Smith “pressured” Zina, since this private journal was not written under the influence of anyone but Zina herself.

Within the historical documents supporting a plural sealing between Presendia and the Prophet are seven that provide a year. One (the Historian’s Private Journal) lists 1840 and the remaining six specify 1841:

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<td>1842</td>
<td>Bennett, <em>The History of the Saints</em>, 256, lists as one of Joseph’s wives “Mrs. B****.” Presendia married Norman Buell.</td>
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<td>1848</td>
<td>Zina Huntington Young, Journal, December 11, 1848.</td>
<td>On “Monday, December 11, 1848,” Zina Huntington recorded in her journal: “This morning My sister Presendia moved … 7 years ago to day since Presendia was sealed to Joseph Smith.”</td>
<td>Earliest of any dates</td>
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<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Dimick Huntington Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:19, 4:19</td>
<td>December 11, 1841</td>
<td>Firsthand-eyewitness</td>
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<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Fanny Huntington Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:21, 4:21</td>
<td>“fall of the year 1841”</td>
<td>Firsthand-eyewitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Presendia L. Huntington, “Autobiographical Sketch,” 1881, MS 742, CHL.</td>
<td>“in 1841 I entered into the new &amp; everlasting Covenant was sealed to Joseph Smith the Prophet &amp; Seer”</td>
<td>Firsthand-participant</td>
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<td>1883</td>
<td>Oliver Huntington, Journal, February 18, 1883.</td>
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Hales, Dating Joseph Smith’s First Nauvoo Sealings • 5

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<td>1887</td>
<td>Malissa Lott dictation to Jenson, &quot;First list of wives,&quot; Document #1, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.</td>
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<td>1887</td>
<td>Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 233.</td>
<td>December 11, 1841</td>
<td>First published date</td>
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**Andrew Jenson’s 1887 *Historical Record* Article**

Another important source that is underutilized by Bergera is a July 1887 article written by Andrew Jenson entitled “Plural Marriage,” which was published in his independent periodical the *Historical Record*.5 Bergera mentions it only once in a footnote (105fn20) and seems unaware that it provides specific dates for the sealings of Louisa, Zina, and Presendia — all in 1841.

Might Bergera have assumed that Andrew Jenson used Joseph F. Smith’s 1869 collection of affidavits to write his 1887 article, so Jenson’s dates would be duplications rather than independent attestations? Multiple observations support that Jenson in 1887 had no access to — and probably no knowledge of the existence of — the Joseph F. Smith collection of affidavits. I here review six such evidences.

First, a June 22, 1887, letter from Zina D. H. Young to Mary Elizabeth Lightner demonstrates that Jenson had approached her directly to learn of her plural marriage experience with the Prophet, rather than relying on the 1869 affidavits. She wrote to Mary: “Brother Andrew Jenson, the historian was in yesterday. He is making quite a success in getting up the ^brief record of^ the wives of President Joseph Smith.”6 Accordingly, Zina’s sealing date and probably all three 1841 dates published by Jenson should be treated as independent verifications coming eighteen years after the 1869 affidavits but providing the same consistent information.

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6 Zina Diantha Huntington Young, Letter to Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, 22 June 1887, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner Collection, MSS 363, Perry Special Collections, Item 13, p. 2. The text marked with carat symbols (^) represents an interlineal handwritten addition in the letter.
Second, Andrew Jenson was not set apart as an “Assistant Historian in Zion” until 1892 and thus had limited access to items in the Church Historian’s Office before that time. This makes it less likely that he would have seen the Smith affidavits.

Third, Jenson included only nine documents in his *Historical Record* article that are found in the Joseph F. Smith collection. However, all of those had been published in “Joseph the Seer’s Plural Marriages” (*Deseret News*, October 19, 1879, 604–05, and October 22, 1879, 12) except one (by David Fullmer) that was printed in the June, 1886, issue of *The Saints’ Advocate*. In other words, all the 1869 affidavits Jenson included had been published before. In fact, the first pages of Jenson’s article follow the 1879 *Deseret News* article almost verbatim.

Fourth, Jenson failed to include information found in the affidavit books that contained more important details than some of the later testimonials that he did include.

Fifth, a July 8, 1869, affidavit signed by Martha McBride Knight affirms her sealing to Joseph, but her name is missing from Jenson’s final list of Joseph’s plural wives. His private notes indicate that he had heard of a “Mrs. Knight” but did not know her first name or her actual status. Access to the Joseph F. Smith affidavits would have resolved that question and supported her inclusion on the list.

Last, Jenson’s personal journal contains no references to the affidavit books or a time when he visited either the Church Historian’s Office or Apostle Joseph F. Smith to view them.

**Documenting Zina Huntington’s Sealing Date**

When addressing the sealing date of Zina Huntington, Bergera writes: “The case for the traditional date of October 27, 1841, for Zina’s marriage to Smith rests entirely on Zina’s, Dimick’s, and Fanny’s [Huntington’s] May 1, 1869, affidavits. There are no other known statements from Dimick and/or Fanny” (121), and “All of Zina’s other reminiscences are phrased more generally and tentatively” (118). These statements are also incorrect. As demonstrated, Zina spoke with Jenson in 1887 and is the probable source of the October 27, 1841, sealing date he published in the *Historical Record*.9

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8 Andrew Jenson journal for 1886–1887, Church History Library.

Among the historical sources supporting a plural sealing between Joseph and Zina are five that provide a date: one provides an 1840 date (the Historians Private Journal) and four list the year as 1841.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Marriage Date</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>Nauvoo Temple proxy marriage to Joseph Smith, February 2, 1846, in Brown, <em>Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings</em>, 284.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>William Hall, <em>The Abominations of Mormonism Exposed</em>; Cincinnati, OH: I. Hart, 1852, 43–44.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Zina D. Huntington Affidavit, May 1, 1869, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:5, 4:5,</td>
<td>October 27, 1841</td>
<td>Firsthand-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Dimick Huntington Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:19, 4:19</td>
<td>October 27, 1841</td>
<td>Firsthand-eyewitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Fanny Huntington Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:21, 4:21</td>
<td>“fall of the year 1841”</td>
<td>Firsthand-eyewitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Emmeline B. Wells, “A Distinguished Woman, Zina D. H. Young.” <em>Woman's Exponent</em> 10 (December 1, 1881), 99.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Oliver Huntington, Journal, February 18, 1883, October 27, 1887.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Malissa Lott, &quot;First list of wives,&quot; Document #1, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.</td>
<td>No date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Marriage Date</td>
<td>Comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 233.</td>
<td>October 27, 1841</td>
<td>First Published date</td>
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**Discounting Joseph B. Noble**

When specifically discussing Joseph Smith’s sealing to Louisa Beaman, Bergera identifies one additional manuscript that supports an 1840 year — a secondhand account from Charles L. Walker’s diary. He also spends four pages quoting from Noble’s Temple Lot deposition in 1892 (108–11). While the testimony is interesting, devoting such space to reproduce the transcription is surprising, since Noble consistently places the sealing in either 1841 or 1842, but never in 1840.

Perhaps Bergera included it as evidence that Noble’s memory was not clear in 1892: “Noble was unable to specify consistently the year of his performing Smith’s plural marriage” (111). However, an unclear memory in 1892 says nothing of Noble’s ability to accurately recall details decades earlier, including his 1869 signed affidavits stating that the union occurred in 1841.

Unfortunately, Bergera’s transcription of Noble’s Temple Lot testimony skips questions 617–642 (111). In question 627 Noble is asked: “Do you mean that it [the plural sealing] was performed in Nauvoo?” and he answers, “Yes Sir.” Question 628 poses: “At whose house?” to which Noble responds: “At mine.” While Noble is unable to recall exactly the date he moved to Nauvoo, Bergera’s research discloses that he “moved his family, including presumably Louisa, to Nauvoo sometime after September 1841” (112). So if the ceremony occurred at Noble’s house in Nauvoo, it would of necessity have been in 1841 or later.10

10 Franklin D. Richards recorded that the sealing occurred “in May — I think the 5th day in 1841 during the evening under an Elm tree in Nauvoo. The Bride disguised in a coat and hat.” (Franklin D. Richards Journal, January 22, 1869, MS 1215, LDS CHL.)
A May 1840 sealing date is also inconsistent with Bergera’s reconstruction of the chronology surrounding Louisa Beaman’s move into the Noble household. He dates her change in domicile as “August 29 or September 29, 1840” (112). Noble’s biography states:

A young, intelligent woman by the name of Louisa Beman, a sister of Elder Noble’s wife, was at that time living in the family. To her the Prophet paid his attentions with a view of yielding obedience to the principle of plural marriage. The girl, after being convinced that the principle was true, consented to become the Prophet’s wife, and on April 5, 1841, she was married to him, Elder Noble officiating.11

If Louisa was not taught about plural marriage until she was living with the Nobles, she could not have been sealed on the date found on the Woodruff’s document.

Bergera concludes: “Noble’s memory (beginning some twenty-five-plus years after the event) shifts between 1840 and 1841 as the year of Nauvoo’s first plural marriage.” Claiming that Noble experienced a “memory shift” goes beyond the available evidence. My research has identified twenty-six documents that could be first- or secondhand accounts verifying the Smith-Beaman plural marriage; fourteen provide a date for the ceremony. Of these, two (including the “Historian’s Private Journal”) place it in 1840, nine list 1841, one mentions 1841 or 1842, and two identify the “fall of 1840” as the first time Noble learned of plural marriage from Joseph Smith (precluding a May 1840 sealing).12 Eight of the documents supporting an 1841 year were recorded in private records composed before the first publication in 1887 of Louisa’s name and the sealing date, which was recorded by Jenson in the Historical Record. It is impossible to tell how many of these eight records quoted Noble directly, but there is a remarkable consistency in the year recorded in these documents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Bennett, <em>The History of the Saints</em>, 256: “Miss L***** B*****.”</td>
<td>No date</td>
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11 Andrew Jenson. “Plural Marriage.” *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 239; emphasis added.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Marriage Date</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1843?</td>
<td>[Oliver Olney?], uncatalogued and untitled manuscript, Western Americana MSS, Beinecke Library, Yale University, folder labeled &quot;Nauvoo Female Society.&quot; Some of the writing on the document is dated October 18, 1843.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866?</td>
<td>Wilford Woodruff, “Historian’s Private Journal”</td>
<td>“May 1840”</td>
<td>Source unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Franklin D. Richards, Journal, January 22, 1869.</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Br. Joseph B. Noble being the master of ceremonies was present and During the visit related he performed the first sealing ceremony in this Dispensation in which he united Sister Louisa Beman to the Prop[h]et Joseph in May I think the 5th day in 1841”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Joseph B. Noble, quoted in Scott G. Kenney, ed., Wilford Woodruffs Journal, 6:452, February 22, 1869.</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Joseph B. Noble said that he performed the first Marriage Ceremony according to the Patriarchal order of Marriage ever performed in this dispensation By sealing Eliza Beman to Joseph Smith on the 6 day of May 1841.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Marriage Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Joseph B. Noble, Affidavit, June 26, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:38</td>
<td>“in the fall of the year A.D. 1840 Joseph Smith, taught him the principle of Celestial marriage or a ‘plurality of wives’”</td>
<td>Firsthand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Joseph B. Noble, Affidavit, June 26, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 4:38</td>
<td>“in the fall of the year A.D. 1840 Joseph Smith, taught him the principle of Celestial marriage or a ‘plurality of wives’”</td>
<td>Firsthand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>George A. Smith, Letter to Joseph Smith III, October 9, 1869.</td>
<td>“5th day of April, 1841”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>William Clayton, Affidavit, February 16, 1874.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Ann Eliza Webb Young, Wife No. 19, 72.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Orson Pratt, quoted in “Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith.” Millennial Star 40, no. 49 (December 9, 1878): 769–74; continued in 40, no. 50 (December 16, 1878): 785–89; page 788. Date of sealing given but Louisa’s name not provided.</td>
<td>“April 5th, 1841”</td>
<td>First published date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Marriage Date</td>
<td>Comments</td>
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<td>1883</td>
<td>Almera Johnson, Affidavit, August 1, 1883.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Joseph Noble, Address, June 11, 1883, at Centerville, Utah, stake conference, in Andrew Jenson “Plural Marriage,” <em>Historical Record</em>, 233.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Erastus Snow, St. George Utah Stake [Conference], General Minutes, Sunday, June 17, 1883, 2 p.m., LR 7836 11, Reel 1.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Eliza R. Snow, &quot;First list of wives,&quot; Document #1, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Joseph Bates Noble, Testimony at the Temple Lot Case, Part 3, pp. 432, 436, questions 793, 799, 861; sentence order reversed.</td>
<td>1841 to 1842 with emphasis on 1841</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Benjamin Winchester, Testimony to Joseph Smith III, Council Bluffs, Iowa, November 27, 1900, Community of Christ Archives.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Nauvoo Temple Proxy Marriage to Joseph Smith, January 14, 1846. Brown, Nauvoo Sealing, Adoptions, and Anointings, 281.</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Johnson, My Life's Review, 96.</td>
<td>No date</td>
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</table>

**Accepting the Woodruff Document Information Uncritically**

Bergera uncritically promotes the reliability of the dates found on the Woodruff document in contrast to overwhelming evidence for the alternative dates. He acknowledges that Woodruff’s source or sources of information regarding the 1840 year are unknown but assures his readers, “Woodruff was historically conscious and well-positioned regarding the need to record significant events in LDS History as any LDS Church member” (99).

Woodruff was not present for any of the original four sealings, so he had no firsthand knowledge of the ceremonies. Yet, nowhere does Bergera address the question regarding who might have shared accurate information with Woodruff in 1866 (or sometime before) regarding these sealings. Perhaps members of the Huntington family could have provided accurate dates for Zina and Presendia, but it is less certain that they would have known of Louisa Beaman. Joseph B. Noble could have provided Louisa’s date but probably not the Huntington’s.

A review of Woodruff’s personal journal shows that he heard Noble speak on September 19, 1865, for ten minutes and again on November 25, 1866. The second date is later than the one Bergera proposes for the record, but the earlier date would have required only Woodruff’s memory regarding the Louisa Beaman sealing to be correct a year later. Woodruff also held conversations regarding Indian affairs with

Dimick Huntington on January 1, 1862. The next reference to Dimick is May 24, 1868, when he spoke in a church meeting. Woodruff records a visit with Zina Huntington Young in gathering with several other people on April 9, 1861, but does not mention her again until September 6, 1877. Fanny Huntington and Presendia Huntington Buell Kimball are not referenced.

These are the only participants in the first three sealings who were still living in 1866, so if Woodruff received accurate information, it would have had to come from another source or in a conversation that he did not mention in his journal. Beyond the participants, one might postulate that Brigham Young or Heber C. Kimball would have known of the plural unions, but it is less certain they would have known the exact day and year. The inclusion of Rhoda Richards’s 1843 ceremony as the last item on the document is fodder for additional inquiry, but none of this is discussed in Bergera’s article.

The Unreliable Date of 1866

As already noted, Bergera dates the information supporting 1840 sealings to “specifically September or thereabouts” of 1866 (99). This dating is based partially on the observation that the information regarding the four plural wives is written in the Historian’s Private Journal immediately after — and on the same page — as an entry dated July 1, 1866. Regrettably, Bergera does not tell us of the date of the entry immediately after the recording of the four sealing dates. Starting on the following page is a transcription in different colored ink dated November 18, 1874.

Based, then, on the surrounding entry dates, the information penned by Woodruff regarding Joseph Smith’s plural wives was written sometime between July 1, 1866, and November 18, 1874. There is no way to know exactly when, but Bergera theorizes: “Woodruff’s record may have been prompted by the visits to the Salt Lake Valley of three proselytizing missionaries — including one of Joseph Smith’s own sons — of the recently formed Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS)” (99). This is indeed a possibility.

However, a more probable hypothesis is that it was not written in 1866 because there is no record of anyone in that year inquiring about the identities of Joseph’s plural wives and the dates when the

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14 Ibid., 6:4.
15 Ibid., 6:408.
16 Ibid., 5:565, 7:375.
sealings occurred. However, if we fast-forward three years, we find the affidavit books being compiled by Joseph F. Smith and filled with all of this information for all four women, except that the sealing year for Louisa, Zina, and Presendia is 1841. Joseph B. Noble’s statement regarding Louisa Beaman is recorded on page 3 of affidavit book 1, Zina Huntington’s signed statement is on page 5, and Presendia’s is on page 7. On May 1, 1869, Rhoda Richards signed an affidavit on page 17 identifying June 12, 1843, as the date of her sealing to the Prophet.17

In contrast to Bergera’s reconstruction, it seems likely that Woodruff (or his informant) viewed the affidavit book and simply misremembered the year of the first three sealings when that information was recorded (or conveyed), which may have been any time before the 1874 entry.

Discounting Recollections

Bergera admonishes his readers to “consider more carefully our reliance on human memories as primary historical sources” (96). This is wise counsel but is surprising in light of his willingness to accept with little scrutiny what he believed to be an 1866 source. No official record of these early 1840s sealings was made at the time they were performed, so an 1866 record would not be contemporaneous. Instead it would rely on a human memory as a primary historical source. It is unclear what other options Bergera advocates to document the chronology of these sealings.

In summary, multiple historical records discuss the sealing year of Joseph Smith to plural wives Louisa Beaman, Zina Huntington, and Presendia Huntington. The “Historian’s Private Journal” highlighted by Gary Bergera contains an entry from an unknown source scribed by Wilford Woodruff at an unknown time and specifying 1840. One additional secondhand account places the Beaman marriage in that year. In contrast, all other known sources — including an 1848 journal entry by Zina regarding Presendia and affidavits from the participants themselves — support 1841 as the first year of Joseph Smith Nauvoo plural sealings. Observers are left to decide for themselves the year that is best supported by available historical data.

Brian C. Hales is the author of six books dealing with polygamy, most recently the three-volume, Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: History and

Theology (Greg Kofford Books, 2013). His Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto received the “Best Book of 2007 Award” from the John Whitmer Historical Association. He has presented at numerous meetings and symposia and published articles in The Journal of Mormon History, Mormon Historical Studies, and Dialogue as well as contributing chapters to The Persistence of Polygamy series. Brian works as an anesthesiologist at the Davis Hospital and Medical Center in Layton, Utah, and has served as the President of the Utah Medical Association.
A Pilgrim’s Faith

Jared Riddick


Abstract: The history of the African-American community and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been a confused one since the Church’s early days. Few blacks joined the fledgling group, and those that united with the Saints met with a mixed reception. This short biography by historian Russell Stevenson is the story of one of these pioneering souls, Elijah Ables, who was also the first black priesthood holder.

Elijah Ables is a mystery for Latter-day Saints, from his life down to the spelling of his name.¹ His story largely disappeared from Mormon consciousness, at least until the last few years. In this short volume, Russell Stevenson has reconstructed the life of this “pilgrim.” And it is one that all members of the Church should be familiar with, not only because of Ables’s fascinating position in the early days of the Restoration but also for the attitudes and diligence that he exhibited in a church and culture that seemingly wished to reject him. Ables alters the narrative built around the Mormon priesthood ban, his existence defying both the historical and doctrinal theories that built up around it.

It should be noted that this book is self-published and that occasional spelling and grammatical errors are present throughout. These are minor and should not cast a negative pall on the quality of the author’s scholarship. Stevenson has presented information from truly fascinating primary sources, many of them unused until now, and as he points out,

¹ Several variants — Abel, Able, Ables — exist. Stevenson uses Ables, as do I for the sake of uniformity.
we cannot truly “understand … Elijah Ables merely by cataloging a series of Joseph Smith or Brigham Young quotes. … It takes a village to exclude a child” (p. ii).

To that end, the author has reconstructed Ables’s environment, both political and religious, in an effort to help us. In our quest, we must “seek to understand not only Elijah Ables the man but also the world he experienced” (p. iv).

Stevenson was able to provide much of what is available on the early life of Ables. There is little to be found here, through no fault of the author’s. Primary sources listing the names of African-Americans, except for slave transactions, were the exception rather than the rule. In addition, at this point in the nineteenth century, the federal census didn’t record the names of non-heads of households. He was likely born a slave somewhere in western Maryland, to a white father and a slave mother (pp. 1, 3).

The known textual record indicates that knowable history of Ables begins with his membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, when he was baptized by an early missionary in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1832 (p. 3). Stevenson does an excellent job of portraying early Mormonism’s struggle with how it would handle African-American converts and potential priesthood ordinations.

As Stevenson points out, “Joseph Smith’s Mormonism looks more like an awkwardly-formed coalition than a social movement” (p. 10). No collection of quotes can do justice to a uniquely Mormon position on race in the early days of the Church. No such position existed because of the various positions that Joseph Smith negotiated in order to preserve the fragile church and gospel that he preached. Stevenson summarized the conflict that the young prophet faced. “Revelation bound Joseph to ordain Ables with one hand; politics required that he defend slavery with the other” (p. 11). The political and racial tensions of the day forced a dichotomy. Abolitionists and anti-slavery advocates were assaulted and even murdered (pp. 12–14). Attempting to publicly hold a middle ground on slavery and rights for blacks became nigh impossible.

2 As Stevenson points out, this changed in 1850; however, this is too late for the purposes of exploring Ables’s early days. While some local censuses would record the names of non-head of households, these exceptions were few and far between.

3 Stevenson tells us that Elijah was variously identified as both a quadroon and an octrooan, outmoded terms that refer to someone that was either of one-fourth or one-eighth black ancestry, respectively.
Stevenson summarizes many of the events that took place in the decade wherein Ables was baptized. The tensions of the 1830s were an unfortunate foreshadowing of the Civil War that would break out in fewer than thirty years. One of my criticisms of Stevenson’s book comes with this limited summary, though it was relatively unavoidable, considering the scope of his volume is focused on Elijah Ables himself. The political, social, and economic tumult of the 1830s and 1840s are too complicated for a full picture of them to be possible in a short treatment. That being said, the author does an admirable and generally effective job of communicating how they related to Ables directly.

Ables emerged from this bubbling miasma of attitudes and beliefs. While he and Joseph Smith would become friends, that friendship wasn’t enough to engender trust for him among all the leaders in the early church (p. 6). While Elijah Ables’s ordination took place, it did so despite the personal feelings of Zebedee Coltrin, who claimed to have ordained Ables. (pp. 6–7).

Elijah Ables would serve as a missionary three times, beginning in upstate New York and southern Ontario. Stevenson describes Ables’s preaching as distinctive but unpolished and provides us a fascinating window into his early style through the testimony of one of Ables’s converts: “[T]he Spirit rested upon him and he preached a most powerful sermon. It was such a Gospel sermon as I had never heard before, and I felt in my heart that he was one of God’s chosen ministers” (p. 18).

Ables’s missionary labors were perhaps his most distinguishing times. Stevenson begins his book by claiming that Ables’s “was a pilgrim’s faith. … He represented his faith most poignantly when he was on his own.” Stevenson reconstructs these times well, despite gaps in the documentary evidence. As Ables’s missionary experiences are related, one gains a greater sense for the type of man than could be otherwise grasped. His three missions were by no means easy. There were harsh disagreements with his fellow missionaries, doctrinal misunderstandings, very real

4 For an expanded look at the events of the 1830s and 1840s, see Daniel Walker Howe, What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848, The Oxford History of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5 For more information on these political events and as to how they impacted African-American Latter-day Saints, see Russell W. Stevenson, For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830–2013 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014).

6 Stevenson speculates that “[i]t is not improbable that Joseph [saw] a little of himself in the long, black wayfarer.”
threats to his life, and apostasy and the formation of splinter groups during the Succession Crisis (pp. 18–27).

At the time of the Prophet Joseph’s death in June 1844, Ables was serving his second mission, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Stevenson shows how Ables served as a true pillar to the church in a community that “became a microcosm for the troubles threatening to rip the Church apart” (p. 34). Strangism and Rigdonism were becoming prevalent among the members there, and Ables firmly supported the Twelve. As Stevenson points out, he even preferred charges against members disloyal to them. “Ever unyielding, Ables had little patience for people seeking to tear down church leadership” (p. 35).

It is unfortunate that, while Ables was serving in the east and helping to hold the church together there, a hardening of attitudes among the Twelve against black members would begin. This came largely because of the apostasy and actions of one man, William McCary, while in Winter Quarters (pp. 40–49). When Ables and his family joined the Saints in the Salt Lake Valley in late 1853, it was a different community than the one he had left (p. 51).

Stevenson does an excellent job in telling us about the balance of Ables’s life. It would have been a frustrating period — indeed those feelings vibrantly emerge from the pages — undoubtedly difficult for a man who had served the church for many years. Ables would eventually pass away from illness while serving a third mission at an advanced age in December 1884 (p. 64).

The story of Elijah Ables is one that should be known by every Latter-day Saint. His loyalty and dedication in the face of adversity are an inspiration and example to those who find themselves feeling isolated and cut off today. In this short and highly recommended little volume, Stevenson has brought an admirable and neglected figure of early Church history alive for a modern audience.

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“Idle and Slothful Strange Stories”: Book of Mormon Origins and the Historical Record

Neal Rappleye

Abstract: From the very beginning, Joseph’s story about the origins of the Book of Mormon seemed wild and unbelievable. Today, however, Joseph’s account enjoys a high degree of corroboration from (1) eyewitness accounts confirming Joseph’s possession of actual metal plates and other artifacts, with some even corroborating the involvement of an angel in providing access to the record; (2) eyewitness reports on the process of producing the text; and (3) evidence from the original manuscript. This evidence is reviewed here, and the implications it has for the Book of Mormon’s origin are considered.

The stories Joseph Smith told about the origins of the Book of Mormon are quite fantastic. He said that in 1823 one of the ancient authors, Moroni, came to him as an angel and told him where the record was hidden. After four years under Moroni’s annual tutelage, Joseph was permitted to recover the record engraved on a set of gold plates from its resting place in a stone box in a hill. Joseph was empowered by God to translate the record, through the medium of “interpreters,” or seer stones. Thus empowered, he dictated to scribes such as his wife Emma, Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and others. This is the origin of the Book of Mormon, per Joseph Smith.¹

¹ The most accessible primary source for all of this is Joseph Smith’s own history written in 1838–1839, included in the LDS standard works as Joseph Smith — History. For additional treatments of the topic that cite the relevant primary sources, see Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter, How We Got the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 1–23; Matthew B. Brown, Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003), 3–97; Brant A. Gardner, The Gift and Power: Translating the
Naturally, this narrative was greeted with skepticism by those outside Joseph’s inner circle and continues to be doubted by many today. In January 1830, newspaper editor Abner Cole wrote a biting satire about Joseph Smith and his stories about angels, gold plates, and divine translation. Cole lumped these tall tales in with “Idle and Slothful strange stories of hidden treasures and of the spirit who had the custody thereof.” The story continues to be lumped in with tales of Captain Kidd and other money-diggers lore today and forms part of the rationale for why even some professed Latter-day Saints would have us abandon any kind of defense of the book’s origins, opting instead for some sort of vague “inspired-fiction” view of the Book of Mormon.

Though this story may seem wild and unbelievable to the modern skeptic, its elements actually fit ancient patterns for the discovery of lost books. The account also enjoys a high degree of corroboration from (1) eyewitness accounts confirming Joseph’s possession of actual metal plates and other artifacts, with some even corroborating the involvement of an angel in providing access to the record; (2) eyewitness reports on the process of producing the text; and (3) evidence from the original manuscript. These three items are addressed in this paper.


2 Obadiah Dogberry [Abner Cole], “The Book of Pukei,” Palmyra Reflector (June 12, 1830), 36.


Artifacts and Angels

Anthony Sweat, assistant professor of Church History at BYU, talks about how remarkably physical the Book of Mormon’s origins are.

Joseph said the Book of Mormon came forth from a nearby hill, by removing dirt, using a lever to lift a large stone, and removing actual engraved plates and sacred interpreters for the translation of its inscriptions. The Book of Mormon text didn’t just pass through Joseph’s trance-induced revelatory mind; its palpable relics passed through a clothing frock, hollowed log, cooper’s shop, linen napkin, wooden chest, fireplace hearth, and barrel of beans.6

The physicality of these artifacts was experienced by a wide variety of men and women in a wide variety of ways. As Richard Lloyd Anderson explained decades ago,

The plates figured in the regular life of Joseph Smith for over a year and a half. … He worried about obtaining them, [and] guarded them carefully during this period. … This meant that those nearest him shared in his strategies for preserving and using them. So a larger circle than the official witnesses had some contact with the ancient record in their daily affairs.7

To start, there are the official eleven witnesses. Just prior to publishing the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith showed the plates to two separate groups of people. The first consisted of Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and Cowdery’s brother-in-law David Whitmer. These three all testified that after praying with Joseph Smith, an angel showed them the plates on which the Book of Mormon was written.8 Another set of witnesses, consisting of David’s brothers Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Jr., John Whitmer, their brother-in-law Hiram Page, and Joseph’s father and brothers, Joseph Smith Sr., Hyrum Smith, and

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8 See “The Testimony of Three Witnesses,” in the front of contemporary editions of the Book of Mormon.
Samuel Smith were shown the record under ordinary circumstances and allowed to handle the plates.9

Both sets of witnesses had group testimonies drafted and published within the covers of the Book of Mormon. Many of the individuals also made frequent statements throughout their lives as they were questioned about the experience by believers and skeptics alike. The earliest of these on record comes from Oliver Cowdery a few months after the experience. In response to a newspaper editor inquiring about the Book of Mormon, Oliver wrote, “It was a clear, open beautiful day, far from any inhabitants, in a remote field, at the time we saw the record, of which it has been spoken, brought and laid before us, by an angel, arrayed in glorious light, [who] ascend [descended I suppose] out of the midst of heaven.”10

Oliver later left the Church, yet there is no indication that he ever denied his testimony of the Book of Mormon.11 After returning to the Church in 1848 at a Conference held in Council Bluffs, Iowa, Oliver delivered a stirring address. Included in that address was the declaration, “I beheld with my eyes, and handled with my hands, the gold plates from which [the Book of Mormon] was translated. I also saw with my eyes and handled with my hands the Holy Interpreters. That book is true.”12

In a letter written in 1870, Martin Harris testified: “I do say that the angel did show me the plates containing the Book of Mormon.”13 In 1887, after all the other witnesses had passed away, David Whitmer, though no longer a member of the Church, continued to fulfill the charge they had received in 1830. “I will say once more to all mankind,” he wrote, “that I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof. I also

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9 See “The Testimony of Eight Witnesses,” in the front of contemporary editions of the Book of Mormon.


11 See Anderson, Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses, 37–47.


13 Martin Harris to Hannah Emerson, November 23, 1870, printed in “Correspondence,” in True Latter Day Saints’ Herald 22/20 (Plano, IL; October 15, 1875), 630.
testify to the world, that neither Oliver Cowdery or Martin Harris ever at any time denied their testimony.”

Similar individual statements can be found among the eight witnesses. The Prophet’s brother Hyrum Smith said, “[H]e had but two hands and two eyes” and that “he had seen the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands.” In 1839, after enduring the bleakness of Liberty Jail, Hyrum Smith wrote, “I thank God that I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled.” In 1847, after leaving the Church, Hiram Page said, speaking of the Book of Mormon, it would be “doing injustice to myself and to the work of God of the last days, to say … my mind was so treacherous that I had forgotten what I saw.”

John Whitmer, like his brother David, is one of the witnesses who left the Church and never returned. Once, after leaving the Church, he stood before some of his anti-Mormon friends and was questioned about his witness of the Book of Mormon by Theodore Turley. With all the peer pressure in the world telling him to deny his testimony, John declared, “I now say I handled those plates. There was fine engravings on both sides. I handled them.” Decades later, after most of the other witnesses had passed away, John responded by letter to someone asking about his testimony in the Book of Mormon. “I have never heard,” he wrote, “that any one of the three or eight witnesses ever denied the testimony that they have borne to the Book as published in the first edition of the Book of Mormon.”

The two sets of witnesses are complemented by the additional experiences and informal interactions with the plates that others had.

14 David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 8.
15 Sally Bradford Parker to John Kempton, August 26, 1838; transcribed in Janiece L. Johnson, “The Scriptures Is a Fulfilling: Sally Parker’s Weave,” *BYU Studies* 44/2 (2005): 115, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization standardized. Original reads: “he said he had but too hands and too eyes he said he had seene the plates with his eyes and handeled them with his hands”.
16 Hyrum Smith to the Saints, December 1829, printed at “Communications,” *Times and Seasons* 1/2 (December 1839): 23.
19 John Whitmer to Mark H. Forest [Forscutt], March 5, 1876; cited by Harper, “The Eleven Witnesses,” 123.
These include Alvah Beaman, Josiah Stowell, and Joseph Knight Sr. along with other members of Joseph Smith’s family, such as his wife Emma, his mother Lucy, and his brother and sister, William and Katharine. Although most of these people never actually saw the plates, they can attest that Joseph Smith really did have a tangible object. They felt, lifted, and moved this object around (while covered). They could feel the weight, contours, and shape of the object well enough to discern that it was not blocks of wood or stones. They could lift the individual pages (or plates), hear them make a metallic rustling sound as they moved, and feel that they were bound by three rings.

Their experiences are so straightforward they cannot be easily dismissed. Both Emma and Katharine moved the covered plates around the house as they did daily chores, Josiah Stowell caught a glimpse of their corner as the covering slipped off when Joseph handed them to him, Alvah Beaman heard the metallic clinking of the plates as he helped move them around in the wooden chest, and Martin Harris let them sit, covered, on his knee for some time as he talked with Joseph in the


25 See “Mormonism,” New England Christian Herald 4/6 (Boston, MA; November 7, 1832); reprinted in Morning Star 8/29 (Limerick, ME; November 16, 1832); transcripts online at http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/NE/miscne01.htm#110732 and http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/NE/miscMe01.htm#111632 respectively (accessed August 2, 2015).

woods while they were preparing to hide the plates from a mob. Others reported finding the stone box in the hill after it had been emptied of its contents. These are mundane, ordinary, even day-to-day experiences. Experiences like these bring a certain tangibility and physicality to the plates that makes them hard to remove from historical reality.

There is also the experience of Mary Whitmer, who saw both the plates and the angel. Her experience is interesting because, even though it includes the divine messenger, even he is portrayed in rather ordinary terms. He shows up as a man while she is out milking cows, he shows her the record, and then he is gone.

This is only a small sampling of the many accounts that exist from the various witnesses. While it is easy to scrutinize and dismiss these testimonies now, for those living in the vicinity of Palmyra at the time, it was much harder to ignore. As a pair of historians who work for the The Joseph Smith Papers Project explain, “Joseph’s initial problems with enemies in 1827 were precisely because they were certain that he had in fact obtained some golden treasure from the hill.”

All of this makes notions of co-conspirators or easily duped followers very difficult to square with the historical record. There are too many people with too many stories about interactions with the plates and other artifacts. Several left the Church while continuing to bear their witness of the plates. As Richard Lloyd Anderson noted, several were strong-willed individuals who “tended to compete rather than cooperate with [Joseph Smith’s] leadership.” Given such circumstances, it would be impossible to keep a conspiracy under wraps, and their tendency to compete with Joseph’s leadership indicates they are not likely to be easily duped.

27 “Testimonies of Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris,” Millennial Star 21 (August 20, 1859): 545.
28 See MacKay and Dirkmaat, From Darkness unto Light, 9–10.
30 Unfortunately, there is no complete collection of these accounts. Preston Nibley, comp., The Witnesses of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968) does gather a handful, though the collection is incomplete and out of date.
31 MacKay and Dirkmaat, From Darkness unto Light, 10.
The different types of experiences of the various witnesses provide what Terryl Givens called “an evidentiary spectrum, satisfying a range of criteria for belief.” He elaborates:

The reality of the plates was now confirmed by both proclamation from heaven and by empirical observation, through a supernatural vision and by simple, tactical experience, by the testimony of passive witnesses to a divine demonstration and by the testimony of a group of men actively engaging in their own unhampered examination of the evidence.33

While Givens was only speaking of the official witnesses, the experiences of others who interacted with these objects further expands the evidentiary spectrum. For these participants, the plates and other objects were an omnipresent reality, sometimes out of sight but never really out of mind. They helped protect them from mobs trying to take the plates, either to get rich, expose the fraud, or both. They moved them around while doing daily chores. Homes were ransacked, marriages were severed, and family ties strained to the limit — all over whatever Joseph had hidden under that linen cloth or secured in his wooden chest. “From Nephi to Joseph and Emma,” Brant A. Gardner notes, “the Book of Mormon was intensely physical, intensely tangible.”34

Steven C. Harper of the Church Historical Department feels that the witnesses’ testimonies “are some of the most compelling evidence in favor of its miraculous revelation and translation.” Indeed, Harper notes that, “[f]or believers,” such testimony “approaches proof of Joseph Smith’s miraculous claims.”35 But what of doubters and skeptics?

“The witnesses’ statements were an effective demonstration of authenticity for a skeptical age,” according to Richard Lyman Bushman, a highly respected early American historian and former Howard W. Hunter chair of Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate

School. “Secular historians have never come to grips with the fact that none of the eleven who saw the plates (in addition to Joseph Smith) ever recanted.”

All told, these accounts corroborate Joseph Smith’s claim to having a set of metal plates and other objects within his possession. Some support his assertions of having retrieved them from a stone box in the Hill Cumorah. Additionally, several eyewitnesses were also introduced to the angel who was involved in revealing the plates. This creates a large body of historical evidence consistent with Joseph Smith’s claims.

**Translation Process**

There is an abundance of documentation on the process by which the English text was produced. Using that documentation, researchers have determined that the bulk of the translation occurred between April and June 1829, in a period only a little longer than two months — a rate of about eight pages per day. This was accomplished amidst a variety of other activities that had to be done, such as the dictation of twelve additional revelations (now in the Doctrine and Covenants), application for copyright, and hostile interactions with neighbors, which eventually


38 See John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, “How Long Did it take to Translate the Book of Mormon?” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 1–8; For a much longer and thorough examination, see John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2005), 77–117. Immediately following the article, from pages 118–213 are transcriptions of the relevant statements regarding the translation process, from a total of 202 documents. The primary sources used in this section can all be found in this collection. The citation to pages in *Opening the Heavens* will be provided only for documents difficult to access directly.
mandated a relocation of the translation from Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, New York, a distance of a hundred miles.39 “Besides translating,” Bushman writes, “Joseph received revelations for his brother Hyrum and the helpful Joseph Knight, and was instructed by the Lord to translate the small plates of Nephi rather than go back again to Lehi’s longer record. But through all of the ambient events, the main project ground on, the words coming relentlessly from Joseph’s mouth and going onto paper under Cowdery’s pen.”40

Witnesses to the process have insisted that Joseph Smith had no other book or manuscript with him from which to draw material.41 Using a hat to shield out the light as he focused on his seer stone, Joseph could not have read from a manuscript because, as he once told Martin Harris (who had switched out the seer stone with a different rock), it was “dark as Egypt” in the hat.42 Despite that, however, Joseph seemed to be reading from something because he would have his scribe recite back what was written to verify its accuracy.43 After countless interruptions, Joseph always started back right where he left off, without ever checking with his scribe to see what was last dictated.44 Sometimes Joseph had trouble pronouncing the names of the various characters in the narrative, including that of the name Sariah, Nephi’s mother.45 On at least one occasion, the content of the text seemed to surprise Joseph. For example, on one occasion when Emma was acting as his scribe, she remembered,

43 See Edward Stevenson, letter to the editor (reporting an interview with Martin Harris) November 30, 1881, Deseret Evening News (December 13, 1881), interview occurred in 1870; Eri B. Mullen, “Letter to the Editor,” (reporting an interview with David Whitmer) The Saints’ Herald 27 (March 1, 1880): 76; Interview of David Whitmer reported in Kansas City Journal (June 5, 1881).
[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.46

In the words of Martin Harris, “Joseph knew not the contents of the Book of Mormon until it was translated.”47

Evidence from the remaining portions of the original manuscript corroborates much of the witnesses’ testimony. Royal Skousen, a linguist who has led the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project for over a quarter century,48 has observed that the kind of errors found in the original manuscript reflect the mishearing, rather than the misreading, of the words, indicating that the original text was dictated to scribes. His analysis leads him to conclude that Joseph could only read twenty to thirty words at a time. Names are often misspelled and then corrected, supporting the witnesses’ testimony that Joseph would sometimes spell out the proper names. There are immediate changes to errors, consistent with the scribes reading back the text to Joseph to have it verified. Consistent with Joseph’s being unfamiliar with the text, the manuscript shows that Joseph did not always know when a break in the text was the beginning of a new chapter or a whole new book, specifically evidenced in the manuscript at the division between 1 and 2 Nephi.49

To summarize, both the eyewitness and manuscript evidence suggest that Joseph was reading a text, but not from any manuscript or


book. He only had access to limited portions of the text at a time, and did not have personal control over the text. There is no long, drawn out composition process — over five hundred pages were rattled off into a complex, coherent narrative in just over two months’ time, a miraculous feat in its own right. After breaks, he did not go back to do extensive revisions, nor did he need to review what had already been written, as an author normally would. He could not pronounce some of the names, and the information in the text was often as new to him as it was to his scribes and those observing the process. Overall, this evidence suggests that the text was not his own.

It is impossible to prove that something is miraculous or divine, but all of the above evidence is consistent with the story told by Joseph himself — that he dictated a text given to him by revelation, through the medium of an “interpreter,” or a seer stone.50 Taken together, Joseph Smith’s basic account, from the angel delivering the record on metal plates to the translation provided by “the gift and power of God,” is supported, to the extent possible, by the best primary sources on the coming forth of the text.

The Implications for Origins

In his study on authorship attribution, Harold Love explained that an important class of evidence includes “[c]ontemporary attributions contained in … titles, and from documents purporting to impart information about the circumstances of composition — especially diaries, correspondence, publishers’ records, and records of legal proceedings.”51 While the Book of Mormon title page listed Joseph Smith as the “author and proprietor” of the text in 1830, this was clearly done for copyright reasons.52 Therefore, the historical evidence, summarized here, coming from the people most familiar with “the circumstances of composition,”

50 The exact mechanics of how one actually sees and translates using a seer stone are unclear, but the best attempt at explaining this is made by Gardner, The Gift and Power, 250–315. Other writers have explicitly avoided trying to explain, instead choosing to focus on capturing the miracle of the Book of Mormon translation as Joseph Smith and his contemporaries experienced it. See, for example, MacKay and Dirkmaat, From Darkness unto Light, xiii–xvi.


52 See Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 64 n. 196, 94 n. 366. Also see Miriam A. Smith and John W. Welch, “Joseph Smith:
must be dealt with in any attempt to explain the origins and authorship of the Book of Mormon.

Such evidence makes it difficult to dismiss these narratives as “idle and slothful strange stories,” or otherwise explain them. Despite continued efforts by some critics to posit some other author, such as Sidney Rigdon or Solomon Spaulding, the evidence really allows only for Joseph Smith as a potential author in 1830. Too many people saw and described the process of Joseph, head in hat, dictating the text for it to be any other way. Yet Joseph as author also quickly runs into problems.

Joseph was unfamiliar with the content (Jerusalem’s walls) and structural divisions (mislabeled division between 1 and 2 Nephi), and could not pronounce at least some of the names (like Sariah). Why would this be if the text was Joseph’s own creation? Add to that the questions of where the plates and other artifacts in his possession came from, which are also corroborated by eyewitness testimony. Despite these problems, Joseph Smith and several of the other nineteenth century persons have been proposed as the author(s) of the text. Such proposals fail the test of historical evidence. Overall, the external evidence is consistent with Joseph Smith’s own explanation of events — including the angel and the plates — more than any other.

A great deal of creativity has been expended trying to account for all this in some other way. Some have argued, for example, that Joseph Smith manufactured a fake set of plates, even appealing to known


54 See several of the sources in Opening the Heavens, 118–213.

55 See, for example, Dan Vogel, “The Validity of the Witnesses’ Testimony,” in American Apocrypha, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 108. Taves, “History and the Claims of Revelation,” 182–207 more or less follows Vogel.
forgeries such as the Voree and Kinderhook plates, as analogs. Such arguments suffer from a number of difficulties:

1. This is an *ad hoc* explanation, necessitated by the witnesses’ testimonies but not actually supported by them or any other historical evidence.

2. The Voree and Kinderhook plates are small and crude and were obviously made of easily available materials. The Book of Mormon plates, on the other hand, are a different story entirely. Reconstructions of them based on witness descriptions prove extremely difficult.\(^5\) These plates were a well-crafted artifact far beyond the skills of Joseph Smith.\(^6\)

3. Lastly, witnesses attested to several other artifacts, such as the Liahona, Sword of Laban, the breastplate, and Interpreters.\(^7\) If the plates alone were beyond Joseph’s skill set to manufacture, then these added props certainly complicate the matter. It seems difficult to maintain that Joseph Smith created these artifacts himself (or with others). There is no evidence to support such an argument.

Others, then, turn to conspiracy theories, as already discussed. All the eyewitnesses to both the plates and the translation are from Joseph Smith’s “inner circle,” and thus they colluded with him on a major hoax. This theory breaks down quickly, however. Too many of these persons were later estranged from Joseph Smith and the Church, and yet not one backed away from his testimony nor exposed a conspiracy. Added

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6. MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 108. Even seemingly obvious and “common sense” aspects of the construction turn out to be beyond what Joseph Smith or someone from his day would have known to do. For example, the fact that the plates had *three* rings, which were D-shaped, makes it highly unlikely someone like Joseph Smith manufactured them. Three rings provide the most stability, and the D-shape provides the optimum utility, facts that were unrealized when ringed-binders were first developed in 1854. Whoever manufactured the plates had knowledge and experience in ring-binding technology, something no one in upstate New York had but which some ancient peoples were aware of, as confirmed by recent discoveries. See Warren P. Aston, “The Rings That Bound the Gold Plates Together,” *Insights* 26/3 (2006): 3–4.

to that is the fact that most of the eyewitness accounts are made after their estrangement from Joseph, independently and spontaneously upon questioning and cross-examination (sometimes from skeptical interviewers), during a time when these witnesses were scattered and isolated from each other, when no collusion was possible. 59

Richard Lloyd Anderson is both a historian and an attorney. His legal background is evident in the way he examines historical sources. While some regard such approaches as problematic, it has its merits as well. When trying to discern potential conspirators, for instance, Anderson’s interrogative approach is quite valuable. With the acumen of a seasoned trial attorney accustomed to discerning when witnesses are covering something up, he examined both the public and private statements left behind by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery from the period of translation. He found no deception but instead sincerity.

Profound faith and reverence characterize Joseph and Oliver in the early years of the Church. … The early Joseph and Oliver are men with missions, servants of Christ devoted to his work. This is supremely relevant in judging their Book of Mormon translation. They are the kind of men that God would use in such a great work. Their lives and thoughts are in harmony with what they claimed to do. … Their intense prayerfulness is consistent with communion with God. Not only is their translation story credible by numerous practical tests — the translators themselves emerge as spiritually credible.

… Did Oliver and Joseph translate by revelation and receive testimony and authority from angels? One must judge their credibility and discern the product of their work. Their activities are verified and their lifetime testimonies unwavering. The translators’ minds harmonize with their

prophetic call. Moreover, their claims are phrased with the confident simplicity of men who expect to be believed. What they said is important, but so also is how they said it; lack of overstatement in their first testimonies underlines depth of conviction.60

Such sincerity is problematic for theories of fraud or conspiracy. Richard Lyman Bushman, widely regarded as the leading expert on the life of Joseph Smith, reached a similar conclusion after reviewing the primary sources for the recovery and translation period. Speaking of Joseph Smith’s unpublished 1832 history, for example, Bushman observes:

The passage has an endearing candor to it. Joseph admits his teenage transgressions and his hope for forgiveness. He comes across as a learner trying to understand what he is to do. He is baffled when he cannot get the plates and wonders for an instant if he had just dreamed the vision. He is terrified that he has done something wrong. The angel at times frightens him. When he is rebuked, Joseph recognizes that he had been thinking of gold and riches, not of the glory of God. He is relieved to record the assurance that by repentance he could be forgiven and get the plates eventually. … The passage captivates a reader, making it hard to doubt Joseph’s sincerity. Inserting too much of language like this into a secular account would diffuse the search for Book of Mormon sources and turn attention to Joseph’s desire to comply with the will of heaven.

This is why, Bushman explains, “believing historians are more inclined to be true to the basic sources than unbelieving ones.”61

Counter-explanations ultimately fall flat of accounting for all the historical evidence, and they needlessly multiply hypotheses. They are particularly inadequate to account for the sincerity and honesty that both Anderson and Bushman discern in the most reliable primary sources. The most parsimonious explanation remains that given by Joseph Smith himself: an angel showed him where to find a record engraved on metal plates. This record was translated by means of revelation, through the

medium of seer stones (called “interpreters” by the record itself), and published as the Book of Mormon.

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Abstract: The fear that Moroni’s soldier’s speech (Alma 44:14) aroused in the Lamanite soldiers and the intensity of Zerahemnah’s subsequently redoubled anger are best explained by the polysemy (i.e., multiple meanings within a lexeme’s range of meaning) of a single word translated “chief” in Alma 44:14 and “heads” in Alma 44:18. As editor of a sacred history, Mormon was interested in showing the fulfilment of prophecy when such fulfilment occurred. Mormon’s description of the Lamanites “fall[ing] exceedingly fast” because of the exposure of the Lamanites’ “bare heads” to the Nephites’ swords and their being “smitten” in Alma 44:18 — just as “the scalp of their chief” was smitten and thus fell (Alma 44:12–14) — pointedly demonstrates the fulfilment of the soldier’s prophecy. In particular, the phrase “bare heads” constitutes a polysemic wordplay on “chief,” since words translated “head” can alternatively be translated “chief,” as in Alma 44:14. A similar wordplay on “top” and “leader” in 3 Nephi 4:28–29, probably again represented by a single word, also partly explains the force of the simile curse described there.

Alma 44:12–14 recounts a prophetic threat uttered by “one of Moroni’s soldiers” to the defeated Lamanite leader Zerahemnah and his soldiers after Moroni’s soldier had taken off a part of Zerahemnah’s scalp with his sword. His soldier’s prophecy and its reported fulfilment verses later in Alma 44:18 turn on the words “chief” and “head.” Both “head” in the anatomical sense and “head”/“chief” in a sociological leadership
sense are represented by a single word in Hebrew (rōʾš)\(^1\) and Egyptian (tp),\(^2\) both languages that the Nephites themselves said they used.\(^3\)

In this brief note, I propose that the intensity of the fear aroused in the Lamanite soldiers and the intensity of Zerahemnah’s redoubled anger are best explained by the polysemy (i.e., the range of meaning) of a single word translated “chief” in Alma 44:14 and “heads” in Alma 44:18. Mormon’s use of the latter term in Alma 44:18 completes the fulfilment of the soldier’s prophecy, a polysemic wordplay initiated with his use of a term translated “chief” in Alma 44:14.

“This Scalp, Which Is the Scalp of Your Chief”

Mormon records that the Nephite armies under Moroni’s leadership had defeated the armies of the Lamanites under the leadership of the Zoramite\(^4\) Zerahemnah in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges (Alma 43:3–44:20). In particular, Alma 44:1–11 details an exchange between Moroni and Zerahemnah in which the former dictated terms of peace (an “oath” that the Lamanites lay down their weapons and not come again to battle) and the latter rejected those terms. In verse 11, Moroni issues an ultimatum: surrender or be destroyed. What follows is one of the more dramatic and intriguing episodes in the Book of Mormon. Zerahemnah, angry at Moroni’s ultimatum, attempts to assassinate Moroni:

> And now when Moroni had said these words, Zerahemnah retained his sword, and he was angry with Moroni, and he rushed forward that he might slay Moroni; but as he raised his sword, behold, one of Moroni’s soldiers smote it even to the earth, and it broke by the hilt; and he also smote Zerahemnah that he took off his scalp and it fell to the earth. And Zerahemnah withdrew from before them into the midst of


\(^2\) Raymond O. Faulkner (A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian [Oxford: Griffith Institute/Ashmolean Museum, 1999], 246) glosses tp, which is written with “head”-glyph, as “head” (i.e., anatomical); “head(man), chief,” etc.

\(^3\) See 1 Nephi 1:2 and Mormon 9:32–33.

\(^4\) See Alma 43:5.
his soldiers. And it came to pass that the soldier who stood by, who smote off the scalp of Zerahemnah, took up the scalp from off the ground by the hair, and laid it upon the point of his sword, and stretched it forth unto them, saying unto them with a loud voice: **Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace. (Alma 44:12-14)**

Mark Morrise cites the speech of Moroni’s soldier in Alma 44:14 as an example of a “simile curse” or a “treaty curse,” in which the symbolic action enacted on the scalp becomes the penalty for violating the terms of the treaty (in this case by not accepting them). The treaty comparison here is appropriate because the Lamanites are being offered a “covenant of peace” or “peace treaty” (cf. Hebrew בְּרִיתָ שָלוֹם) and on very generous terms. The only apparent requirements are to hand over their weaponry and to never come to battle against the Nephites again.

In the soldier’s “prophetic curse,” as Donald W. Parry describes it, we also hear cultic echoes and the divine-warrior language of the Psalms: “But God shall wound the head [רֹֽעֶש] of his enemies, and the hairy scalp [קָדְּתָ שֶֽׁירַ] of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses [בָּאָשָׁמָו — i.e., “his guilt”]”(Psalm 68:21 [MT Psalm 68:22]); “He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; **he shall wound the heads** [lit. singular the head, רֹֽעֶש] over many countries … therefore shall he lift up the head [רֹֽעֶש]” (Psalm 110:6–7). These two Psalms — hymns of the Jerusalem temple having particular pertinence to Davidic kingship and leadership — promise or prophesy...
that the Lord will wound the “heads” of his enemies, especially the enemies of the Davidic king. The polysemy of the term ṭōṣ (“head”) is evident: the Lord will wound the “head[s]” (body parts) of his enemies, but he will also wound their heads (chiefs or leaders), just as he will uphold Judah’s head — i.e., the Davidic king (cf. the title of Jesus as “our great and eternal head,” Helaman 13:38).

“They Were Struck With Fear”

Mormon reports that the soldier’s visually-enhanced prophetic rhetoric struck many of the Lamanites with abject fear:

> Now there were many, when they heard these words and saw the scalp which was upon the sword, that were struck with fear; and many came forth and threw down their weapons of war at the feet of Moroni, and entered into a covenant of peace. And as many as entered into a covenant they suffered to depart into the wilderness. (Alma 44:15)

Parry states that soldier’s “symbolic actions … were so effective that … the audience reacted immediately and positively.”¹⁰ I would further argue that the great fear that the Lamanite soldiers exhibited was due to how they heard the word “chief” used by Moroni’s soldier. If “chief”/“head” (sociological) and “head” (anthropological) were represented by the same term in their own language, they would have not only heard “this is the scalp of your chief,” but “this is the scalp of your head” — i.e., your own “heads.” The scalp, of course, was the extension of Zerahemnah’s anatomical “head,” just as they were extensions of him as their sociological “head” or “chief.” Not wanting their own “heads” to become like their “head”/“chief” Zerahemnah and his fallen scalp, these warriors “threw down their weapons” (i.e., caused them to “fall”) at the feet of Moroni. Their “thrown down,” or “fallen,” weapons, in a sense serve as substitutes for themselves (who would have otherwise “fallen”). It is further noteworthy that the image of the “weapons … at the feet of Moroni” provides a vivid contrast to the Zerahemnah’s “scalp … upon the point of [Moroni’s soldier’s] sword,” or “the scalp which was upon the sword.”

“Zerahemnah Was Exceedingly Wroth”

The soldier’s “simile” or “treaty” curse has the opposite effect on Zerahemnah himself, who does not react positively: “Now it came to

pass that Zerahemnah was exceedingly wroth, and he did stir up the remainder of his soldiers to anger, to contend more powerfully against the Nephites” (Alma 44:16). Of course, Zerahemnah’s wounding coupled with the speech by one of Moroni’s subordinates laying out a set of demands would have been enough to make Zerahemnah angry. However, Zerahemnah apparently also heard the *double entendre* of the word rendered “chief”/“head,” referring to himself both as “chief” of the Lamanites but also to his own wounded “head,” which the soldier made into a metonym for the “heads” of the individual Lamanite soldiers. Additionally, the “scalp” of Lamanite “chief”/“head” Zerahemnah becomes a metonym for their soldiers’ own persons or bodies, which are both extensions of the “head” (see below).

Thus, the soldier’s prophetic speech with its polysemic pun on “chief”/“head” redoubles Zerahemnah’s anger. He then stubbornly and foolishly incites some of his more loyal soldiers to continue waging an unwinnable battle. The results of this stubbornness, in terms of additional and unnecessary loss of human life, are tragic.

*“Their Bare Heads … Were … Smitten”*

Mormon indicates that Zerahemnah’s being “exceedingly wroth” coupled with the “anger” of Zerahemnah’s more loyal soldiers, in turn redoubles Moroni’s own anger:

> And now Moroni was angry, because of the stubbornness of the Lamanites; therefore he commanded his people that they should *fall* upon them and slay them. And it came to pass that they began to slay them; yea, and the Lamanites did contend with their swords and their might. But behold, *their naked skins*¹¹ and *their bare heads* were exposed to the sharp swords of the Nephites; yea, behold they were pierced and smitten, yea, and did fall exceedingly fast before the swords of the Nephites; and they began to be swept down, even as the soldier of Moroni had prophesied. (Alma 44:16–18)

The “heads” of the Lamanites who refuse the “covenant of peace” become like their *head*, Zerahemnah and his scalp: “pierced and smitten” (cf. “smote,” vv. 12–13), and they “fall [to the earth] exceedingly fast.” The correspondence between Mormon’s use of the term translated as “heads” here and “chief” (Alma 44:14) becomes clearest when we consider that both are most likely represented by the same word in the underlying text.

Mormon’s statement that the Lamanites who continued to fight “did fall exceedingly fast” recalls the image of the “scalp [that] fell to the earth” and the soldier’s prophetic declaration, “Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth” (44:14). In fact, the words “did fall exceedingly fast” confirm the fulfilment of the soldier’s prophetic simile curse that regarded not merely the fate of their “chief” but also the fate of their own bare “heads,” which were “smitten”12 like Zerahemnah’s scalp because of their “expo[sure] to the sharp swords of the Nephites.”

It is additionally possible that Mormon incorporates a similar simile13 involving a polysemic play on “head” in 3 Nephi 4:28–29, when the righteous Nephites and Lamanites make a public example of Zemnarihah, the leader of the Gadianton robbers:

And their leader [head, ḫā’š], Zemnarihah, was taken and hanged upon a tree, yea, even upon the top [খā’š]14 thereof until he was dead. And when they had hanged him until he was dead they did fell the tree to the earth, and did cry with a loud voice, saying: May the Lord preserve his people in righteousness and in holiness of heart, that they may cause to be felled to the earth all who shall seek to slay them because of power and secret combinations, even as this man hath been felled to the earth. (3 Nephi 4:28–29)

At least part of the simile here seems to consist in the “top” or “head” of the tree upon which the “leader” or “head” of the Gadianton robbers had been executed being “felled” (i.e., caused to “fall”) to the earth, much like the scalp of Zerahemnah’s “head” and the Lamanite “heads” falling in Alma 44. Both episodes serve as object lessons on the consequences that wicked leaders or “heads” bring upon their people.

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12 Since “heads” are not usually “pierced,” this statement assumes that Mormon’s phraseology intended a matching of terms — i.e., the Lamanites’ “naked skins” were “pierced” whereas their “bare heads” were “smitten.”

13 Morrise (“Simile Curses,” 135) also briefly mentions 3 Nephi 4:28–29 as an example of this phenomenon, as does Parry (“Symbolic Action as Prophetic Curse,” 207). Morrise and Parry focus on the felling of the tree. I am suggesting here that what happens on and to the “top” or “head” of the tree, in particular, is important in terms of the simile of what happens to the “leader”/“head.”

14 Hebrew ḫā’š has the sense of “top” (or “tops”) of trees in Isaiah 17:6; 2 Samuel 5:24 (1 Chronicles 14:15); Ezekiel 17:4; 22; it has the sense of “top” (or “tops”) of mountains in Genesis 8:5; Numbers 14:40, 44; Deuteronomy 34:1; Judges 9:7, 25, 36; Joshua 15:8–9; (famously) Isaiah 2:2 (Micah 4:1); 30:17; 42:11; Hosea 4:13; Joel 2:5; Psalm 72:16; Song of Solomon 4:8; Ezekiel 6:13; 43:12, etc.
Conclusion

Identifying the polysemic play involving “chief” and “heads” in Alma 44:14, 18 as reflecting a single underlying term helps us further appreciate the richness of the Book of Mormon as an ancient text reflecting an ancient Israelite background and set within an ancient milieu. This pericope, moreover, offers a vivid didactic example of the collective corporate toll that faulty leadership can incur: the wound inflicted upon the unrighteous head (leader) is liable to be inflicted figuratively (if not literally) upon the heads of that leader’s followers who “go on still in [their] trespasses” (Psalm 68:22), rather than submitting themselves to their “great and eternal head,” the Lord Jesus Christ (Helaman 13:38).

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Now That We Have the Words of Joseph Smith, How Shall We Begin to Understand Them? Illustrations of Selected Challenges within the 21 May 1843 Discourse on 2 Peter 1

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Abstract: In this article, I explore some of the opportunities and challenges that lie before us as we try to reach a better understanding of the prophetic corpus that has come to us from Joseph Smith. I turn my attention to a specific instance of these opportunities and challenges: the 21 May 1843 discourse on the doctrine of election, which Joseph Smith discussed in conjunction with the “more sure word of prophecy” mentioned in 2 Peter 1:19.

Recovering Lost Dimensions of Meaning in the Records of the Restoration

Now that we enjoy an unparalleled ease of access to the original manuscripts of the history, translations, revelations, and teachings of Joseph Smith,¹ we are in an ideal position to explore the many lost dimensions of ancient religion that we can see and appreciate because of what the Prophet restored. Unfortunately, however, as soon as we begin to explore in earnest, we realize that access to his papers addresses only the issue of transmission of his words, and accurate transmission “need in no way imply ‘understanding.’”² For modern readers to understand the papers of Joseph Smith, some amount of translation must also be done, even for English-speakers.³

Hugh Nibley points out that a “translation must … be not a matching of dictionaries but a meeting of minds, for as the philologist William Entwistle puts it, ‘there are no ‘mere words’ … the word is
a deed’; it is a whole drama with centuries of tradition encrusting it, and that whole drama must be passed in review every time the word comes up for translation.” Below, I will outline twelve interpretive and historiographical challenges that must be faced in order to achieve a better understanding of Joseph Smith’s words.

**Interpretive Challenges**

1. **The challenge of replicating Joseph Smith’s range of experience.** In an insightful presentation by John C. Alleman, he described several examples of difficulties that still plague translators when they are required to render the teachings of Joseph Smith in a form that can be understood by “every nation, and kindred and tongue, and people.” In the course of his discussion of specific issues in vocabulary, syntax, culture, scripture citations, and foreign phrases, Alleman summarized the one major proposition that underlies all translation: “namely, that one cannot translate that which one does not understand. … The problems [in translating the teachings of Joseph Smith require] … a range of experience equal to that which the Prophet himself had, almost, to understand some of his writings.”

   A range of experience equal to that which the Prophet himself had? This, the man whose mind “stretch[ed] as high as the utmost heavens, and search[ed] into and contemplate[d] the deepest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity”—indeed, one who “commune[d] with God”—what greater range of experience could be imagined than that?

2. **The challenges of decoding imagery and overcoming our lack of familiarity with scripture.** Even if we thought ourselves capable of fully grasping the plain sense of Joseph Smith’s most straightforward statements, most of us will still struggle to decode his pervasive imagery, which is so often loaded with localisms, creative allusions, and scriptural wordplay. Moreover, the frequent allusions Joseph Smith made to scripture and other sources will never be recognized, let alone understood, unless we are familiar with these external texts ourselves. One of Joseph Smith’s frequent teaching methods was to take an obscure or misunderstood passage of scripture and unfold new meanings to his listeners, drawing on both his familiarity with an astonishing number of scriptural passages and also on the prophetic insights he had gained firsthand through divine revelation. Sadly, however, scriptures are not the staple of literary and religious life in our day that they were to those who lived in Joseph Smith’s time.
3. The challenges of vocabulary and reading skills. At the most basic level, many scriptural terms such as “endow,” “seal,” “mystery,” “key,” “sign,” “token,” “calling,” and “election” have significantly changed in meaning, connotation, and association since the early days of the Restoration. In some cases, the words have completely dropped out of our everyday vocabulary. Besides these challenges at the lexical level, some early evidence suggests that those of us who feed largely on today’s media may read differently than our ancestors. For one thing, we have become accustomed to a kind of reading that consists of facile skimming for rapid information ingestion — what the great Jewish scholar Martin Buber went so far as to term “the leprosy of fluency.” For another thing, even if one had the time and patience to read more reflectively, many today lack the capacity to follow the logic of passages that are longer than a sound bite. Complex descriptions or lines of argument are mentally processed as grab bags of simple, unordered, atomic associations rather than as linear structures that were carefully composed by divinely inspired authors of scripture to serve specific literary, expository, or revelatory purposes.

4. The challenge of doctrinal ignorance. It cannot be doubted that our difficulties in grasping the larger logic of scripture — the logic that binds phrases and sentences together into coherent passages — are at least partly behind what Prothero calls a widespread “religious amnesia” that has dangerously weakened the foundations of faith. When scripture is consulted at all, it is too often “solely for its piety or its inspiring adventures” or its admittedly “memorable illustrations and
contrasts” rather than the “deep memories” of spiritual understanding that provide context for the imagery and are woven throughout the stories themselves. Harold Bloom concludes that since the current “American Jesus can be described without any recourse to theology,” we have become, on the whole, a post-Christian nation. Similarly, Herberg characterized our national “faith in faith” as a “strange brew of devotion to religion and insouciance as to its content.” Little wonder that the teaching of the major doctrines of the Gospel, as centered in scripture, has become a significant emphasis in classroom teaching over in recent years.

5. The challenge of personal revelation. According to Hugh Nibley, the written record of what the Prophet translated, revealed, and taught is a “means of helping those to understand who are unable to get the Spirit for themselves.” In other words, we might say that the revelatory corpus of Joseph Smith is intended to serve as a set of training wheels that aid readers to understand, through their own personal revelation, what “God [already] revealed” to the Prophet. Understanding what has already been revealed prepares us in turn to receive whatever additional revelation is needed on specific matters that concern our own lives and stewardships. In this connection, Elder Neal A. Maxwell once remarked: “God is giving away the spiritual secrets of the universe,” and then asked: “but are we listening?”

6. The challenges of Joseph Smith’s reluctance to share sacred events publicly and of deliberately concealed meaning. A further difficulty that hinders our understanding of Joseph Smith’s words is his reluctance to share details of sacred events and doctrines publicly. Consider, for example, Joseph Smith’s description of the Book of Mormon translation process. While some of the Prophet’s contemporaries gave detailed descriptions of the size and appearance of the plates, the instruments used in translation, and the procedure by which the words of the ancient text were made known to him, Joseph Smith demurred when asked to relate such specifics himself, even in response to direct questioning in private company from believing friends. The only explicit statement we have from him about the translation process is his testimony that it occurred “by the gift and power of God.” More generally, Brigham Young referred to the fact that those who sat in Joseph Smith’s “secret councils year after year … heard [him] say thousands of things that the people have never yet heard.” Moreover, on at least one occasion — following the practice of Jesus when He taught in parables — the Prophet gave a sermon with a meaning that was deliberately concealed
to all but a few of his listeners. All this leads one to wonder just how much we might be missing when we read the record of Joseph Smith’s teachings.

7. The challenge of understanding the ancient context of scripture. Of course, all I have mentioned above is only the beginning of the challenge before us in trying to understand what Joseph Smith revealed and taught. Not only are we handicapped in our personal preparation to close the revelatory gap of prophetic experience with that of a nineteenth-century seer, we also live on the near side of a great historical divide that separates us from the religious, cultural, and philosophical perspectives of previous ages. Joseph Smith was far closer to this lost world than we are — not only because of his personal involvement with the recovery and revelatory expansion of ancient religion, but also because in his time many archaic traditions were still embedded in the language and daily experience of the surrounding culture. Margaret Barker describes the challenges this situation presents to contemporary students of scripture:

Like the first Christians, we still pray “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” but many of the complex systems of symbols and stories that describe the Kingdom are not longer recognized for what they are.

It used to be thought that putting the code into modern English would overcome the problem and make everything clear to people who had no roots in a Christian community. This attempt has proved misguided, since so much of the code simply will not translate into modern English. ... The task, then, has had to alter. The need now is not just for modern English, or modern thought forms, but for an explanation of the images and pictures in which the ideas of the Bible are expressed. These are specific to one culture, that of Israel and Judaism, and until they are fully understood in their original setting, little of what is done with the writings and ideas that came from that particular setting can be understood. Once we lose touch with the meaning of biblical imagery, we lose any way into the real meaning of the Bible. This has already begun to happen and a diluted “instant” Christianity has been offered as junk food for the mass market. The resultant malnutrition, even in churches, is all too obvious.

Consistent with Barker’s observations, many observers have documented a worldwide trend toward a religious mindset that prizes
emotion\textsuperscript{39} and entertainment\textsuperscript{10} as major staples of worship. Even when undertaken with evident sincerity, religious gatherings of this sort rarely rise above the level of a “weekly social rite, a boost to our morale,”\textsuperscript{41} with exhortations on ethics occasionally thrown in for good measure.

8. The challenge of applying ancient scripture to modern contexts.
A factor that complicates the statement by Barker above is that Joseph Smith not only interpreted scripture by “enquiring” about the particulars of the situation which “drew out the answer”\textsuperscript{42} of a given teaching in its ancient context, but also, like Nephi, reshaped his interpretations in order to “liken them”\textsuperscript{43} to the situation of those living in the latter days. Indeed, on many occasions, the specifics of Joseph Smith’s interpretations of scripture and doctrinal pronouncements can be understood only with reference to current events in his life, among the community of the Saints, and in the world. Thus, Ben McGuire argues that in contrast to the traditional view that our job in reading scripture is simply to uncover an absolute, “true” meaning that was meant to be grasped by the original audience, Joseph Smith frequently “ignores the increasing gap between the cultural and societal contexts of the past and present, and re-inscribes scripture within the context of the present.”\textsuperscript{44} McGuire observes that Nephi’s reading strategy, like that of Joseph Smith, is quite foreign to the traditional way of thinking about scripture interpretation: “He is consistently re-fashioning his interpretation of past scripture through the lens of his present revelations, and the outcome is something that [might have been] … unrecognizable to the earlier, original audience.”\textsuperscript{45}

9. The challenge of pragmatically adapting the language of scripture and revelation.
Though Joseph Smith was careful in his efforts to render a faithful reading of scripture when he translated and interpreted, he was no naïve advocate of the inerrancy or finality of scriptural language.\textsuperscript{46} For instance, although in some cases his Bible translation attempted to resolve blatant inconsistencies among different accounts of the Creation or the life of Christ, as a general rule he did not attempt to merge the sometimes-divergent perspectives from different accounts of the same events into a single harmonized version. Of course, having multiple versions of these important stories should not be seen a defect or inconvenience. Differences in perspective between such accounts, and even seeming inconsistencies, composed “in [our] weakness, after the manner of [our] language, that [we] might come to understanding,”\textsuperscript{47} can be an aid rather than a hindrance to human comprehension, perhaps serving disparate sets of readers or diverse purposes to some advantage.
In translating the Bible, Joseph Smith’s criterion for the acceptability of a given reading was typically pragmatic rather than absolute. For example, after quoting a verse from Malachi in a letter to the Saints, he admitted that he “might have rendered a plainer translation.” However, he said that his wording of the verse was satisfactory in this case because the words were “sufficiently plain to suit [the] purpose as it stands.” This pragmatic approach is also evident both in the scriptural passages cited to him by heavenly messengers and also in his preaching and translations. In these latter instances, he often varied the wording of Bible verses to suit the occasion.

**Historiographical Challenges**

10. The challenge of obtaining qualified and reliable scribes. If all I have described thus far were not enough, there is the reality “that almost all of what we have of Joseph Smith’s sayings and writings comes to us not through his own pen, but via scribes and recorders who could not possibly have been 100% accurate when they attempted to write down the Prophet’s words.” Consider that Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo sermons were neither written out in advance nor taken down by listeners verbatim or in shorthand as they were delivered. Rather, they were copied as fragmentary notes and reconstructions of his prose (sometimes retrospectively) by a small number of individuals, often, but not always, including one or more official recorders. Of the estimated 450 discourses the Prophet may have given throughout his public ministry, available sources “identify only about 250 discourses, and his published history only gives reasonably adequate summaries of only about one-fifth of these.”

It was an almost impossible job for Joseph Smith to find qualified and reliable scribes, and to manage their frequent turnover: “More than two dozen persons are known to have assisted the Prophet in a secretarial capacity during the final fourteen years of his life. … Of these scribes, nine left the Church and four others died while engaged in important writing assignments.” The arduous culmination of the trial-and-error effort that eventually produced Joseph Smith’s *History of the Church* was successful only after eight previous attempts to write the history had been abandoned.

11. The challenge of complex and divergent sources. Notes kept by various individuals were shared and copied by others. Later, as part of serialized versions of history that appeared in church publications, many (but not all) of the notes from such sermons were gathered,
expanded, amalgamated, and harmonized; prose was smoothed out; and punctuation and grammar were standardized.\textsuperscript{57} Elaborations on the original notes were made not only to complete a thought but also to include additional material not now available in extant sources.\textsuperscript{58} Sometimes the wording of related journal entries from scribes and others was changed to the first person and incorporated into the \textit{History of the Church}\textsuperscript{59} in order to fill gaps in the record, an accepted practice at the time.\textsuperscript{60} Unfortunately, this approach masks the provenance of sources and the hands of multiple editors within the finished manuscript.

Over the years, various compilations have drawn directly from various editions of the \textit{History of the Church}\textsuperscript{61} while, more recently, transcriptions of contemporary notes (including sources that were unavailable to historians who produced the standard amalgamated versions) also have been collected and published.\textsuperscript{62} In addition, translations of these accounts into different languages has sometimes exposed new difficulties that required creative solutions.\textsuperscript{63}

\textbf{12. The challenge of assessing the reliability of a given teaching of Joseph Smith.} An important point in assessing the reliability of a given teaching of Joseph Smith is that while each of the published accounts of the Prophet’s Nauvoo sermons has been widely used to convey his teachings to church members on his authority, none of these were reviewed by him personally.\textsuperscript{64} Moreover, not quite two hundred years after these sermons were delivered, multiple variants in their content and wording — none of which completely reflect the actual words spoken — are in common circulation. In some cases, imperfect transcriptions of Joseph Smith’s words led to misconstruals of doctrine by early Church members and, in consequence, have had to be corrected explicitly by later Church leaders. One need look no further than the March 2014 edition of the \textit{Ensign} for a valuable apostolic correction of such a misunderstanding.\textsuperscript{65} In light of historical circumstances, it is easy to see how significant divergences in our understanding of Joseph Smith’s teachings have sometimes happened, even in the best case where like-minded scribes recorded events more or less as they occurred, doing the best they could to preserve the original words of the Prophet. This phenomenon also helps explain the great lengths that Joseph Smith went to, in compliance with the commandments of the Lord, in order to preserve an accurate written record of the doings of his day.\textsuperscript{66}

With these considerations in mind, I will undertake a close look at the 21 May 1843 discourse of Joseph Smith. The detailed accounts of that sermon come to us from Elder Willard Richards\textsuperscript{67} (the keeper of Joseph
Smith’s journal), from the Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, and from the expanded and polished version prepared for publication by church historians in the 1850s. Shorter summaries of portions of the sermon are also provided by Franklin D. Richards, James Burgess, Wilford Woodruff, and Levi Richards. In addition to these accounts, I will also quote relevant passages from the Prophet’s discourses on other occasions, including material from the diaries of Wilford Woodruff and William Clayton.

**Synopsis of Joseph Smith’s 21 May 1843 Discourse:**

“The More Sure Word of Prophecy”

On the morning of Sunday, 21 May 1843, Joseph Smith “pressed his way through the crowd” to the stand on the floor of the unfinished Nauvoo temple. After the congregation sang, he read the text he had selected as the subject of his discourse: the first chapter of 2 Peter. After a prayer by William Law, more singing, and a few introductory remarks, he opened his sermon.

**What Could Be “More Sure” Than Hearing the Voice of God Bearing Testimony of His Son?**

*Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal:* we have a more sure word of prophecy. whereunto you do well to take heed — as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty and heard the voice of his excellent glory — &. what could be more [p. [212]] sure? transfigured on the mount &c what could be more sure? Divines have been quarreling [quarreling] for ages about the meaning of this.

*Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History:* “We have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto you do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. We were eye witnesses of his majesty and heard the voice of his excellent glory.” And what could be more sure? When He was transfigured on the mount, what could be more sure to them? Divines have been quarreling for ages about the meaning of this.

*Original Notes in Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook:* we were eye witnesses of his Majesty we have also a more sure word of Prophecy.
The first topic taken up by the Prophet in this discourse is the meaning of the reference in 2 Peter 1:19 to the “more sure word of prophecy.” Continuing his effort to “stir … up” the Saints “in remembrance of these things” (vv. 13, 12), Peter reminded his readers of his firsthand experience at the Mount of Transfiguration. The overall scriptural account is cryptic, and translators have struggled particularly with the reference to the “more sure word of prophecy” in verse 19 — a “crux interpretum” for the entire book according to Jerome Neyrey.81

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter and his companions had become “eyewitnesses of [the] majesty”82 of the glorified Jesus Christ and had heard the voice of God the Father declare: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”83 Joseph Smith asked his hearers, “What could be more sure” than that? The Prophet will give the answer to that question near the end of his sermon.

The “more sure word of prophecy” is a topic to which the Prophet returned again and again, especially in the last two years of his life.84 He had made the first chapter of 2 Peter the subject of a sermon the previous Sunday, 14 May 1843,85 and preached on it again to a different audience on 17 May.86 He elaborated on the same principles and doctrines on 1387 and 27 August 184388 and again on 10 March89 and 12 May90 1844. Since

Figure 2. Carl Heinrich Bloch, 1834-1890: The Transfiguration

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our record of his sermons is incomplete, he may have addressed the topic on additional occasions as well. His discourse of the 21 May 1843 was not intended merely as an exposition of doctrine. Rather, at its heart was an urgently enjoined plea for the Saints to “go forward and make [their] calling and … election sure” “for in this way entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly added to you.”

Polishing the Rough Stone

*Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal:* rough stone rolling down hill.

*Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History:* I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priestcraft, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executives, backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women—all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty, who will give me dominion over all and every one of them, when their refuge of lies shall fail, and their hiding place shall be destroyed, while these smooth-polished stones with which I come in contact become marred.

*Notes from a Sermon Recorded on 11 June 1843 in Joseph Smith’s Diary:* I a rough stone. The sound of the hammer and chisel was never heard on me, nor never will be. I desire the learning & wisdom of heaven alone.

*Notes from a Sermon of Heber C. Kimball recorded by Wilford Woodruff on 9 September 1843:* We are not Polished stones like Elder Babbit Elder Adams, Elder Blakesley & Elder Magin &c. But we are rough Stones out of the mountain, & when we roll through the forest & nock the bark of from the trees it does not hurt us even if we should get a Cornor nocked of occasionally. For the more they roll about & knock the cornors of the better we are. But if we were polished & smooth when we get the cornors knocked of it would deface us.
This is the Case with Joseph Smith. He never professed to be a dressed smooth polished stone but was rough out of the mountain & has been rolling among the rocks & trees & has not hurt him at all. But he will be as smooth & polished in the end as any other stone, while many that were so vary poliched & smooth in the beginning get badly defaced and spoiled while they are rolling about.

The self-characterization of Joseph Smith as a “rough stone rolling” was made famous by the title of Richard Bushman’s biography of the Prophet. Starting out as a rough stone was a badge of honor in the rough culture in which Joseph Smith was raised — and the fact no one but God could take credit for the polishing only added to that honor: “The sound of the hammer and chisel was never heard on me, nor never will be. I desire the learning & wisdom of heaven alone.”

The comparison of the polishing of a rough stone to the moral education of Joseph Smith would have been familiar not only to students of the Bible but also to fellow Freemasons in the Prophet’s audience. According to Masonic historian W. Kirk MacNulty:

The Rough Ashlar is a stone fresh from the quarry that must be cut to the appropriate shape before it can be placed in the building. It represents the Apprentice who has started his journey, and who must work to improve himself.

The Perfect Ashlar is a stone that has been cut and polished to its proper form and is ready to be placed in the building. It represents the Apprentice who has completed his work and is ready to advance to the Second Degree.

As mentioned above, Joseph Smith’s version of the thought emphasizes that his polishing was not so much the result of efforts at ordinary self-improvement as it was of “the learning & wisdom of heaven.” This is consistent with the biblical ethos of Exodus 20:25:

“And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.”

The imagery is also reflected in Daniel’s interpretation of the vision of the stone that was “cut out of the mountain without hands” and Jesus’ prophecy that contrasted the “temple that is made with hands” (i.e., Herod’s temple) to the temple that would be made “within three days … without hands” (i.e., Jesus’ resurrected body).

Why would one want to polish stones for building purposes before they are brought out of the mountain quarries and onto the construction
site? An answer is provided in the description of how such stones were to be prepared for use in Solomon's Temple:

And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.

The brevity of Elder Richards' note on this passage suggests that he may have heard similar comments on other occasions and only required a few words to remind him of the gist. Note the accounts of similar imagery used on 11 June and 9 September 1843 as given above.

“By Virtue of the Knowledge of God in Me”

Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal: 3 grand secrets lying in this chapter which no man can dig out. which unlocks the whole chapter.

what is wrttn are only hints of things which ex[is]ted in the prophets mind. which are not written. concen[tr]ing eternal glory.

I am going to take up this subj[e]ct by virtue of the knowledge of God in me. — which I have received fr[o]m heaven. [p. [213]]

Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History: There are three grand secrets lying in this chapter, [2 Peter 1] which no man can dig out, unless by the light of revelation, and which unlocks the whole chapter as the things that are written are only hints of things which existed in the prophet’s mind, which are not written concerning eternal glory.

I am going to take up this subject by virtue of the knowledge of God in me, which I have received from heaven.

Original Notes in Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook: Now brethren who can explain this no man be [but] he that has obtained these things in the same way that Peter did. Yet it is so plain & so simple & easy to be understood that when I have shown you the interpretation thereof you will think you have always Known it yourselves — These are but hints at those things that were revealed to Peter, and verily brethren there are things in the bosom of the Father, that have been hid
from the foundation of the world, that are not Known neither
can be except by direct Revelation

In light of the Prophet’s reticence to share all the details of his
sacred experiences openly, he was certainly commenting as much on his
personal practice as he was on Peter’s when he explained that “what is
written [is] only hints of things which existed in the prophet’s mind.”

The secrets hinted at by Peter in this chapter could be discovered by no
man except through direct revelation. Thus, of necessity, Joseph Smith
would explain the passage “by virtue of the knowledge of God in me,—
which I have received from heaven.”

No doubt, the Prophet saw the “hints” given in this chapter as
pointing to knowledge and keys received by Peter, James, and John on the
Mount, including the firm “promise from God,” received personally
for themselves, that they should “have eternal life. That is the more sure
word of prophecy.”

“The Opinions of Men … Are to Me as the Crackling of the
Thorns Under the Pot”

Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal: the opinions of
men. so far as I am possessed concerned. are to me as the
crackling of the thorns under the pot. or the whistle[n]g of
the wind, Columbus and the eggs. —

Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History: The opinions
of men, so far as I am concerned, are to me as the crackling of
thorns under the pot, or the whistling of the wind. I break
the ground; I lead the way like Columbus when he was invited
to a banquet, where he was assigned the most honorable place
at the table, and served with the ceremonials which were
observed towards sovereigns. A shallow courtier present, who
was meanly jealous of him, abruptly asked him whether he
thought that in case he had not discovered the Indies, there
were not other men in Spain who would have been capable
of the enterprise? Columbus made no reply, but took an egg
and invited the company to make it stand on end. They all
attempted it, but in vain; whereupon he struck it upon the
table so as to break one end, and left it standing on the broken
part, illustrating that when he had once shown the way to the new world nothing was easier than to follow it.

*Original Notes Recorded from a Sermon Delivered on 17 May 1843 in Wilford Woodruff’s Diary:* I will make every doctrine plain that I present & it shall stand upon a firm bases And I am at the defiance of the world for I will take shelter under the broad shelter cover of the wings of the work in which I am ingaged. It matters not to me if all hell boils over. I regard it ownly as I would the Crackling of thorns under a pot.

Expressing his disregard for the skepticism of unbelievers about his mission and teachings, Joseph Smith compared their views to “the crackling of the thorns under the pot” or “the whistle[n]g of the wind.” “By virtue of the knowledge of God in [him],” he was in a position to lead out in his teachings rather than follow the shallow opinions of others.

As with the previous reference to the rough stone rolling, church historians confidently expanded the brief note about “Columbus and the eggs” into a polished version of the well-known anecdote.

**Ladder and Rainbow**

*Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal: Ladder and rainbow.*

*Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History:* Paul ascended into the third heavens, and he could understand the three principal rounds of Jacob’s ladder — the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms, where Paul saw and heard things which were not lawful for him to utter. I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them.

The Lord deals with this people as a tender parent with a child, communicating light and intelligence and the knowledge of his ways as they can bear it. The inhabitants of this earth are asleep; they know not the day of their visitation. The Lord hath set the bow in the cloud for a sign that while it shall be seen, seed time and harvest, summer
and winter shall not fail; but when it shall disappear, woe to that generation, for behold the end cometh quickly.\footnote{Original Notes in the Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook:} There are some things in my own bosom that must remain there. If Paul could say I knew a man who ascended to the third heaven & saw things unlawful for man to utter, I more. [Note that this passage occurs at a later place in the discourse within the Coray notebook than it does in the church historians’ expansion. More on this below.]

Original Notes Recorded from a Sermon Delivered on 17 May 1843 in William Clayton’s Diary:\footnote{Original Notes Recorded from a Sermon Delivered on 11 June 1843 in Joseph Smith’s Diary:} Paul had seen the third heavens and I more.

Original Notes Recorded from a Sermon Delivered on 10 March 1844 in Joseph Smith’s Diary: The bow has been seen in the cloud & in that year that the bow is seen seed time

\textbf{Figure 3.} Stephen T. Whitlock, 1951–: \textit{Jacob’s Ladder}, Bath Abbey, 9 October 2004.\footnote{Figure 3. Stephen T. Whitlock, 1951–: \textit{Jacob’s Ladder}, Bath Abbey, 9 October 2004.}
and harvest will be. but when the bow ceases to be seen look out for a famine. [5 lines blank] [p. [30]]

The sense of the words “ladder and rainbow” might be something like the statement made by Joseph Smith few weeks later: “I wou[l]d make you think I was climbi[n]g a ladder when I I was climbing a rainbow.” The point of the allusion is unclear, however Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Brent M. Rogers infer from the context of the 11 June discourse that Joseph Smith was “commenting on the misleading use of theological terms.”139 With respect to the conjectured application of a similar phrase during the 21 May sermon, Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook see it as an anecdotal comment on the general “theme of reluctance — the reluctance of others to accept Joseph Smith’s teachings,”140 as also expressed in the previous anecdotes of the rough stone rolling and Columbus and the egg. A third possibility is raised by Ben McGuire, who matches up Joseph Smith’s reference with a statement by Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the Congregationalist theologian:141

Part of this bow is on earth, and part in heaven, so it is with the church. The bow gradually rises higher and higher from the earth towards heaven, so the saints from their first conversion are travelling in the way towards heaven, and gradually climb the hill, till they arrive at the top. So this bow in this respect is a like token of the covenant with Jacob’s ladder, which represented the way to heaven by the covenant of grace, in which the saints go from step to step, and from strength to strength, till they arrive at the heavenly Zion.

Comments McGuire: “I don’t know if Joseph Smith was aware of the material of Edwards, and so I cannot say with any sort of conviction that this was the case. But it makes me wary of the idea that Joseph was simply ‘commenting on the misleading use of theological terms’ — especially in a context where we can trace many of these ideas and anecdotes and allusions to existing contemporary material and sources.”142

Regardless of exactly how this phrase should be understood, it appears that later church historians were incorrect in reshaping and expanding “ladder and rainbow” into the passage that was published in Joseph Smith’s history. In further support of the view that the historians’ expansion failed to capture the intent of the Prophet is that “ladder” and “rainbow” seem to be joined as a single idea in the original notes, which contradicts their later rendering as two disjointed — and seemingly out-of-place — paragraphs. But if it is true that the brief note was incorrectly
fleshed out by later church historians, where did the additional material they used for the published version come from?

With respect to the paragraph that expands on the mention “rainbow,” a plausible conjecture is that church historians borrowed, not only from their memories of the 21 May discourse, but also from Joseph Smith’s prophetic statements about the sign of the rainbow in his 10 March 1844 discourse. Though the passage does not really fit the context of the 21 May 1843 discourse where it was placed, it seems consistent with the more extensive notes taken on the later occasion.

With respect to the paragraph that expands on the “ladder,” parallels to the statements about Paul’s and Joseph Smith’s ascensions in the account of the 21 May sermon are recorded in the Coray notebook and in the record of William Clayton for 17 May. In addition, sentiments similar to Joseph Smith’s statements regarding how little of what he knew he was able to share with the Saints can be found elsewhere in his Nauvoo teachings as well as in the Book of Mormon.

However, there is one idea in this same paragraph that has no other direct attestation elsewhere in the teachings of Joseph Smith, namely the assertion that Paul “could understand the three principal rounds of Jacob’s ladder — the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms.” How did the historians come up with this statement? Three possibilities come to mind:

1. The statement was made up by later historians from whole cloth. This possibility seems remote since nothing in its immediate context would have required inventing a statement to this effect, either to complete the rest of the thought or to enhance its readability. Had the historians simply left the idea out, no one would have noticed its absence. Moreover, according to Elder George A. Smith, inventing new material was something that he and his fellow historians strenuously avoided doing — and indeed there is nowhere else in this sermon where the polished prose they provided is not plausible. Of his work on the History of the Church, Elder Smith said that “the greatest care has been taken to convey the ideas in the Prophet's style as near as possible; and in no case has the sentiment been varied that I know of; as I heard the most of his discourses myself, was on the most intimate terms with him, have retained a most vivid recollection of his teachings.” In addition, Elder Smith felt his own careful editorial work was enhanced by
promised inspiration in his calling and the fact that he verified his work by reading each compiled discourse with members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, many of whom had also heard the original discourses. Moreover, we know that Joseph Smith used related imagery about a ladder on at least two other occasions. Finally, this statement, if authentic, would be — along with the “rough stone rolling” anecdote — a second direct instance of wordplay in the same discourse that would have been recognized by the Prophet’s fellow Freemasons. Although Freemasonry is not a religion and, in contrast to Latter-day Saint temple ordinances, does not claim saving power for its rites, within the first degree of Masonry, the ladder is also said to have “three principal rounds, representing Faith, Hope, and Charity,” which “present us with the means of advancing from earth to heaven, from death to life — from the mortal to immortality.” Similar to the reconstructed statement of Joseph Smith, Freemasonry correlates these three “principal rounds” with three different worlds or states of existence, beginning with the physical world and ending with the Heavens. All these culminate in a fourth level, associated with “Divinity.” Putting ancient imagery in Masonic terms already familiar to many of the early Saints would have served a pragmatic purpose, favoring their acceptance and understanding of specific aspects of the scriptural idea better than if a new and foreign vocabulary had been introduced.

2. The statement was derived from something Joseph Smith said elsewhere at one time or another. This possibility seems more plausible than the previous option. Indeed, as a prime example of such a practice, the expanded prose associated with the “rainbow” arguably was created in part from material the historians found in the 10 March 1844 sermon. But if Joseph Smith’s teaching about the ladder and the three kingdoms did originate elsewhere, the question remains, from where did it come?

3. The statement was derived from something Joseph Smith said elsewhere within the 21 May 1843 sermon. This is, of course, a more specific version of the alternative just described, so the arguments in favor there also support this third
possibility. I believe that the best explanation for the origin of the “ladder” material is that it was erroneously transposed and then expanded, along with related material about Paul’s vision, from a later portion of the 21 May 1843 sermon to its current, earlier position. The idea of such a transposition becomes all the more believable in the realization that in the symbolic vocabulary of many ancients the rainbow was no less a means of heavenly ascent than the ladder153 — perhaps making Joseph Smith’s statement on confusion between the “ladder and rainbow” more than just a frivolous comparison. Specific evidence supporting a mistaken transposition of material is found in the Coray Notebook, which was not accessible to the church historians when they expanded Elder Richards’ notes.154 The reference therein, regarding Paul’s visit to the third heavens, occurs at a later point in the record of the sermon than it does in the historians’ expanded version of this material. Moreover, in the Coray account, at the very point in the sermon corresponding to the mention of Paul’s visit to the third heavens, there seems to be a gap in the account of Elder Richards.155 It seems plausible that one of the historians, remembering Joseph Smith’s statements about Paul’s visit and Jacob’s ladder and erroneously associating it with the cryptic reference to “ladder” in Elder Richards’ brief notes, could have inserted the expanded prose in the wrong place. Additionally, although the material in Coray’s Notebook parallels some of the material in historians’ version,156 it could not have been a source for it. Thus, the Coray notes provide independent corroboration both for a significant part of the gist of the expansion as well as for where it should have been located in the polished version of the sermon.

Elsewhere, I discuss in more detail the logic of equating of the three kingdoms of glory with the “three principal rounds of Jacob’s ladder,”157 an idea which now appears less likely to have been made up from whole cloth by later church historians. However, for now let’s turn our attention to another ladder, Peter’s so-called “ladder of virtues,” that appears as part of the next passage from Joseph Smith’s 21 May 1843 sermon.
Peter’s “Ladder of Virtues”

Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal: like precious faith with us … — add to your faith virtue &c … another point after having all these qualifications [qualifications] he lays this injunction [injunction]. — but rather make your calling & election sure — after adding all. this. virtue knowledge &. make your calling &c Sure. — what is the secret, the starting point. according as his divine power which hath given unto all things that pertain to life & godliness. [p. [214]]

how did he obtain all things? — th[r]ough the knowledge of him who hath calld him. — there could not any be given pertaining to life & knowledge & godliness without knowledge

wo wo wo to the Ch[r]istendom. — the divine & priests; &c — if this be true.

Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History: Contend earnestly158 for the like precious faith159 with the Apostle Peter “and add to your faith virtue,” knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity; “for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”160 Another point, after having all these qualifications, he lays this injunction upon the people “to make your calling and election sure.”161 He is emphatic upon this subject — after adding all this virtue, knowledge, etc.,162 “Make your calling and election sure.”163 What is the secret — the starting point? “According to his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.”164 How did he obtain all things? Through the knowledge of Him who hath called him.165 There could not anything be given, pertaining to life and godliness,166 without knowledge.

Original Notes in Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook.167 The Apostle says, unto them who have obtained like precious faith with us the apostles through the righteousness of God & our Savior Jesus Christ, through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory & virtue add faith virtue &c. &c. to godliness brotherly kindness — Charity — ye shall neither be barren or unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
He that lacketh these things is blind — wherefore the rather brethren after all this give diligence to make your calling & Election Sure Knowledge is necessary to life and Godliness.

wo unto you priests & divines, who preach that knowledge is not necessary unto life & Salvation. Take away Apostles &c. take away knowledge and you will find yourselves worthy of the damnation of hell.

The list of personal qualities from 2 Peter 1:3–11 discussed by the Prophet have long been suspected by scholars such as Käsemann to be a “clear example of Hellenistic, non-Christian thought insidiously working its way into the New Testament.” Nowadays, however, this passage of scripture is generally accepted as “fundamentally Pauline” and, hence, thoroughly consonant with the ideas of early Christianity. The emphasis of these verses is on the finishing and refining process of sanctification, not the initiatory process of justification.

2 Peter 1:4 sounds the keynote of the biblical list of the personal qualities of the perfected disciple, reminding readers of the “exceeding great and precious promises” that allow them to become “partakers [= Greek koinonos, ‘sharer, partaker’] of the divine nature.” The New English Bible captures the literal sense of this latter phrase: namely, the idea is that the Saints may “come to share in the very being of God.”

Unlike the Latter-day Saints, who are comfortable with the idea of sharing “the very being of God,” contemporary Eastern Orthodox proponents of the doctrine of theosis are wary of the straightforward interpretation of “divine nature” in its original context. They are quick to clarify their narrower reading of the passage: “We are gods in that we bear His image, not His nature [i.e., His essence].” That said, apart from this important ontological difference, there are many similarities between the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis and LDS teachings about exaltation, as Catholic scholar Jordan Vajda has so competently detailed.

To those in whom the qualities of divine nature “abound” there comes the fulfillment of a specific “promise”: namely, that “they shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord.” In other words, according to Joseph Smith’s exposition of Peter’s logic as given above, the additional “knowledge of the Lord” that disciples will receive — after they have qualified themselves through the cultivation of all these virtues and after they have entered into God’s presence — will ultimately make their “calling and election sure” so that they may “obtain all things.”
Significantly, the qualities, to which Christian disciples are exhorted to give “all diligence,” are not presented in 2 Peter 1 as a randomly assembled laundry list but rather as part of an ordered progression leading to a culminating point. These qualities have been structured into a rhetorical form called sorites, climax, or gradatio—a form that is not uncommon in Hellenistic, Jewish, and Christian literature. Harold Attridge explains the ladder-like property of the personal qualities given in lists of this type: “In this ‘ladder’ of virtues, each virtue is the means of producing the next (this sense of the Greek is lost in translation). All the virtues grow out of faith, and all culminate in love.” Joseph Neyrey observes that the Christian triad of faith, hope, and charity in 2 Peter 1:5–7 “forms the determining framework in which other virtues are inserted” in such lists. The table below summarizes key words in scriptural exemplars from Paul, Peter, and Doctrine and Covenants 4 that illustrate this idea:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Romans 5:1–5</th>
<th>2 Peter 1:5–7</th>
<th>D&amp;C 4:6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>faith</td>
<td>faith</td>
<td>faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>virtue</td>
<td>virtue</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>peace</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>temperance</td>
<td>temperance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hope [patience, experience]</td>
<td>patience, godliness</td>
<td>patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>brotherly kindness</td>
<td>brotherly kindness, godliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>charity</td>
<td>charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>humility, diligence</td>
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</table>

Though some elements of the three lists differ, the reward of divine fellowship for disciples is the same. In 2 Peter 1:4, 8, and 10, they are promised that they will become “partakers of the divine nature,” that they will ultimately be fruitful “in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and in this way, according to Joseph Smith’s reading, will have made their “calling and election sure.” In Romans 5:2, they are told that they will “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” This means that they can look forward with glad confidence, knowing that they “will be able to share in the revelation of God — in other words, that [they] will come to know Him as He is.” D&C 4:7 states the same truths by echoing the words of the Savior: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall
find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

Matthew Bowen correlates to faith, hope, and charity. He notes that

“‘ask’ and ‘seek’ correspond to the Hebrew verbs š’l and bqsh, which

were used to describe ‘asking for’ or ‘seeking’ a divine revelation, often

in a temple setting,” and Jack Welch has argued that the symbolism

of knocking is likewise best understood “in a ceremonial context.”

It

should be added, however, that temple ordinances foreshadow actual

events in the life of faithful disciples who endure to the end.

The expansion of 2 Peter’s list of virtues within section 4 of the D&C

warrants further discussion. It is worth noting that the “three principal

rounds” of the ladder — namely, faith, hope, and charity/love — are

specifically highlighted in verse 5, and then repeated in the same order

as part of the longer list of virtues given in verse 6. Intriguingly, the list

of eight qualities found in 2 Peter 1 is expanded in D&C 4 to ten in

number. In an insightful article, John W. Welch has shown how the

number ten in the ancient world — which conveys the idea of perfection,

especially divine completion — relates to human ascension into the holy

of holies or highest degree of heaven:

“The rabbinic classification of the ten degrees of holiness,

which begins with Palestine, the land holier than all other

lands, and culminates in the most holy place, the Holy of

Holies, was essentially known in the days of High Priest

Simon the Just, that is, around 200 BCE.” Echoing these ten

degrees on earth were ten degrees in heaven. In the book of

2 Enoch, Enoch has a vision in which he progresses from the

first heaven into the tenth heaven, where God resides and

Enoch sees the face of the Lord, is anointed, given clothes of

glory, and is told “all the things of heaven and earth.”

Kabbalah, a late form of Jewish mysticism, teaches that the

ten Sefirot were emanations and attributes of God, part of the

unfolding of creation, and that one must pass through them

to ascend to God’s presence.

Though it is true that no explicit mention is made in the Bible of

the performance of rites inculcating this divine pathway of virtues, it

is equally true that a lecture based on 2 Peter 1:3–11 would not in the

least be out of place as a summary of progression through LDS temple

ordinances.
Salvation Through Being Sealed Up Unto Eternal Life and Receiving the Key of the Knowledge of God

Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal: salvation. is for a man to be seve[r]ed [possibly “saveed” [saved]\(^{193}\)] from all his enemies. — until a man can triumph over death. he is not saved. knowledge will do this.

Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History: Salvation is for a man to be saved from all his enemies;\(^{194}\) for until a man can triumph over death,\(^{195}\) he is not saved. A knowledge of the priesthood alone will do this.\(^{196}\)

Original Notes in the Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook:\(^{197}\) Knowledge is Revelation hear all ye brethren, this grand Key; Knowledge is the power of God unto Salvation.

What is salvation. Salvation is for a man to be Saved from all his enemies even our last enemy which is death and for David Saith, “and the Lord Said unto my Lord ‘Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”\(^{198}\)

Original Notes Recorded from a Sermon Delivered on 17 May 1843 in William Clayton’s Diary:\(^{199}\) At 10 Prest. J. preached on 2nd Peter Ch 1. He shewed that knowledge is power & the man who has the most knowledge has the greatest power. Also that salvation means a mans being placed beyond the power of all his enemies. He said the more sure word of prophecy\(^{200}\) meant a mans knowing that he is sealed up unto eternal life by revelation & the spirit of prophecy through the power of the Holy priesthood. He also showed that it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.\(^{201}\)

In the King Follett discourse delivered on 7 April 1844, Joseph Smith explained that God’s purpose in instituting laws for mankind was “to instruct the weaker intelligences,” allowing fallen humanity to gradually “advance in knowledge” so that eventually they “may be exalted with [God] himself.”\(^{202}\) “A knowledge of the priesthood alone” is sufficient for “a man to be saved from all his enemies,” including a “triumph over death.”

In his discourse on 2 Peter 1 given on 14 May 1843, the Prophet taught similarly that the “principle of knowledge is the principle of
salvation,” therefore “anyone that cannot get knowledge to be saved will be damned.” However, when Joseph Smith taught that it is “impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance,” he was not thinking of ignorance in general. He made it clear that only by having one’s calling and election made sure, i.e., being “sealed up unto eternal life by revelation & the spirit of prophecy through the power of the Holy priesthood,” could one receive “the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.” He saw within this principle the meaning of the Savior’s own words: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Emphasizing that this “principle can [only] be comprehended by the faithful and diligent,” he concluded the thought by reiterating that “The principle of salvation is given us through the knowledge of Jesus Christ.”

Ascendancy of Those Who Have Received Bodies Over Those Who Have Not

Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal: organization of spirits in the eternal world. — spirits in the eternal world are like spirits in this world. when those spirits have come into this world and received glorified bodies. they will have an ascendancy over spirits who have no bodies or kept not their first estate like the devil. Devils punishment. Should not have a habitation. like other men — Devil’s retaliation — come into this world bind up men’s bodies and occupy himself. — authorities come along and eject him from a stolen habitation.

design of the great God. in sending us into this world. and organizing us to prepare us for the Eternal world. —

Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History: The spirits in the eternal world are like the spirits in this world. When those have come into this world and received tabernacles, then died and again have risen and received glorified bodies, they will have an ascendancy over the spirits who have received no bodies, or kept not their first estate, like the devil. The punishment of the devil was that he should not have a habitation like men. The devil’s retaliation is, he comes into this world, binds up men’s bodies, and occupies
them himself.\textsuperscript{213} When the authorities come along, they eject him from a stolen habitation.\textsuperscript{214}

The design of the great God in sending us into this world, and organizing us to prepare us for the eternal worlds,

\textit{Original Notes in the Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook}:\textsuperscript{215}
The design of God before the foundation of the world was that we should take tabernacles that through faithfulness we should overcome & thereby obtain a resurrection from the dead,\textsuperscript{216} in this wise obtain glory honor power and dominion\textsuperscript{217} for this thing is needful, inasmuch as the Spirits in the Eternal world, glory in bringing other Spirits in Subjection unto them, Striving continually for the mastery,\textsuperscript{218} He who rules in the heavens when he has a certain work to do calls the Spirits before him to organize them. they present themselves and offer their Services —\textsuperscript{219}

When Lucifer was hurled from Heaven the decree was that he Should not obtain a tabernacle not those that were with him, but go abroad upon the earth\textsuperscript{220} exposed to the anger of the elements naked & bare,\textsuperscript{221} but oftimes he lays hold upon men binds up their Spirits enters their habitations\textsuperscript{222} laughs at the decree of God and rejoices in that he hath a house to dwell in, by & by he is expelled by Authority\textsuperscript{223} and goes abroad mourning naked upon the earth like a man without a house exposed to the tempest & the storm —

Joseph Smith taught that God has a glorified resurrected body, and that man was created in His literal image and likeness. Despite its imperfect and provisional nature, the human body is a divine gift, provided to enable an essential next step in eternal progression so that individuals might “obtain a resurrection from the dead, [and] in this wise obtain glory, honor, power, and dominion.”\textsuperscript{224} Elsewhere, the Prophet said: “We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the Celestial Kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The Devil has no body, and herein is his punishment.”\textsuperscript{225}

In LDS discussions of the purpose of the body in mortality today, the necessity of being able “to experience the pleasures and pains of being alive” and to seek “perfection and discipline of the spirit along with training and health of the body”\textsuperscript{226} are the kinds of reasons most often mentioned. However, as important as these reasons are, the teachings of
Joseph Smith almost always highlight the fact that the clothing of spirits with bodies would provide protection for them against the power of Satan. As Matthew Brown succinctly summarizes:

“All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not,” said the Prophet Joseph Smith. The “spirits of the eternal world” are as diverse from each other in their dispositions as mortals are on the earth. Some of them are aspiring, ambitious, and even desire to bring other spirits into subjection to them. “As man is liable to [have] enemies [in the spirit world] as well as [on the earth] it is necessary for him to be placed beyond their power in order to be saved. This is done by our taking bodies ([having kept] our first estate) and having the power of the resurrection pass upon us whereby we are enabled to gain the ascendancy over the disembodied spirits.”

Joseph Smith taught that the acquisition of a body in mortality was to enable not only the new experiences of pleasure, pain, and parenthood, but also to provide a protective power from the influences of Satan in both the mortal and the eternal worlds.

“Some Things in My Own Bosom … Must Remain There”

Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal: I shall keep in my own bosom.

Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History: I shall keep in my own bosom at present. … Paul ascended into the third heavens, and he could understand the three principal rounds of Jacob’s ladder — the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms, where Paul saw and heard things which were not lawful for him to utter. I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them. [Note that I have inserted the church historians’ expansion regarding Paul’s ascent, previously discussed above in the “ladder and rainbow” section, into what appears to be its proper place so that the three accounts of this section of the sermon can be compared more easily.]
There are some things in my own bosom that must remain there. If Paul could say I Knew a man who ascended to the third heaven & saw things unlawful for man to utter, I more.

Because the more complete account in the Coray Notebook was not available to church historians at the time they prepared Joseph Smith’s published history, they mistakenly conjoined in a single sentence (“The design of the great God in sending us into this world, and organizing us to prepare us for the eternal worlds, I shall keep in my own bosom at present”) what were originally two separate thoughts (i.e., “design of the great God …” and “I shall keep in my own bosom”). The “things in my own bosom that must remain there” turn out to be, in the Coray Notebook version, heavenly “things unlawful for a man to utter,” that he saw in vision, not the basic “design of the great God” itself, which he goes on to describe, at least in general terms.

The “design of the great God” or the “the design of God before the foundation of the world,” as it is described in the Coray Notebook, turns out to be connected with the need to provide physical bodies for His children and to help them overcome sin and death so that they may be raised to a glorious resurrection. A few months later, the Prophet made this connection even more explicit: “What was the design of the Almighty in making man, it was to exalt him to be as God.”

Inextricably linked to the plan for men and women to be exalted together as gods is the doctrine of eternal (and plural) marriage. An examination of the historical context at the time this discourse was given makes it clear both why the Prophet felt compelled to address the subject and also why it was discussed only indirectly, by allusion. Andrew F. Ehat describes the background of the precarious situation with regard to the subject that prevailed on 21 May 1843:

In the aftermath of [John C.] Bennett’s expulsion [from the Church for licentious teachings and practices relating to a counterfeit form of “spiritual wifery”], the crusade in Nauvoo to rid the last vestiges of Bennett’s profligacy … divided the nine-member [“Quorum of the Anointed” which consisted of a small group of men who had received their temple endowments on 4 May 1842]. By July 1842, while the other members of the Quorum had accepted eternal and plural marriage, Hyrum Smith, William Law and William Marks had resisted Joseph Smith’s effort to broach the subject with them. Their crusade against the embarrassing activities of
Bennett narrowed their perspective, and Joseph Smith soon learned that he should not try then to convert them. This helps explain why in the year after Joseph Smith first gave these endowment blessings to the Quorum he did not invite others to become members of the group, did not yet invite the wives of these men to receive these ordinances, and did not administer any of the more advanced ordinances. …

In May 1843, when Hyrum, William Law and William Marks realized that their efforts had not ended the rumors of the private practice of to them aberrant marriage forms, they decided to bring the issue into the open. They were suspicious that their worst fears were true — Joseph was teaching plural marriage. So while Joseph was out of town, Hyrum spoke on 14 May to the Nauvoo populace taking as his text Jacob 2 in the Book of Mormon — quoting the verses that are a severe denunciation of polygamy. … Hyrum said to the Saints, “If an angel from heaven should come and preach such doctrine, [you] would be sure to see his cloven foot and cloud of blackness over his head.” The following Sunday, Joseph, in an apparent mild rebuttal, referred to the doctrine of eternal marriage for the first time in public, as quoted from the notes of his 21 May 1843 sermon given above. …

Apparently, Hyrum Smith, William Law and William Marks were disturbed by the Prophet’s remarks. They did not understand why some concepts of the Gospel still needed to remain unsaid, concepts relating to the doctrine of eternal covenants. Two days later, Heber C. Kimball and William Clayton “conversed … concerning [rumors they had apparently heard, rumors of] a plot … being laid to entrap the brethren of the secret priesthood [i.e., those who had entered plural marriages] by bro. H[yrum] and others.” …

With this insight into a time of personal dilemma of the Prophet, a point emerges that must be emphasized: Joseph Smith’s actions towards his brother confirm the depth of his religious convictions regarding these principles. The eyes of his people, his closest leaders and associates, and even his brother Hyrum were scrutinizing his every action, and yet he never once faltered. Even the most gracious of humanistic explanations of the origins of plural marriage — the belief
and characterization that Joseph Smith’s practice of plural marriage was such a complexly conceived system, so subtly and subconsciously constructed from latent biblical precedent that it totally quieted his own conscience regarding it — seems too superficial a theory to approach describing the fact and reality of Joseph and Hyrum’s experience. He must truly have believed he heard the voice of God to go through what he did from his brother, his counselors in the First Presidency, and from his wife. To carry on such a principle sub rosa for two years without any of the First Presidency the least bit agreeable to the concept is incredible, and yet true.

The Prophet’s actions at this time — and subsequently — demonstrated that he was more willing to forfeit his life than to deny the truthfulness of what had been revealed to him. Later, Brigham Young remembered that Joseph Smith told him and “scores” of others on many occasions that “if ever there was a truth revealed from heaven through him, it was revealed when that revelation [i.e., on celestial and plural marriage] was given, and if I have to die for any revelation God has given through me I would as readily die for this one as any other. And I sometimes think that I shall have to die for it. It may be that I shall have to forfeit my life to it and if this has to be so, Amen.”

Our Actions and Contracts Must Be Done with a View to Eternity

Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal: we have no claim in our eternal compact. in relation to Eternal things unless our actions. & contracts & all things tend to this end. —

Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History: We have no claim in our eternal compact, in relation to eternal things, unless our actions and contracts and all things tend to this end.

Original Notes in the Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook: There are only certain things that can be done by the Spirits and that which is done by us that is not done with a view to eternity is not binding in eternity.

Original Notes in Franklin D. Richards “Scriptural Items”: Our covenants here are of no force one with another except made in view of eternity.
According to Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, these statements make “allusion to the concept of the eternality of the marriage covenant.”\textsuperscript{253} The principle expressed here is similar to one that would be written down seven weeks later as part of D&C 132:13:

\begin{quote}
And everything that is in the world, whether it be ordained of men, by thrones, or principalities, or powers, or things of name, whatsoever they may be, that are not by me or by my word, saith the Lord, shall be thrown down, and shall not remain after men are dead, neither in nor after the resurrection, saith the Lord your God.
\end{quote}

Against all expectations, the difficulties the Prophet had faced in the opposition of Hyrum\textsuperscript{254} and Emma to plural marriage suddenly evaporated during the month of May 1843.\textsuperscript{255} As Ehat summarizes:\textsuperscript{256}

In some respects May of 1843 must have been an incredibly happy month for the Prophet. If he was delighted with the unexpected conversion of his brother Hyrum to eternal and plural marriage, it could only have been the fitting cap of events of similar surprise that occurred a few days before [on 11 May when “Emma personally participated in Joseph’s marriage to four plural brides, Eliza and Emily Partridge and Sarah and Maria Lawrence, all with her explicit approval”\textsuperscript{257}].

On 26 May 1843, five days after the 21 May sermon and apparently due at least in part to the conversion of Hyrum\textsuperscript{258} and Emma to the principle, the Quorum of the Anointed met for instruction for the first time in a year.\textsuperscript{259} At this meeting, “the first ordinances of endowment” were administered.\textsuperscript{260} Two days later, Joseph and Emma were the first couple in the Quorum to be married for time and eternity; others received the same ordinance soon afterward.\textsuperscript{261} Though Emma continued to struggle with the principle of plural marriage,\textsuperscript{262} she and Joseph together received the “highest and holiest order of the priesthood,” the “fulness of the priesthood,”\textsuperscript{263} or “second anointing”\textsuperscript{264} on 28 September 1843.\textsuperscript{265} Later, Emma “oversaw and administered temple ordinances to female Church members.”\textsuperscript{266} As the Prophet had taught on other occasions, receiving the fulness of the priesthood is a prerequisite to having one’s calling and election made sure.\textsuperscript{267}
Summary of the Three Keys Hidden in 2 Peter 1

*Original Notes from Joseph Smith’s Journal:* after all this make your calling and election sure. If this injunction would lay largely on those to whom it was spoken, how much more those to whom them of the 19. century. —

<1 Key> Knowledge is the power of Salvation

<2 Key> Make your calling and election sure

3d — it is one thing to be on the mount & hear the excellent voice &c &c. and another <to hear the> voice declare to you you have a part & lot in the kingdom. — [4 lines blank] [p. [217]]

*Expanded Version from Joseph Smith’s History:* But after all this, you have got to make your calling and election sure. If this injunction would lie largely on those to whom it was spoken, how much more those of the present generation!

1st key: Knowledge is the power of salvation. 2nd key: Make your calling and election sure. 3rd key: It is one thing to be on the mount and hear the excellent voice, &c., &c., and another to hear the voice declare to you, You have a part and lot in that kingdom.

*Original Notes in the Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook:* Oh Peter if they who were of like precious faith with thee were injoined to make their Calling & Election sure, how much more all we There are two Keys, one key knowledge. the other make you Calling & election sure, for if you do these things you shall never fall for so an entrance shall be administered unto you abundently into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ. We made known unto you the power & coming of our Lord & S. J. Christ were Eye witnesses of his Majesty when he received from God the Father honor & glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy Mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy whereunto give heed until the day Star arise in your hearts this is It is one thing to receive knowledge by the voice of God, (this is my beloved Son &c.) & another to know
that you yourself will be saved, to have a positive promise of your own Salvation is making your Calling and Election sure. viz the voice of Jesus saying my beloved thou shalt have eternal life. Brethren never cease strugling until you get this evidence. & Take heed both before and after obtaining the more sure word of Prophecy.

Joseph Smith concluded by answering the question he raised at the beginning of the sermon: What could be “more sure” than hearing the voice of God bearing testimony of His Son? After summarizing the three linked keys that are hidden in the first chapter of 2 Peter, he urgently enjoined the Saints to do everything necessary to make their calling and election sure so they would be eligible to receive the divine knowledge that constitutes the ultimate power of salvation. This knowledge does not come merely by hearing the voice of God speak, as when Peter heard the Father’s testimony of the Son, but through the “more sure” promise of eternal life made with the Father’s personal oath to Peter afterward.

Though non-LDS commentators understandably fail to grasp the full nature and import of Peter’s experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, some at least clearly sense the implication of his subsequent words269 for every reader of the epistle. According to the editors of the esv “believers are admonished to ‘pay attention’ to the certainty of the ‘prophetic word.’ In the contrast between ‘we have’ and ‘you will do well,’ Peter is apparently emphasizing that the interpretation of the apostles (‘we’) is to be regarded as authoritative for the church (‘you’)”270 — while striving themselves, meantime, to obtain the same “prophetic word” that Peter possessed (i.e., “take heed [unto our more sure word], as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts”).271 Not only Jesus and Peter, but every one who endures to the end in keeping “all the commandments” and obeying “all the ordinances of the house of the Lord,”272 can look forward with eager anticipation to the day when they will hear the Father’s declaration that they have become, at last, as His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased.

**Conclusions**

Having spent much of my life in focused study of translations, revelations, and teachings of Joseph Smith, I have been astonished with the extent to which they reverberate with the echoes of antiquity — and, no less significantly, with the deepest truths of my personal experience. Indeed, I would not merely assert that the words of Joseph Smith hold up well under close examination, but rather that, like a fractal whose self-similar
patterns become more wondrous upon ever closer inspection, the brilliancy of their inspiration shines most impressively under bright light and high magnification: there is glory in the details. My hope is that this glory will be more fully revealed and appreciated as we take advantage of our unparalleled access to the words of the Prophet in order to more fully understand and apply them personally.

Acknowledgments

My deep appreciation to Matthew Bowen, Don Bradley, David Calabro, Andrew F. Ehat, Paul Hoskisson, David Larsen, Ben McGuire, Eric D. Rackley, John S. Thompson, John W. Welch, Stephen T. Whitlock, and anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and feedback. I am also grateful to Julie Griffin, Tim Guymon, Tanya Spackman, and Allen Wyatt for their help in editing and preparing the article for publication.

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Endnotes

1 See, e.g., J. Smith, Jr., Papers 2008--; R. Skousen, Analysis; S. H. Faulring et al., Original Manuscripts; B. M. Hauglid, Textual History; M. D. Rhodes, Hor; M. D. Rhodes, Books of the Dead; J. Smith, Jr., Words; J. W. Welch et al., Book of Mormon Central.

2 G. de Santillana et al., Hamlet’s Mill, p. 120.

3 Perhaps the most significant publication of its time in this regard is J. Smith, Jr., Words. The in-depth notes and indexes prepared by editors Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook brilliantly illuminate the accounts of Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo discourses and go a long way toward providing the basic context for understanding the Prophet’s words. The volumes published by the Joseph Smith Papers project make a similar contribution though, understandably, they are more conservative in their use of interpretive and secondary sources as an aid to the reader. See, e.g., J. Smith, Jr. et al., Journals, 1843–1844, p. xxxiii for a description of the annotation conventions used in all the volumes.

Of course, the task of understanding the words of Joseph Smith and his successors is only the beginning of what is required of us. I am fully conscious of the fact that an understanding of “the doctrine of the kingdom” (D&C 88:77) does not come by mere “study” alone, but “also by faith” (D&C 88:118. See also D. A. Bednar, Seek) as we are asked to give loving and whole-hearted expression in our lives of what we feel and believe. I concur with Elder Marion G. Romney that: “One cannot fully learn the gospel without living it” (M. G. Romney, Oath, p. 19; M. K. Jensen, Anchors, p. 59. See also J. M. Bradshaw, God’s Image 1, Endnotes P–18 and P–19, pp. xxxiv–xxxv). Indeed, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said about the most common way that we receive spiritual
understanding: “revelation comes most often when we are on the move” (D. H. Oaks, Sharing, p. 7). See also B. C. Hafen, Anchored, pp. 3–5). Such learning “by faith” is the supreme test — and among the sweetest rewards — of discipleship during this mortal “season of unanswered questions” (L. B. Wickman, But If Not, p. 30).

Commenting on James’ comparison of the Word of God to a mirror (James 1:23–24), S. Kierkegaard, Self-Examination, pp. 25-29 compares scholarship that is concerned only with the preliminary, technical aspects of the process of interpretation of scripture and not with wholehearted reading and personal implementation of its message to a lover who meticulously reconstructs the meaning of a letter from his beloved in a foreign language with a dictionary at his side and then, once the meaning is clear, casts the letter aside without regard to what it means for himself (D. R. Law, Cheap Grace, pp. 106–107):

Only when the translation is finished, does the lover begin truly to read the letter.

Reading the letter mans more, however, than merely extracting its “objective” meaning. To illustrate this point, Kierkegaard asks us to imagine that this letter “contained a wish, something the beloved wished her lover to do. It was, let us assume, much that was required of him, very much” (S. Kierkegaard, Self-Examination, p. 27). Having at last translated the letter, the lover does not hesitate but immediately rushes off to fulfill his beloved’s wish.

Thus, for each of us who love to study the scriptures, there is both encouragement and a warning in the wise words of Kierkegaard (ibid., 12:318, pp. 28-29):

When you read God’s word eruditely — we do not disparage erudition, far from it — but remember that when you read God’s word eruditely, with a dictionary, etc., you are not reading God’s Word … If you are a learned man, then take care lest with all your erudite reading (which is not reading God’s Word) you forget perchance to read God’s Word. If you are not learned — ah, envy the other man not, rejoice that you can at once get to the point of reading God’s Word! And if there is a desire, a commandment, an order [that you read], … then be off at once to do accordingly. “But,” you perhaps would say, “there are so
many obscure passages in the Holy Scriptures, whole books which are almost riddles.” To this I would reply, “I see no need of considering this objection unless it comes from one whose life gives expression to the fact that he has punctually complied with all the passages which are easy to understand.” Is this the case with you? [Thus a godly man must act:] if there were obscure passages, but also clearly expressed desires, he would say, “I must at once comply with the desire, then I will see what can be made of the obscure passages. Oh, but how could I sit down to puzzle over the obscure passages and leave the desire unfulfilled, the desire which I clearly understood?” That is to say: When you read God’s Word, it is not the obscure passages which impose a duty upon you, but that which you understand and with that you must instantly comply. If there were only a single passage you did understand in Holy Scripture — well, the first thing is to do that; but you do not first have to sit down and puzzle over the obscure passages. God’s Word is given in order that you shall act in accordance with it, not in order that you shall practice the art of interpreting obscure passages.


The hardest question of all for the Egyptologist, according to Gundlach and Schenkel, is whether Egyptian writings can really be understood by anyone but an Egyptian. Go up to the man in the car (it used to be the man in the street) when he stops at a red light and deliver this sober message to him: “Osiris shall be towed toward the interior of the great pool of Khonsu,” which is the first line of Joseph Smith Papyrus XI. If the man gives you a blank look or starts an ominous muttering, explain to him that the great lake of Khonsu is “probably a liturgical designation of the portion of the Nile that has to be crossed in order to reach the Theban cemetery on the west bank” and that Khonsu, or Khons, is a youthful moon-god. When the light changes, your new friend may proceed on his way knowing as much about the first line of our Book of Breathings as anybody else does — namely, nothing at
all. Though as correct and literal as we can make it, the translation ... is not a translation. It is nonsense.

Though superficial students of Joseph Smith may disagree, acquiring even a rudimentary understanding of some of the Prophet’s writings and teachings may be no less challenging — and, frankly, no less error prone — than rendering a competent translation of the Book of Breathings for an untrained modern reader.


6  J. C. Alleman, Problems in Translating the Language of Joseph Smith, pp. 22, 26, 28.

7  Continuing with ibid., p. 22:
Some of the problems encountered in understanding Joseph Smith’s writings can be anticipated from what we know of his life and the conditions under which his words were recorded and have come down to us.

In the first place, Joseph Smith wrote and spoke more than a hundred years ago, and, while a hundred years is not a long time in the history of a language, it is sufficient for noticeable changes to occur. Second, the Prophet was almost entirely self-educated, a circumstance which is reflected in his writing by a style which is a combination of the most elevated rhetoric, with complicated, yet often beautiful constructions and images, interspersed with common expressions from the language of the people he grew up with, and not altogether free from what we would call outright grammatical errors. Third, he was above all a religious leader, and in speaking of religious subjects consciously or unconsciously used a type of language which the people of his day associated with prophets and apostles, namely the language of the King James version of the Bible.

Ben McGuire comments (B. L. McGuire, 29 March 2016):
I am always reminded in these sorts of discussions about understanding that scene in Star Trek after Spock has come back from the dead, where Bones wants to talk about it with Spock, and Spock essentially tells him that until they have a common point of reference, they can’t
discuss it, to which Bones responds by asking: “So, I have to die before you can discuss it with me?”

[The issue is in] having access to the texts as opposed to understanding them. … [W]e have the original papers, we have a history of interpretation — and even with all of this, we still have difficulty getting to the mind of Joseph Smith, because of course, neither later interpretation or the original texts convey that to us.


9 Cf. Hymns (1985), Praise to the Man, #27: “Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah!”

10 See examples of culture-related imagery in J. C. Alleman, Problems in Translating the Language of Joseph Smith, pp. 23, 25–26 such as: “closely whispered by the bear” (J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, p. 140), “flat as a pancake” (ibid., p. 292), “stuffed me like a cock-turkey” (ibid., p. 294), “hunt … as Pat did for the woodchuck” (ibid., p. 310), and “splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle” (ibid., p. 331).

With respect to scriptural allusions by Joseph Smith, Alleman concludes that “quoting from the Bible came as naturally to [the Prophet] as speaking itself.” However he notes that the occurrence of scriptures in the writings of Joseph Smith can be a problem for translators because “frequently, whether intentionally, or by oversight, the quotation differs from the original. The example … shows an extreme case in which eight different passages are worded into a single sentence. Some are quoted accurately but others are not. In one case … the difference is so great that one cannot really speak of a quotation; rather we give the translator a reference to the scripture which contains similar words, so that he can have a source for selecting the vocabulary items he will use, but he will have to put them into a completely different structure to translate the sense of the original” (J. C. Alleman, Problems in Translating the Language of Joseph Smith, p. 26).

11 “By definition,” writes Ben McGuire, “an allusion is recognizable only by someone who is familiar with the text to which it
alludes. This awareness of the source text is often referred to as the ‘competence’ of the reader. ... A reader who is familiar with the referent text is considered competent while a reader who is unfamiliar with the referent text (and by extension unable to recognize the reference or allusion) is not” (B. L. McGuire, Nephi and Goliath, p. 17 and p. 29 n. 7)

12 See, e.g., Richard C. Galbraith’s introductory essay in J. Smith, Jr., Scriptural Teachings, pp. 1–11. Galbraith writes (ibid., pp. 1–2, 3):

Ironically, of all Joseph Smith’s great accomplishments in the work of the Restoration, the one perhaps least appreciated was his immense knowledge of the scriptures. The scriptures were the brick and mortar of all his sermons, writings, and other personal communications; he quoted them, he alluded to them, he adapted them in all his speaking and writing.

The Prophet’s extensive use of the scriptures may not be obvious to the casual reader. In the book Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, for example, the Prophet appears to cite fewer than one passage of scripture every other page. ... But that figure misses the mark. A more careful reading of this book reveals some twenty scriptures for every one actually cited. When I discovered that, I began to ask, not “When is the Prophet quoting scripture,” but rather “What might he be quoting that is not scripture?”

Of course, as Ben McGuire observes, we have to be cautious when we draw parallels using a computer-aided search (B. L. McGuire, 7 March 2016):

Finding scriptural phrases in a text is not the same thing as finding scriptural citations. A citation is an intentional movement of text, and computer algorithms are, for the most part, not capable of distinguishing between such an intentional borrowing and coincidental usage or echoes. This is particularly true in the time of Joseph Smith, where the King James Bible was arguably the most influential literary work available. And because of this, the use of King James language cannot be automatically considered to be a citation of the biblical text. I am not sure that this needs much clarification in the chapter, but it is a problematic issue. The problem is that it tends to
create an opposite swing (and perhaps one just as great) as the original identified problem. If we weren’t identifying all of the citations before, we may be identifying too many now. And reading allusion where none was intended may well provide us with deep insight, it certainly doesn’t represent the message intended by the author (Joseph Smith in this case). At best computer assisted search only helps us identify potential citations which then need to be eyeballed by a human being with a solid method.

13  M. Rich, Literacy Debate.

14  Citing U. Eco, Kant, pp. 280ff., Ben McGuire describes the problem as follows: “when we refer to things (and these things are the sorts of things that Joseph Smith is referring to in his sermons … ) … the meaning of these expressions that make these references should come with … general directions about their use. And the problem is that for us, as modern readers, we have simply lost those general directions.”

15  Studies of “new literacies” explore the nature of youths’ modern, digital reading practices (M. Knobel et al., A New Literacies Sampler). M. Rich, Literacy Debate gives a brief summary of some of the issues involved:

Clearly, reading in print and on the Internet are different. On paper, text has a predetermined beginning, middle and end, where readers focus for a sustained period on one author’s vision. On the Internet, readers skate through cyberspace at will and, in effect, compose their own beginnings, middles and ends. …

Critics of reading on the Internet say they see no evidence that increased Web activity improves reading achievement. “What we are losing in this country and presumably around the world is the sustained, focused, linear attention developed by reading,” said Mr. Gioia of the N.E.A. “I would believe people who tell me that the Internet develops reading if I did not see such a universal decline in reading ability and reading comprehension on virtually all tests.”

Nicholas Carr sounded a similar note in “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” in the current issue of the Atlantic magazine
(N. Carr, Is Google. See also, e.g., N. Carr, Shallows; N. Carr, Glass Cage; N. Carr, Juggler’s Brain; N. Romeo, Is Google). Warning that the Web was changing the way he — and others — think, he suggested that the effects of Internet reading extended beyond the falling test scores of adolescence. “What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation,” he wrote, confessing that he now found it difficult to read long books. …

Neurological studies show that learning to read changes the brain’s circuitry. Scientists speculate that reading on the Internet may also affect the brain’s hard wiring in a way that is different from book reading.

“The question is, does it change your brain in some beneficial way?” said Guinevere F. Eden, director of the Center for the Study of Learning at Georgetown University. “The brain is malleable and adapts to its environment. Whatever the pressures are on us to succeed, our brain will try and deal with it.”

Some scientists worry that the fractured experience typical of the Internet could rob developing readers of crucial skills. “Reading a book, and taking the time to ruminate and make inferences and engage the imaginational processing, is more cognitively enriching, without doubt, than the short little bits that you might get if you’re into the 30-second digital mode,” said Ken Pugh, a cognitive neuroscientist at Yale who has studied brain scans of children reading.

Eric Rackley takes issue with some of the views summarized by Rich, and proffers a more hopeful view based on efforts to gain a better understanding of what motivates youth to read in the first place (E. D. Rackley, 25 April 2016):

[P]urpose matters. And motivation too. Show me a youth who can’t read scripture for more than two minutes and I’ll give her something to read that’s important to her and probably pretty complex and we’ll sit back and watch her read for hours. … [Those who say that reading ability and comprehension are declining are mistaken.] Adolescents’ reading comprehension as measured by the
National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that youths’ reading abilities have actually improved a little since 1992 (http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/). More pressing issues include the reading gap between white and black students, and the relatively stable 2/3 of students who don’t read proficiently. The NEAP data suggest that reading skill isn’t declining, it’s just not increasing as quickly as it could and for all of our young people equally. … A digital text can be as enriching as any other text or as mind-numbing. The issue may not be the nature of the texts, but how we engage with them. Pugh talks about “taking the time to ruminate and make inferences and engage the imaginational processing.” That happens with digital texts. It’s not isolated to books. For me, teaching youth is the key. We must teach them how to do what Pugh suggest with any text, even the boring and complex ones. We must also give them opportunities to practice doing this with various kinds of text for a variety of purposes. One of the affordances of nonlinear digital texts is that they give readers a chance to develop different parts of their “reading” brains.

Consistent with Rackley’s views, M. P. Lynch, Teaching asks whether higher education will become obsolete in the face of ubiquitous, immediate access to the world’s knowledge through technology. He points out what makes what he calls “Google knowing” both useful and problematic: “The Internet is at one and the same time the most glorious fact-checker and the most effective bias-affirmer ever invented.” Because of the “epistemic overconfidence that Google knowing encourages,” “teaching critical, reflective thinking matters more than ever.” Critical thinking, he argues, is one means to achieve one of the enduring ideals of higher education, namely, helping people “gain understanding,” “to comprehend hidden relationships among different pieces of understanding” through facilitating “the creative abilities that understanding requires.”

Although concerns about differences between reading on paper and reading from a screen are probably overdone, there is no doubt that, in general, different media exploit different sensory and cognitive strengths and weaknesses. Already in 1937, the prescient Paul Valéry ruminated on the various consequences of
“broadcasting and the gramophone” on literature (P. Valéry, Our Destiny, pp. 148–150, 152. See also J. Mander, Four Arguments; J. Mander et al., Nancho Consults Jerry Mander):

We can already begin wondering whether a purely spoken and auditive literature will not fairly soon replace written literature. That would be a return to the most primitive times, and the technical consequences would be immense. What would happen if writing died out? First of all — and this would be an advantage — the voice and the needs of the ear would regain, in matters of form, the capital importance which whose conditions of the senses had until a few hundred years ago. Immediately, the structure and dimensions of literary works would be strongly affected; but the author’s work would be much less easy to reconsider. Certain poets would no longer be able to remain so complicated as they are made out to be, and readers, transformed into listeners, would hardly be able to return to a passage, read it over, go more deeply into it through enjoyment or criticism as they can do with a text they can hold in their hands.

There is another point. Suppose television develops (and I admit I do not welcome it), then immediately the entire descriptive parts of works could be replaced by visual representation; landscapes and portraits would no longer be the province of men of letters, and they would elude the means of language. One can go further. The sentimental parts would also be reduced, if not entirely abolished, thanks to the intervention of tender pictures and appropriate music released at the psychological moment. …

And there is, finally, another possible and perhaps more serious consequence of the introduction of all these new methods: What happens to abstract literature? So long as it is a question of amusing, touching, or seducing men’s minds one might agree, at a pinch, that broadcasting would be adequate. But science and philosophy demand quite another rhythm of thought than reading aloud could allow, or rather, they impose an absence of rhythm. Reflection stops or breaks its impulsion every second, it
introduces uneven tempos, returns, and detours which demand the physical presence of a text and the possibility of handling it at leisure. All this is cut out by audition. Listening is inadequate for the transmission of abstract works. …

But all this is rather clumsily derived from our present physical potentialities. We must go a little farther. To think of the destiny of letters is to think at the same time and above all of the destiny of the mind. At this point everyone is at a loss. We can only too freely imagine this future as we wish, and we can arbitrarily suppose either that things will continue to be fairly like those we know, or that in the age to come there will be a depression of intellectual values, a lowering or decadence comparable to what happened at the close of classical antiquity; culture almost abandoned, works becoming incomprehensible and being destroyed, production abolished, all of which is unfortunately quite possible and even possible by two methods we already know: either through the use of powerful weapons of destruction, decimating the populations of the most cultured regions of the globe, ruining monuments, libraries, laboratories, and archives, and reducing the survivors to a misery exceeding their intelligence and suppressing all the elevates the mind of man; or else that not these means of destruction but those of possession and enjoyment, the incoherence imposed by the frequency and facility of impressions, the rapid vulgarization and application of industrial techniques to the productions, evaluations, and consumption of the mind’s fruits, will end in impairing the highest and most important intellectual virtues — concentration, meditative and critical powers, and what one may call thought in the grand style, thorough research directed towards the most exact and most powerful expression of its object.

We are living under the perpetual régime of intellectual disturbance. Intensity and novelty have in our time become good qualities, which is a rather remarkable symptom. I cannot believe that this system is good for culture. Its first result will be to make unintelligible or insupportable
all the works of the past which were composed in quite different conditions and which were meant for minds that were formed entirely differently.

16 Cited M. Fishbane, Spirituality, p. 12. Buber goes on to describe this as:

… a disease of the spirit that can lead us to imagine that we already know what we are reading, causing us to blithely and triumphantly read past the text… The spiritual task of interpretation … is to affect or alter the pace of reading so that one’s eye and ear can be addressed by the text’s words and sounds — and thus reveal an expanded or new sense of life and its dynamics. The pace of technology and the patterns of modernity pervert this vital task. The rhythm of reading must, therefore, be restored to the rhythm of breathing, to the cadence of the cantillation marks of the sacred text. Only then will the individual absorb the texts with his or her life breath and begin to read liturgically, as a rite of passage to a different level of meaning. And only then may the contemporary idolization of technique and information be transformed, and the sacred text restored as a living teaching and instruction, for the constant renewal of the self.

17 For good examples of how to read in a way that tries to take full advantage of the richness of scripture, see D. Packard et al., Feasting.

18 S. Prothero, Literacy, pp. 105–112.


20 M. Barker, Hidden, p. 34.

21 H. Bloom, Names Divine, p. 104. Since at least the time of Norman Vincent Peale’s The Power of Positive Thinking (1952), a parade of quasi-religious books have, in the words of Prothero (S. Prothero, Literacy, pp. 113, 117. See also C. Lasch, Revolt, p. 216ff.):

preached therapy more than theology, happiness rather than salvation. Then, as today, debating (or even discussing) religious doctrines was considered ill-mannered, a violation of the cherished civic ideal of tolerance, so it was difficult for children to learn or for
adults to articulate what set their religious traditions apart from others.

Current interest in contemplative practice has caused “spiritual but not religious” folks to rediscover such neglected resources inside Christianity and Judaism as centering prayer and Kabbalah. But it has also led them to Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and other Asian religions in search of various forms of meditation, yoga, and tai chi… Here too, however, the trend is toward religion stripped down to its “essentials”—essentials that in this case are confined almost entirely to the experiential or moral dimensions. This development is well advanced in the American Buddhist community, where some have argued that Buddhism can get along just fine without such staples as karma and reincarnation. “Buddhism Without Beliefs,” as this movement has been called, aims to distill the Buddhist life down to nothing more than one’s favorite sitting or chanting practice, and then to put that practice at the service of such American preoccupations as happiness. The tendency to shirk from doctrine is particularly pronounced in the “multi-religious America” camp. Here even the minimal monotheism of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic model must be sacrificed since many Buddhists don’t believe in God and many Hindus believe in more than one. The only common ground here seems to be tolerance itself. When pluralists gather for interreligious dialogue, their discussions always seem to circle back to ethics… [without] a whisper of theology.

22 Cited in S. Prothero, *Literacy*, p. 113. As an example, Prothero cites a statement by Eisenhower to a Soviet official in a December 1952 meeting that “our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is” (ibid., p. 113). The same fierce loyalty to an abstract “idea” of God divorced from any particulars is expressed more prosaically in an off-the-street comment made to a sociologist by a high-school student in the Middle West, “Yeah, we smoke dope all over, in our cars, walking around before class, anytime, but that doesn’t mean we don’t believe in God or that we’ll let anybody put God down” (P. Fussell, *Class*, p. 150).

Eric Rackley’s pioneering study on how “Latter-day Saint youths’ social and cultural values, practices, beliefs, and experiences influence their views of scripture” is a good example of how empirical research can be helpful in future efforts to develop “more effective religious literacy practices that are more responsive to youths’ histories with scripture” (E. D. Rackley, *Latter-day Saint Youths’ Construction*, p. 41).

24 H. W. Nibley, *Message* 2005, p. 99. Cf. Moroni 7:31–32. D&C 88:118 exhorts the Saints to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith.” The implication of scripture, however, is that learning spiritual matters from book study is ultimately a poor cousin to learning by faith — i.e., study “out of the best books” is only necessary because “all have not faith.” Though himself a great advocate of schools for the teaching of practical subjects in Kirtland and Nauvoo, on matters of learning for the eternities Joseph Smith wanted the Saints to gain knowledge by direct revelation — to come to the point where they could throw away their crutches, take up their beds, and walk: “The best way to obtain truth and wisdom is not to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer, and obtain divine teaching” (J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 3 October 1841, p. 191). Note that the original source for this quote actually reads “the only way” (J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 3 October 1841, p. 77, emphasis added).

B. L. McGuire, 7 March 2016 notes that this is precisely the message also of 1 Nephi 15:8–9 (see B. L. McGuire, Nephi, 61–64): “And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord? And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us.” McGuire observes that Joseph sees this not only “in a personal way … but also on a larger magnitude. We have a cultural attitude in the Christianity that he was experiencing that said that we had
all the revelation we were going to get (which is a larger societal expression of this same sort of thing) and against which he (and the Book of Mormon) become the counterexample. The Church in some ways becomes the example for other Christian churches” (B. L. McGuire, 7 March 2016).

25 “To put it bluntly,” writes Nibley, “short of revelation, no real translation of [scripture — or, for that matter, any other inspired teaching —] is possible” (H. W. Nibley, Message 2005, p. 55. See also Joseph Smith’s teachings about the necessary spiritual qualifications for understanding the parables of Jesus in J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, December 1835, pp. 94–96). The Prophet taught: “Could we read and comprehend all that has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. … Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject” (ibid., Funeral of James Adams, 9 October 1843, p. 324). Cf. Moroni 7:31–32 and Elder Willard Richards’ original notes of the sermon published in J. Smith, Jr. et al., Journals, 1843–1844, 9 October 1843, p. 109.

Joseph Smith was democratic in his desire that every Saint to receive the privilege of personal communion with the heavens and a revelatory unfolding of the meaning of scripture, decrying those who supposed that the plain truths of scripture were “mystery … and, therefore, are not to be understood” (J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, December 1835, p. 96). He taught that it “is the privilege of every Elder to speak the things of God” (D. Q. Cannon et al., Far West, 25 October 1831, p. 20, spelling and capitalization modernized) and that every Saint could come to a personal knowledge of the Father Himself (see, e.g., D&C 67:10; 88:68; 93:1). On one occasion, Joseph Smith said: “God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them, for the day must come when no man need say to his neighbor, Know ye the Lord; for all shall know Him … from the least to the greatest [see Jeremiah 31:34]” (J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 27 June 1839, p. 149. Cf. J. Smith, Jr., Words, 27 June 1839, p. 4).

26 Articles of Faith 1:9.

27 N. A. Maxwell, Cosmos, p. 2.
In response to a request in 1831 by his brother Hyrum to explain the translation process more fully, Joseph Smith said that “it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and ... it was not expedient for him to relate these things” (J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Documents, July 1831-January 1833*, General Conference Minutes, Orange Township, Cuyahoga Co., Ohio, 25–26 October 1831, p. 84, capitalization modernized). For more on the Prophet’s reluctance to share details of sacred events, see R. O. Barney, *Joseph Smith’s Visions*; R. Nicholson, *Cowdery Conundrum*. As a specific illustration of the sacred regard in which the Prophet held the temple ordinances, Andrew Ehat reminds us that none of the nine participants who were present when the Nauvoo endowment was first bestowed on 4 May 1842 recorded the events of that day in their personal reminiscences. In explanation of this fact, Ehat observes (A. F. Ehat, *Who Shall Ascend*, p. 49):

> The Prophet Joseph Smith had asked each participant not to record the specifics of what they had heard and seen that day. Six weeks later, in a letter to his fellow apostle Parley P. Pratt, Heber C. Kimball wrote that these favored few had received “some precious things through the Prophet on the priesthood that would cause your soul to rejoice.” However, he added, “I cannot give them to you on paper for they are not to be written” (Heber C. Kimball to Parley P. Pratt, 17 June 1842, *Heber C. Kimball Papers*, LDS Church History Library). They were just too sacred.

J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Documents, July 1831-January 1833*, Letter to Noah C. Saxton, 4 January 1833, p. 354, in a parallel to the wording found in Omni 1:20 that was also taken up by Oliver Cowdery in a 9 December 1829 letter (O. Cowdery, Letter to Cornelius Blatchly, 9 November 1829) and in the published account and testimony of the Three Witnesses (J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Histories, 1832–1844*, pp. 318–323). See also D&C 1:29, 20:8. B. L. McGuire, 7 March 2016 observes:

> It seems quite obvious to me that Omni 1:20 (which was translated just before we get the testimonies of the various witnesses) is the source of all of these statements. And it provides a useful context in trying to come to terms with Joseph’s limited descriptions. That is, Joseph sees in his
use of the Nephite Interpreters exactly the sort of thing he reads about in Omni. And his use of this phrase is very much to also say all of the things that this connection suggests as well (that Joseph was a prophet like King Mosiah, that his use of the interpreters was like that given in the Book of Mormon with the Jaredite record, and so on). … [W]hen he talked about the translation of the Book of Mormon, … he did so using a scriptural passage that he first encounters near the end of the translation. And while we often point to this statement as a description of the translation process, because we rarely connect it to an intentional citation of scripture, we miss all that this statement is really being used to tell us about the translation process, and what Joseph Smith wanted to convey through this use of scripture.

30  B. Young, 7 October 1866.

31  Summarizing the Savior’s answer to the disciples who asked him why He taught in parables, Elder James E. Talmage wrote that (J. E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 275):

> while it was their privilege to receive and understand the deeper truths of the gospel, “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” as He expressed it, with people in general, who were unreceptive and unprepared, such fulness of understanding was impossible.

Gordon C. Thomasson further elaborated (cited in *The Directions of Mormon Language: Panel Discussion*, p. 85):

> When Jesus spoke in parables, he was precisely speaking on multiple levels. Intentionally, he was saying different things to different people. I don’t think that we can give meat to babes; I think that they need milk [see 1 Corinthians 3:1–3; Hebrews 5:12]. … For instance, someone could be preaching repentance in a sermon. The ninth through the fourteenth chapters of Alma is an interesting one. People read it for years and just thought that it was a nice repentance sermon. One day, when I was working with Hugh Nibley, I walked into the office, sat down, and he kicked me in the pants and I kicked him in the pants. We realized that Alma was calling to repentance a people who had already had the temple endowment.
Because people never expected to find the temple there, they never saw the temple there, but it’s all through those chapters of Alma [cf. H. W. Nibley, *Message* 2005, p. 54, citing Giorgio de Santillana: “every translation is a mere function of the translator’s expectation”). The General Authority in conference might, as it were, call people to repentance and it looks like the straightforward call to repentance, but it has special relevance to those who have been through the temple.

32 For example, on 2 April 1843, Joseph Smith preached a sermon that included a discussion of Jesus’ Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27) and His nighttime encounter with Nicodemus (see John 3:1–5). In the notes of the sermon recorded in Joseph Smith’s Diary by Elder Willard Richards, it reads (J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1841–1843*, p. 326):

What is the meaning of the scriptures he that is faithful over a few things shall be made ruler over many? & he that is faithful over many shall be made ruler over many more?

Nicodemus. except a man be born of water & of the spirit. —

I shall not tell you? —

According to a late recollection of Benjamin Johnson, the Prophet had explained the doctrine of plural marriage to him not long before. Benjamin was reluctant to embrace the principle and said (B. F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review*, pp. 83–84):

“Brother Joseph, this is all new to me; it may all be true, — you know but I do not, to my education it is all wrong; but I am going, with the help of the Lord to do just what you say, with this promise to you — That if ever I know you do this to degrade my sister I will kill you, as the Lord lives.” He looked at me, oh, so calmly, and said, “Br. Benjamin, you will never see that day, but you shall see the day you will know it is true, and you will fulfill the law and greatly rejoice in it.” And he said, “At this morning’s meeting, I will preach you a sermon that no one but you will understand. And furthermore, I will promise you
that when you open your mouth to your sister, it shall be filled."

At the meeting he read the parable of the Talents, and showed plainly that to him that hath shall be given more, and from him that had but one should be taken that he seemed to have, and given to him who had ten. This, so far as I could understand, might relate to families, but to me there was a horror in the idea of speaking to my sister upon such a subject, the thought of which made me sick. But I had promised, and it must be done. I did not remember his words and have faith that light would come, — I only thought “How dark it all looks to me.” But I must do it, and so told my sister I wished to see her in a room by herself, where I soon found her seated. I stood before her trembling, my knees shaking like Belteshazzar’s. But I opened my mouth and my heart opened to the light of the Lord, my tongue was loosened and I was filled with the Holy Ghost. I preached a sermon that forever converted me and her also, to the principle, even though her heart was not yet won by the Prophet. And so I had great joy after my tribulation [see D&C 58:4].

33 Of course, the same is true in reading from the scriptures. Speaking of the Book of Mormon, John L. Sorenson said it this way (in The Directions of Mormon language: Panel discussion, p. 86): “Let me … speak as a specialist on Mesoamerica and say that while reading the Book of Mormon may ring true some truths of importance, I would say that only a few of us know what we’re missing. In other words, we are vastly ignorant of a great deal that is in there. Yet we suppose we understand. Thank goodness we understand what we do.”

34 C. S. Lewis, Descriptione; G. de Santillana et al., Hamlet’s Mill, p. 10. Specifically regarding the ancient view of the temple, Mark Smith writes: “The idea of divine presence barely resonates in our culture. We stand at such a massive distance from the ancient traditions of the Jerusalem temple … As the decades pass, our culture seems increasingly removed from the Christian and Jewish religious traditions that drew upon the experience of temple” (M. S. Smith, Priestly Vision, p. 36).

Matthew 6:10.


B. C. Hafen, *Anchored*, p. 3.

On the origins of today’s “praise and worship” services, “patterned after the rock concert of secular culture,” see F. Viola et al., *Pagan Christianity*, pp. 164–166.

Paul Tillich, cited in R. Coles, *Secular Mind*, p. 5. See also ibid., p. 18.


1 Nephi 19:24. See also 1 Nephi 19:23; 2 Nephi 11:2, 8.

B. L. McGuire, March 7 2016.

Ibid.. For more on this topic, see B. L. McGuire, *Nephi*, pp. 58–59 n. 21, 68–71, 77.

For example, Gerrit Dirkmaat gives examples of Joseph Smith’s efforts to revise and update his Doctrine and Covenants revelations as they were prepared for publication (G. Dirkmaat, *Great*, pp. 56–57).

D&C 1:24.

D&C 128:18.

Perhaps the most striking example is found in citations of Malachi 4:5–6, a key prophecy relating to the restoration of the priesthood:


5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and
the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.


38 … Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 39 … And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.


Elijah shall reveal the covenants to seal the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers. The anointing and sealing is to be called, elected, and made sure.


Now, the word “turn” here should be translated “bind,” or “seal.”

J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 10 March 1844, p. 337 (cf. J. Smith, Jr., Words, 10 March 1844, p. 329, 334 (“seal or bind or turn the hearts”), 334–335, 336):

He should send Elijah to seal the children to the fathers, and the fathers to the children.

50 J. C. Alleman, Problems in Translating the Language of Joseph Smith, p. 22. See G. Dirkmaat et al., Prophets Have Spoken for a well-crafted exposition of the process and results of George D. Watt’s efforts to record the sermons of Church leaders from 1851 onwards in shorthand and subsequently to create the sometimes highly amended published versions that appeared in the Deseret News and the Journal of Discourses. Of course, those who recorded the sermons of Joseph Smith faced even greater challenges, as they had no skills in shorthand and were often challenged by delays
of years before the notes from the sermon could be filled out into finished prose. Another blow was the untimely death of Elder Willard Richards, who had been a primary scribe for his Nauvoo sermons. He passed away on 11 March 1854, having been able to complete a draft of the *History* only to the date of 1 March 1843. After Elder Richards’ death, the direction of this work fell to Elder George A. Smith who, by 1856, had overseen its completion up through the June 1844 death of the Prophet. For a more complete account of the writing of Joseph Smith’s *History*, see D. C. Jessee, *JS History*; J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Histories, 1832–1844*, pp. xiii–xxxiii.

54 Ibid., p. 31.
55 J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, p. xvii.
56 In an “Epistle to the Saints,” Elder Willard Richards, hoping “soon to start on a mission towards some Island in the Pacific ocean,” urgently enjoined the Saints to contribute to the effort of gathering historical records (J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History*, 16 November 1845, 7:526):

All those who have letters, or documents of any kind in their possession, which in any way relate to the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are requested to leave them with the historian before tomorrow evening.

All elders who have been out on special missions within two years, and have not reported themselves in writing, are requested to do so before tomorrow evening.

Every individual who may be in possession of any fact, circumstance, incident, event, or transaction which they wish recorded in the *General History of the Church* will report it in writing before tomorrow evening.

The historian wants all books, maps, charts, papers, documents of every kind, name, and nature, and all information that may relate to, or have a bearing in any wise upon the History of the Church, before him, in his office within twenty-four hours.

See, e.g., the passage in one of Joseph Smith’s sermons about the rounds of Jacob’s ladder added by later church historians and discussed below (J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 21 May 1843, pp. 304–305).

J. Smith, Jr., Documentary History.

D. C. Jessee, Reliability, p. 47 explains:

To further complicate the question of authorship, since Joseph Smith’s diary did not provide an unbroken narrative of his life, gaps were bridged by using other sources, changing indirect discourse to direct as if Joseph had done the writing himself. Not uncommon according to the editorial practices of the day, this method of supplying missing detail had the effect of providing a smooth-flowing, connected narrative of events.

For examples of these difficulties, see ibid., pp. 37–41.

E.g., J. Smith, Jr., Teachings; J. Smith, Jr., Teachings 2007; J. Smith, Jr., Teachings 1997.


E.g., J. M. Bradshaw, God’s Image 1, pp. 643–644, 750; J. C. Alleman, Problems in Translating the Language of Joseph Smith.

According to D. C. Jessee, JS History, p. 441, Joseph Smith and his scribes had only progressed to the date of August 5, 1838 in the history by the time of the Prophet’s death.

See D. A. Bednar, Faithful Parents, pp. 30–33.

“[D]espite the long list of impediments in history writing, Joseph Smith showed sustained interest in documenting the church’s rise and progress, and his repeated efforts to do so bore fruit. … Near the end of his life, Joseph Smith gave high priority to his history, and he was finally able to devote the resources to make it a substantial production. In May 1843, he told William W. Phelps of a message that came to him in a dream: ‘The history must go ahead before any thing’ [J. Smith, Jr. et al., Journals, 1843–1844, 19 May 1843, pp. 18–19]. … Under Richards’ direction, the enterprise made substantial progress. Addressing the Saints in Nauvoo a month before he was killed, Joseph Smith noted with satisfaction...
that during the past three years his ‘acts and proceedings’ had been recorded by ‘efficient Clerks in constant employ,’ who had accompanied him everywhere and ‘carefully kept my history, and they have written down what I have done, where I have been & what I have said’ [see J. Smith, Jr., Words, 26 May 1844, pp. 374, 406 n. 1. Cited in J. Smith, Jr. et al., Histories, 1832–1844, p. xxxi n. 47 as ““Sermon of Joseph the Proph[et],’ 26 May 1844, p. 2, JS Collection, CHL”] (ibid., pp. xiv, xxxi).

According to Donald Q. Cannon (D. Q. Cannon, King Follett Discourse, p. 182):

Willard Richards … served the Prophet Joseph Smith as “private secretary” and historian. In that position, he kept Joseph Smith’s daily journal for the years 1842–44, and recorded his summary of the King Follett Discourse in that journal. Of Richards’ abilities as a scribe, Orson Spencer wrote that he “was eminently gifted. He chronicled events, dates, circumstances, and incidents with rare accuracy of judgment and rare tenacity of memory.”

Stan Larson gives the following description of Elder Richards’ style as he took notes of the King Follett Discourse, which seems consistent with his general method of recording Joseph Smith’s other sermons (S. Larson, King Follett, p. 193):

Willard Richards left a quite sketchy account, often with disjointed sentence fragments. He seems to have merely taken down various points during the discourse that he felt were particularly important. He often leaves spaces or inserts dashes to indicate he is not taking down every word. His report is “minutes” in the strict sense of the word since the sermon, which lasted a little over two hours, has been reduced to be read in just a few minutes.

Describing the difficulties he faced in trying to create a complete narrative of the last four days of Joseph Smith’s life from the notes of Elder Richards, Elder Wilford Woodruff, Assistant Church Historian, wrote: “Dr. Richards wrote but little, and that in detached sentences, expecting to make it out himself, but died before doing it” (Letter of Wilford Woodruff to John Bernhisel, 30 June 1856, quoted in D. C. Jessee, Reliability, p. 36). This summary aptly describes the challenge that is faced by anyone trying to flesh out Elder Richards’ notes of Joseph Smith’s sermons.
Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, who taught school with her husband Howard in Nauvoo, recorded detailed, literate notes of several of Joseph Smith’s discourses. With assistance from her husband, Howard, she served as a scribe to Lucy Mack Smith as the latter dictated her memoirs, and later created a fair (finished) copy of the manuscript (see L. M. Smith, Revised and Enhanced History, pp. xviii–xxiii; L. M. Smith, Lucy’s Book, pp. 67–68; J. Smith, Jr., Words, p. 419 n. 2). For a detailed account of the lives of the Corays, see C. D. Tate, Jr., Howard and Martha Jane Knowlton Coray.

The transcript of Elder Willard Richards’ notes, made during the sermon, are from J. Smith, Jr. et al., Journals, 1843–1844, 21 May 1843, pp. 20–22. The notes of Richards, who was present for the original discourse, were later filled out under the direction of Elder George A. Smith, who continued the compilation of Joseph Smith’s History of the Church (J. Smith, Jr., Documentary History) in the 1850s after the death of Elder Richards (J. Smith, Jr. et al., Journals, 1843–1844, 21 May 1843, p. 21 n. 68; D. C. Jessee, JS History, p. 470). The original notes by Elder Richards, along with additional accounts of this sermon and helpful notes, were published in J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 May 1843, pp. 204–209. I have drawn the expanded account of the sermon originally compiled in the 1850s by church historians as later edited and published by Elder B. H. Roberts on behalf of the Church (J. Smith, Jr., Documentary History, 21 May 1843, 5:401–403. See also J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 21 May 1843, pp. 303–306). Volumes in the “Histories series of The Joseph Smith Papers … make available the manuscript behind B. H. Roberts’ widely used publication, and … identify, in turn, the sources behind the manuscript itself, thereby facilitating more informed use of the history” (J. Smith, Jr. et al., Histories, 1832–1844, p. xxxii).

Specifically describing the challenges in filling out Joseph Smith’s history and teachings for the final years of the Nauvoo period, Dean C. Jessee wrote (D. C. Jessee, Reliability, p. 41):

The task of preparing Joseph Smith’s discourses for publication was particularly difficult in the later stages of the history when it became necessary to reconstruct word sequences more than a decade after they were spoken, from notes that in some instances were very brief. In summarizing his work on this crucial phase of the history,
George A. Smith wrote: “I have filled up all the reports of sermons by Prest. Joseph Smith and others from minutes or sketches taken at the time in long hand … which was an immense labor, requiring the deepest thought and the closest application, as there were mostly only two or three words (about half written) to a sentence.” But he assured his reader that “the greatest care has been taken to convey the ideas in the Prophet’s style as near as possible; and in no case has the sentiment been varied that I know of; as I heard the most of his discourses myself, was on the most intimate terms with him, have retained a most vivid recollection of his teachings, and was well acquainted with his principles and motives” (Smith to Woodruff, 21 April 1856).

In addition to George A. Smith’s own careful editorial work, which he felt was enhanced by an 1831 revelation that promised the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to those who functioned in the office of Church Historian (D&C 47:4), was the additional verification that came from reading the finished compilation of each discourse in the hearing of members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, some of whom had also heard the original addresses. But while these measures no doubt guaranteed the doctrinal accuracy of Joseph Smith’s discourses, they obviously would not reflect his personality as accurately as a verbatim report would have done.

70 See J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 May 1843, pp. 208–209.

71 According to Donald Q. Cannon (D. Q. Cannon, King Follett Discourse, p. 182):

Wilford Woodruff … had received no formal stenographic training, but had a strong desire to write a history of the Church. Consequently, he recorded not only his own activities, but also the sermons, teachings, and prophecies of Joseph Smith and other Church leaders. He chose to record most of this material in his personal journal, which has been characterized as “careful and painstaking.” Woodruff developed a unique note-taking method which one writer described in this manner:
He had a gift from God. It was this, that when he did not have pencil or paper with him, he could, after hearing the Prophet Joseph Smith preach a sermon, go home and write it word for word and sentence for sentence, but after completing the writing … the sermon would pass from his mind, as though he had never heard it.

Stan Larson gives the following description of Elder Woodruff’s style as he took notes of the King Follett Discourse, which seems consistent with his general method of recording Joseph Smith’s other sermons (S. Larson, King Follett, pp. 193–194):

Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal a more nearly complete account, but only after a formal introduction in which he described the sermon in terms that could only be known after it was finished. Though Woodruff claimed in 1877 to have recorded the King Follett Discourse “on the crown of his hat, standing in the congregation,” he must have meant no longer extant notes which he later transferred to, and expanded in, his journal since his neatly-printed journal account has no abbreviated words, no gaps in the recording, and no unclearly written words. This transfer could have occurred that same day, or as much as a week or two later. Often the Woodruff account has synonyms and a slightly different word or phrase order when compared to the other accounts, but it is compatible to the other three versions in terms of the basic sense of the message. These considerations seem to indicate the need for a slightly different use of the Woodruff account.

According to Donald Q. Cannon (D. Q. Cannon, King Follett Discourse, pp. 181–182):

William Clayton … served as a private secretary to Joseph Smith. According to one biographer, Clayton “received a good common-school education” and was “a clear writer” with a “love for order.”

The popularity and versatility of his missionary and pioneer journals bear witness of his ability as a recorder of historical events.

Ibid., 21 May 1843, p. 20 n. 58, citing Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 21 May 1843.


2 Peter 1:19.

2 Peter 1:19.

See 2 Peter 1:16–17.

Matthew 17:2.

J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, p. 206.


2 Peter 1:16.

2 Peter 1:17.

For related teachings on the doctrine of election during the 1830s, see, e.g.,

J. Smith, Jr., Writings 2002, To Silas Smith, 26 September 1833, p. 323: “Yet [Paul] was careful to press upon them the necessity of continuing on until they as well as those who inherited the promises might have the assurance of their salvation confirmed to them by an oath from the mouth of him who cannot could not lie.”

Ibid., To Hezekiah Peck and others, 31 August 1835, p. 366: “let us be wise in all things, and keep all the commandments of God, that our salvation may be sure.”

J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 22 January 1834, pp. 54–55, 64: “all the commandments contained in the law of the Lord, have the sure promise annexed of a reward to all who obey”; “Have you a promise of receiving a crown of righteousness from the hand of the Lord with the Church of the Firstborn?” (cf. 2 Timothy 4:8)

J. Smith, Jr., Words, Willard Richards Pocket Companion, 27 June 1839, pp. 4–5: “let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering & thirsting after Righteousness. & living by every word of God & the Lord will soon say unto him Son thou shalt be exalted. &c When the Lord has thoroughly proved him & finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazard. then the
man will find his calling & Election made sure.” (Cf. J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History*, 27 June 1839, 3:380; J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 27 June 1839, p. 150)


91 The Greek term for “election” in the underlying New Testament text is *ekloge*.

93  J. H. Neyrey, 2 Peter, Jude, 2 Peter 1:11, p. 106.

94  Isaiah 49:2; 1 Nephi 21:2

95  Judges 5:13; Psalm 49:14; D&C 121:46.

96  Isaiah 28:15–17.

97  Isaiah 52:14; Jeremiah 18:4; Mark 2:22.


99  W. Woodruff, Woodruff, 9 September 1843, 1:297. Cf. Note 8 for Joseph Smith’s 21 May 1843 sermon in the online version of J. Smith, Jr., Words. In the front matter of R. L. Bushman, Rough Stone, the author erroneously attributes the statement of Elder Kimball to Brigham Young. Heber C. Kimball used similar imagery in another sermon in 1860 (H. C. Kimball, 1 January 1860, pp. 347–348):

Joseph Smith, in his day, used similar comparison when speaking of men who are polished. He compared them to a smoothly polished stone, which, when set to rolling, would lose all its fine polish, and turn up marred and bruised, without even leaving a line to mark its course. On the other hand, set a stone to rolling that is unpolished and rough from the mountain side, and it will do great execution in its course, and leave a visible path behind it, and become smoother as it rolls. Joseph compared himself to a rough stone. What is the use of polishing stones for building purposes before they are taken out of the mountains?

100  R. L. Bushman, Rough Stone. In R. L. Bushman, On the Road, pp. 3, 8, the author describes the events around his selection of a title, but says nothing about his rationale for its selection.

101  During a fireside that Bushman gave following the appearance of the biography, he was asked: “Would Joseph Smith be embarrassed that we would try to polish this rough stone?” Bushman answered: “He grew up in a rough culture with deep passions. He was penitent because he wanted unity above all. His love was so great that they [i.e., the Saints] loved him” (R. L. Bushman, Salt Lake
Ensign Stake Fireside (26 February 2006). Personal notes of Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. See the reference to this fireside in R. L. Bushman, On the Road, p. 107).

102 W. K. MacNulty, Freemasonry, p. 160.


104 Daniel 2:45, emphasis added. B. L. McGuire, 7 March 2016 notes that in Joseph Smith’s day, this stone was commonly understood by members and non-members alike to be the Church of Christ, which would roll down the mountain and eventually destroy the kingdoms of the earth that were represented as the components of a statue within Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (E. Smith, Discourse Delivered at Jefferson Hall, p. 27):

This kingdom, set up more than seventeen hundred years ago, has been dreaded by kings ever since, and while they have seen it rolling down from the mountain, they have feared lest it should roll on them. This stone has been rolling nearer and nearer to the image, but it never struck it, till the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. In that year, this stone struck one of the great toes of the image, which was the British kingdom; this kingdom, and France, were the two great toes of the image.

First Presidency counselor Heber C. Kimball used similar imagery in 1860 (H. C. Kimball, 1 January 1860, p. 347):

Though the kingdom that was to be set up in the last days, according to the Prophet Daniel, was compared by him to a stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands, we cannot suppose that temples can be built without hands. The Prophet had reference, no doubt, in this comparison to a block of rock detached by an invisible power from a mountain side, which commenced in its rough and unpolished state to roll down to the plains beneath.

In contrast to the more common idea expressed by Elias Smith and President Heber C. Kimball, it appears that Joseph Smith did not intend to equate the idea of Daniel’s “stone … cut out without hands” (Daniel 2:34; D&C 65:2) with the imagery of a rough stone rolling down a mountain, as one might naturally suppose. In an 1838 entry in the Journal of Henry W. Bigler, the Prophet gave the
following portrait of the stone described in chapter 2 of Daniel (R. N. Moon, Lost Sermon):

The first Sunday I was in Far West I went to [a] meeting held in an unfurnished frame building hoping to hear the Prophet preach but how disappointed I was when he called a beardless boy to the stand to preach — but I soon found there was preach in him. He took a text in the second chapter of Daniel and when he concluded the Prophet got up and complemented the young Elder but said the Prophet, “I will correct the idea in regard to the little stone rolling forward — that is not so, it is stationary like a grindstone. And like a grindstone it revolves (Joseph made a circular motion with his hands) and said that when the Elders went abroad preaching the gospel and people believed and obeyed the gospel and became believers in the Book of Mormon, they were added to the little stone–thus they gathered around it so that it grew larger and larger until it had already begun to pinch the toes of the image — and it [the stone] would finally break it [the image] in pieces and be carried away like the chaff of the summer thrashing floor while the stone kep[t] growing until it filled the whole earth [cf. D&C 109:72: “… that the kingdom, which thou hast set up without hands, may become a great mountain and fill the whole earth.”]

105  Mark 14:58, emphasis added.

106  President Heber C. Kimball, a lifelong Freemason, asked this question rhetorically when comparing Joseph Smith, who was polished as he rolled down the mountain side, to men who began as polished stones and would only become “marred and bruised” as they rolled (H. C. Kimball, 1 January 1860, p. 348). However, this question is answered by the logic of 1 Kings 6:7.

107  1 Kings 6:7. Thanks to Ben McGuire for this suggestion.

108  J. Smith, Jr., Words. This statement appears only in the online version of the book.

109  1 Nephi 14:30; Mosiah 1:8; Alma 13:31; Helaman 5:13; 3 Nephi 7:17; Ether 15:33.

110  J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, p. 206.

J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 2 July 1839, p. 158.

J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 21 May 1843, p. 209.


Ecclesiastes 7:6: “For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.” Thus, Joseph Smith is comparing the opinions of men to the “laughter of the fool.”

Ecclesiastes 7:6.


Ecclesiastes 7:6.

According to B. L. McGuire, 7 March 2016: “it seems very likely that [church historians] used a printed source [for the wording of this anecdote]. The wording is too close to any number of highly similar accounts.”


2 Corinthians 12:2.

Genesis 28:12.


Jacob 3:13; Words of Mormon 1:5; Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 5:8; 26:6; Ether 15:33.


1 Nephi 8:37.

D&C 111:11; 121:33; 128:19.

John 16:12; 3 Nephi 17:2; D&C 19:22; 50:40; 78:18.
131  D&C 35:21; 86:3; 101:53.
132  Isaiah 10:3; 1 Peter 2:12; D&C 124:10.
133  Genesis 9:13; Ezekiel 1:28.
134  Matthew 24:36–38; D&C 51:20; 87:8.
135  J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, p. 207.
140  J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, p. 283 n. 9.
141  Edwards’ comparison of the rainbow to Jacob’s ladder was made in the following context (J. Edwards et al., *Works* 2, pp. 697–698):

Psalm 122:3: “Jerusalem is builded as a city compact together.” Part of this bow is on earth, and part in heaven, so it is with the church. The bow gradually rises higher and higher from the earth towards heaven, so the saints from their first conversion are travelling in the way towards heaven, and gradually climb the hill, till they arrive at the top. So this bow in this respect is a like token of the covenant with Jacob’s ladder, which represented the way to heaven by the covenant of grace, in which the saints go from step to step, and from strength to strength, till they arrive at the heavenly Zion; so in this bow the ascent is gradual towards the top in the way to heaven; the beginning of the ascent is sharpest and most difficult; the higher you ascend the easier the ascent becomes. On earth this bow is divided, the parts of it that are here below are at a distance from one another, but in heaven it is united, and perfectly joined together. So different parts of the church on earth may be divided, separated as to distance
of place, have no acquaintance one part with another, and separated in manner of worship and many opinions, and separate in affection, but will be perfectly united in heaven. The parts of the rainbow, the higher you ascend, the nearer and nearer do they come together; so the more eminent saints are in knowledge and holiness, the nearer they are to a union in opinion and affection; but perfect union is not to be expected but in heaven.

142 B. L. McGuire, 7 March 2016.

143 E.g., J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 January 1844, p. 319: “But their has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation it has been like splitting hemlock knots with a Corn doger for a wedge & a pumpkin for a beetle, Even the Saints are slow to understand I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God, but we frequently see some of them after suffering all they have for the work of God will fly to peaces like glass as soon as any thing Comes that is Contrary to their traditions, they Cannot stand the fire at all.” Cf. the polished versions of this statement in J. Smith, Jr., Documentary History, 21 January 1844, 6:184–185; J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 21 January 1844, p. 331.

144 Jacob 3:13; Words of Mormon 1:5; Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 5:8; 26:6; Ether 15:33.

145 J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 21 May 1843, p. 305.

146 D&C 47:4.

147 See D. C. Jessee, Reliability, p. 41.

148 J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, August 1832, pp. 12–13; J. Smith, Jr., Words, 7 April 1844, p. 350. See also the church historians’ polished version of the 7 April 1844 references in J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 7 April 1844, pp. 346–347, 348.

149 H. W. Nibley, What, p. 369. On the topic of Freemasonry and the origins of modern temple ordinances, see, more generally, J. M. Bradshaw, Freemasonry.

150 A. G. Mackey et al., Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, s.v., Jacob’s Ladder, p. 361. Elsewhere, Mackey elaborates on the symbolism of the ladder as found in the Tracing Board of the First Degree (A. G. Mackey, Symbolism of Freemasonry, chapter XVI–The Covering
of the Lodge): “This mystic ladder, which connects the ground floor of the lodge with its roof or covering, is another important and interesting link, which binds, with one common chain, the symbolism and ceremonies of Freemasonry, and the symbolism and rites of the ancient initiations.” G. Oliver, *Freemason’s Treasury*, p. 197 elaborates as follows:

On the volume of the sacred Law rests a ladder, which reminds us of the vision of Jacob at Luz, on his journey into Padanaram to avoid the wrath of his brother, when he received the promise of a blessing on himself and his posterity; by the assistance of which, we, as Masons, hope to attain to the holy covering of our Lodge; which is sometimes denominated “a cloudy canopy,” at others, “a celestial canopy of divers colours,” or “a starry-decked heaven where all good Masons hope to dwell.” Hence the charge appended to the fourth section of the E. A. P. Lecture: “May every Brother Mason arrive at the summit of his profession, where the just will be sure to meet with their due reward.” It is depicted on our tracing board as a triad, consisting of Sun — Moon — Seven Stars, and connected with the earth by means of the above-mentioned ladder, containing a triad of steps, and resting on the Holy Bible.

Speaking specifically of the theological virtue of charity, Mackey continues:

Charity … takes the same place in the ladder of masonic virtues as the sun does in the ladder of planets. In the ladder of metals we find gold, and in that of colors yellow, occupying the same elevated position. Now, St. Paul explains Charity as signifying, not alms-giving, which is the modern popular meaning, but love — that love which “suffereth long and is kind” [1 Corinthians 13:4]; and when, in our lectures on this subject, we speak of it as the greatest of virtues, because, when Faith is lost and Hope has ceased, it extends “beyond the grave to realms of endless bliss,” we there refer it to the Divine Love of our Creator. But Portal, in his Essay on Symbolic Colors, informs us that the sun represents Divine Love, and gold indicates the goodness of God.
So that if Charity is equivalent to Divine Love, and Divine Love is represented by the sun, and lastly, if Charity be the topmost round of the masonic ladder, then again we arrive, as the result of our researches, at the symbol so often already repeated of the solar orb. The natural sun or the spiritual sun — the sun, either as the vivifying principle of animated nature, and therefore the special object of adoration, or as the most prominent instrument of the Creator’s benevolence — was ever a leading idea in the symbolism of antiquity.

151 W. K. MacNulty, *Freemasonry*, p. 160 gives the following description:

In both the Macrocosm and the Microcosm there are four levels. The lowest of these is the physical world, symbolized in the Macrocosm by the Chequered Pavement and in the Microcosm by the theological virtue Faith. The second level up is that of the psyche which is represented in Macrocosm by the central area of the board with most of the symbols, and in the Microcosm by the theological virtue Hope. The third level up is the Spirit, represented by the Heavens and by the theological virtue Charity. The fourth level is Divinity. It is represented in the Heavens by the Star that contains the “All-Seeing Eye” of the Deity; and It, the Source of all things, is the fourth level and the Source of both the Macrocosm and the Microcosm.

With respect to the “Mystic Ladder of the 30th Degree, Knight Kadosh or Knight of the Black and White Eagle,” Hutchens writes (R. R. Hutchens, *Bridge to Light*, pp. 284, 286–287):

The most elaborate symbol in this degree is the Mystic Ladder. On one side the rungs represent the seven liberal arts and sciences of the ancients — grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. …

Corresponding to the rounds representing the seven Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Mystic Ladder has seven rounds of a more esoteric or mystical significance. Pike approximately corresponds some of them to pars of the Sephirothic Tree of Life from the Kabbalah. The first round represents the Fourth Sephira, Justice; the second, the Fifth Sephira, Benignity; the fifth round, the Seventh
and Eight Sephiroth, Victory and Glory; the seventh, the Third Sephira, Intelligence or Understanding. The other round represent the Masonic virtues of Faith, Kindliness, and Patience. The esoteric significance must remain as part of our ritual, confided only to faithful breasts.

On the other side are the Four Cardinal Virtues (Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance and Justice) surmounted by the three Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity). Connects the ground floor of the Lodge (representing the world) to its roof or covering (representing the heavens).

152 See J. M. Bradshaw, Freemasonry, p. 181. As Lindquist puts it (J. H. Lindquist, Keywords, p. 36):

[Joseph] Smith regularly found ways to make productive and pedagogic use of the Saints’ “traditions” by harnessing words and concepts already available to his listeners and then gradually modifying them in an effort to better explain complex and original — even radical — doctrines. If the Prophet was correct in the Saints’ tendency to “fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions” (J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 20 January 1844, p. 331), then introducing the endowment ceremony in wholly unfamiliar terms would have been extremely difficult. [For example, t]he deployment of “key” [in discussing] the temple was one strategy that allowed the Saints to understand the endowment as both an extrapolation of already familiar doctrines and the expression of new truths in a new way.

153 See, e.g., A. Nozedar, Secret Signs and Symbols, s.v., ladder, p. 116: “A rainbow also serves as a ladder, or bridge, between the celestial realms and the ones below.” Cf. Ibid., s.v. rainbow, p. 249.

154 This fact is known with certainty because the Coray Notebook was not acquired by the Church until sometime after 10 July 1902 (J. Smith, Jr., Words, p. 419 n. 2).

155 In the Coray Notebook, the material about Paul’s visit to the third heaven occurs near the end of the record of the discourse, between these two statements: “There are some things in my own bosom that must remain there” and “There are only certain things that can be done by the Spirits and that which is done by us that is not done
with a view to eternity is not binding in eternity” (ibid., 21 May 1843, p. 207). In the notes of Elder Richards, the equivalent of these two statements occurs in the same order (i.e., “I shall keep in my own bosom. we have no claim in our eternal compact. In relation to Eternal thi[n]gs [p. [216]] unless our actions. & contracts & all thi[n]gs tend to this end. —”), however Elder Richards appears not to have recorded the statement between them that appears in the Coray Notebook concerning Paul’s visit to the third heaven.

156 The Coray Notebook mentions Paul’s visit to the third heaven, but does not say anything about Jacob’s Ladder nor about Joseph Smith’s limitations in being able to explain the Vision (i.e., D&C 76). D&C 76 outlined details of the three degrees of glory in the telestial, terrestrial, and celestial kingdoms.

157 J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 21 May 1843, p. 305. For more detailed discussion of this topic, see J. M. Bradshaw, Faith, Hope, and Charity.

158 Jude 1:3.

159 2 Peter 1:1.


161 2 Peter 1:10.

162 See 2 Peter 1:5.

163 See 2 Peter 1:10.

164 2 Peter 1:3.

165 2 Peter 1:3; D&C 80:5.

166 2 Peter 1:3.

167 J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, pp. 206–207.

168 J. Starr, Partakers, p. 81.

169 N. Russell, Deification, p. 151.

170 J. M. Bradshaw, Temple Themes in the Oath, pp. 21–23. See also B. C. Hafen et al., Contrite Spirit, pp. 222–223.

171 S. Sandmel et al., New English Bible, 2 Peter 1:4, p. 299. See also J. H. Neyrey, 2 Peter, Jude, pp. 159–160.

172 J. N. Sparks et al., Orthodox Study Bible, p. 1692.
173  J. Vajda, *Partakers*.

174  D&C 107:3; 2 Peter 1:8.

175  2 Peter 1:5.

176  Elder Bruce R. McConkie also saw “an additive order to the attaining of these attributes” (J. F. McConkie et al., *Revelations*, p. 68).


179  J. H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, p. 155. I have substituted the KJV terms for these virtues where they differ from Neyrey’s list. I have also corrected the ordering of these lists where it differed from scripture.

180  Matthew Bowen observes that the Hebrew word for hope (*tiqvah*), often equated with “patience” in the New Testament, comes from a root that means to “wait” (M. L. Bowen, 7 March 2016). He suggests that this may reflect the process of approaching the veil and being prepared in all things into enter the presence of the Lord (cf. D&C 136:31). Romans 5:3–4 defines hope as the result of “patience/endurance” (= steadfastness; Greek *hupomene*) and “experience” (= character, proof, testing; Greek *dokime*), developed in tribulation. See also 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Timothy 3:10; Titus 2:2; Hebrews 6:12; 2 Peter 1:6; Revelation 2:19; Alma 7:23; D&C 4:6; 6:19; 107:30 where patience either complements or replaces “hope” in the list. Elsewhere in the New Testament and
the Book of Mormon, the similar quality of “longsuffering” (Greek _makrothymia_) is mentioned, often in conjunction with patience. Cf. Ephesians 4:2; 1 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Corinthians 6:6; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 1:11; 3:12; 2 Timothy 3:10; Alma 7:23; 13:28; 17:11; 38:3; Moroni 7:45; D&C 107:30; 118:3; 121:41.

Neyrey points out that 2 Peter 1:5–7, unlike Romans 5:1–5, supplements the group-specific qualities of faith, hope, and charity with more properly Greco-Roman virtues. He compares the combination of vertically and horizontally oriented virtues within the list to the division in the Ten Commandments between the laws that govern relationship with God and fellow man. Moreover, citing Philo, _Special Laws_, 2:211–213, pp. 438-441, he sees the numerical count of eight virtues as “suggesting a certain wholeness or completeness. … All of the specifically Christian virtues are joined with the more popular ones to suggest a completeness of moral response. … Wholeness, moreover, is found in attention to virtues in regard to body (self-control) and spirit, as well as thought and action. In this wholeness, then, holiness is urged, a completeness of moral excellence to all” (see J. H. Neyrey, _2 Peter, Jude_, pp. 154–155).

J. E. Faulconer, _Life of Holiness_, p. 209. Cf. 1 John 3:2; D&C 38:8; 50:45; 76:94; 93:1. Faulconer continues: “Since the word ‘glory’ can also be taken to mean ‘perfection,’ as in Romans 3:23, Jesus Christ has brought us into a place where we can rejoice in a hope that we will see the perfection of the Father in its brightness and majesty. We will see the Father in the Son, and we will see Him by being in His presence.”


Matthew Bowen comments (M. L. Bowen, _Thy Will Be Done_, p. 243):

The Greek verbs meaning “ask” and “seek” correspond to the Hebrew verbs _sh’l_ and _bqsh_, which were used to describe “asking for” or “seeking” a divine revelation, often in a temple setting. [Tvedtnes] detects a further
temple echo in “knock” (J. A. Tvedtnes, Temple Prayer, p. 90), which should resonate with Latter-day Saints. The two divine passive reward clauses “it shall be given you” and “it shall be opened to you” also may suggest a temple situation with Jesus as “keeper of the gate” (2 Nephi 9:41–42. See J. Gee, Keeper).

These suppositions are supported by Nephi’s assertion, “If ye cannot understand, … it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark” (2 Nephi 32:4, emphasis added). A person’s being “brought into” a place seems to imply the presence of a keeper-of-the-gate figure or paralemptor, as when Jesus promised the disciples, “I will come and receive [paralempsomai] you to myself” (John 14:3). The “light” would then be that part of the temple where God’s full presence shines as represented by the Holy of Holies. … Granted, there are additional senses in which one might understand this reward clause. However, if the temple is the locus par excellence of inquiring, asking, and seeking revelation from the Lord (see Psalm 27:4), then the divine passive to be “brought into the light” probably connotes being brought into the light of the Lord’s countenance (see Numbers 6:24–27), a full reception of the blessings of the Atonement or the royal “adoption” (Romans 8:15–23), the greatest possible “revelation.”

Regarding “revelation,” Bowen continues (M. L. Bowen, Thy Will Be Done, p. 248 n. 41):

The word “revelation” from Latin revelatio originally connoted “a taking away of the veil” (compare Greek apokalyptein, “uncover”). This idea is depicted in 2 Corinthians 3:14–18, where Paul connects “liberty” (Greek eleutheria; Greek apheisan, “release”) to revelation and beholding the Lord’s glory with “open face” and being transformed into His glory (see 2 Corinthians 3:15–19). We note again Paul’s declaration that creation anxiously awaits the “revelation [apokalypsin] of the sons of God” and being “delivered from the bondage of corruption into
the glorious liberty [eleutherian] of the children of God” (Romans 8:19, 21)."


187 See J. M. Bradshaw, *He That Thrusteth In His Sickle* for the temple themes woven throughout D&C 4 and a brief history of the evolution of the list of virtues in that revelation.

188 J. W. Welch, *Counting to Ten*, p. 57.


191 In an unpublished manuscript, Samuel Zinner has shown that in several ancient Christian writings, what later surfaced as the Jewish Sefirot appear as Christian virtues (S. Zinner, *The Kabbalistic Sefirot: Overlooked prototypes in first- and second-century Christian literature*).

192 I discuss the relationship between faith, hope, and charity and the temple ordinances in greater detail in J. M. Bradshaw, *Faith, Hope, and Charity*.


194 Numbers 10:9; Deuteronomy 20:4; 1 Samuel 4:3; Psalm 3:7, 106:10; Luke 1:71.

195 Romans 6:9; 1 Corinthians 15:54–57; Hebrews 2:8; Mosiah 15:20; D&C 7:2; 50:35.


197 J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, p. 207.


200 2 Peter 1:19.


204 J. Smith, Jr., Words, 14 May 1843, p. 200, spelling and punctuation standardized.

205 D&C 84:19. See D. A. Bednar, Power to Become, pp. 75–78.


207 J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 14 May 1843, p. 297. The original in Wilford Woodruff’s Journal reads: “the Principle can be comprehended” (J. Smith, Jr., Words, Wilford Woodruff Journal, 14 May 1843, p. 200).

208 J. Smith, Jr., Words, Wilford Woodruff Journal, 14 May 1843, p. 200, spelling modernized. Ibid., 14 May 1843, p. 297. On 13 August 1843, echoing the Savior’s words in John 17:3, he exhorted his hearers: “Ebe sealed by the servants of God. Eternal life is to know the only true God and his son Jesus without which there is no salvation” (J. Smith, Jr., Words, Howard and Martha Coray Notebook 13 August 1843, p. 241).

Elsewhere, the Prophet taught that this knowledge can only be obtained in the heavenly equivalent of the earthly Holy of Holies (J. Smith, Jr., Documentary History, 1 May 1842, 4:608). Elder Bruce R. McConkie elaborates (B. R. McConkie, New Witness, p. 492):

What greater personal revelation could anyone receive than to see the face of his Maker? … And is it an unseemly or unrighteous desire on man’s part to hope and live and pray, all in such a way as to qualify for so great a manifestation? There is a true doctrine on these points, a doctrine that is spelled out as specifically and extensively in the revealed word as are any of the other great revealed truths. There is no need for uncertainty or misunderstanding and surely, if the Lord reveals a doctrine, we should seek to learn its principles and strive to apply them in our lives. This doctrine is that mortal man, while in the flesh, has it in his power to see the Lord, to stand in His presence, to feel the nail marks in His hands and feet, and to receive from
Him such blessings as are reserved for those only who keep all His commandments and who are qualified for that eternal life which includes being in His presence forever.

210 Alma 34:34.
211 Jude 1:6; Abraham 3:26, 28.
214 Matthew 9:33; Mark 7:26–30.
215 J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, p. 207.
218 1 Corinthians 9:25.
220 Job 1:7.
222 Alma 40:13.
223 Matthew 9:33; Mark 7:26–30.
224 J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, p. 207, spelling and punctuation modernized.
225 Ibid., 5 January 1841, William Clayton’s Private Book, p. 60. Cf. J. Smith Jr., Teachings, 5 January 1841, p. 181. The Prophet continues: “He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine showing that he would prefer a swine’s body to having none.”
227 M. B. Brown, Plan, p. 33.
228 J. Smith, Jr., Words, 5 January 1841, William Clayton’s Private Book, p. 60. In the case of the exercise of this power by the righteous, Madsen clarifies that this is not “a dominating,
exploiting, enslaving power. ‘Power over’ means more advanced, more Christ-like” (T. G. Madsen, LDS View, p. 101).

229  J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 May 1843, Franklin D. Richards “Scriptural Items,” p. 208, spelling and punctuation modernized.


231  For more on this subject, see J. M. Bradshaw et al., Mormonism’s Satan.

232  2 Corinthians 12:2.

233  Genesis 28:12.


236  Jacob 3:13; Words of Mormon 1:5; Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 5:8; 26:6; Ether 15:33.


238  Alma 16:16; D&C 132:3; D&C 136:31.

239  J. Smith, Jr., Words, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, p. 207.

240  Ibid., 27 August 1843, James Burgess Notebook, p. 247. Ehat and Cook comment (ibid., pp. 307–308 n. 43):

Given that the Prophet would have answered the question similarly in May, this is remarkable confirmation of the then-unwritten revelation on eternal marriage. When it was written seven and a half weeks later (12 July 1843), this revelation asserted that if couples were sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise through the authority of the sealing power of the priesthood and later were given the promise that they would come forth in the first resurrection, and if they should continue without committing the unpardonable sin, “Then shall they be gods … because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them” (D&C 132:19–20).
For brief, accessible overviews of doctrines and historical practices in the Church relating to plural marriage, see these Gospel Topics essays posted on the official Church Web site: Plural Marriage; Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo; Plural Marriage in Early Utah; Manifesto. For many in our culture, the “emotional and priestly logic” of faithful practitioners of plural marriage is difficult to understand, particularly in light of the “romantic logic” that prevails in modern society. This topic is insightfully addressed in K. Flake, Emotional and Priestly Logic.


For a description of and history of the Quorum, see ibid., passim. For a brief summary, see J. Smith, Jr. et al., Journals, 1843–1844, pp. xx–xxi.

Levi Richards, Diary, 14 May 1843, Church Archives, cited in A. F. Ehat, Ordinances, p. 261 n. 159. Ehat continues: “William Law also used Jacob 2 in his campaign against the Prophet’s teachings on plural marriage (see A. F. Ehat, They Might Have Known, p. 154). George A. Smith observed that when Joseph Smith was confronted with this passage from the Book of Mormon, the Prophet would cite the passage in that chapter that said, “For if it will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people. … (Jacob 2:30), and follow this by saying, “God has commanded us” (George A. Smith to Joseph Smith III, 9 October 1869, Historian’s Office Letterpress Copybooks, Church Archives).”

Levi Richards, Diary, 14 May 1843, Church Archives, cited in A. F. Ehat, Ordinances, p. 261 n. 60.

Ibid., p. 262 n. 165 writes:

Entries for 7, 9 February 1843; 27 April 1843; 12, 17 July 1843; and 18 August 1843 confirm that Clayton’s references to “priesthood” were his innocuous but fairly transparent synonym for “plural marriage.” The 23 May entry shows that while Hyrum was a member of the “Quorum,” he was not a member of the “secret priesthood.” Moreover, William Clayton, who had been an initiate to the “secret priesthood” for three months, would not become a member of the “Quorum” until February 1844. These two facts show, therefore, that Clayton was referring to
plural marriage when he mentioned “priesthood” in these contexts.

247  W. Clayton, Diaries, 23 May 1843.

248  According to B. C. Hales, Joseph Smith’s Polygamy, 2:1: “Between February and July 1843, Joseph Smith was sealed to perhaps fourteen additional plural wives.”

249  The anguish of Joseph Smith on this subject was still being felt during the spring of 1844 in the midst of attempts by apostates to murder him. D. L. Harris, Verbal Statement, pp. 5–6 remembered him as saying:

They accuse me of polygamy, and of being a false prophet … but, said he, I am no false prophet, I am no impostor; I have had no dark revelations, I have had no revelations from the devil. I have made no revelations; I have not got anything up myself. The same God that has thus far dictated and directed me, and inspired me and strengthened me in this work, gave me this revelation and commandment on Celestial and Plural marriage; and the same God commanded me to obey it. He said to me that unless I accept it and introduce it and practice it, I together with my people should be damned and cut off from this time henceforth. And they say if I do so and so they will kill me. What shall I do! What shall I do! If I do not practice it I shall be damned with all my people; if I do teach it and practice it and urge it, they say they will kill me, and I know they will. But said he, we have got to observe it, that it was an eternal principle, and that it was given to him by way of commandment and not by way of instruction.

For more on the historical background of this statement as well as his eyewitness account of Joseph Smith’s transmission of apostolic keys to the Twelve in March 1844, see J. M. Bradshaw, “‘There’s the Boy.’”

According to Richard S. Law, son of William Law who led the effort against the Prophet’s life, his father “with his arms around the neck of the Prophet, was pleading with him to withdraw the doctrine, of plural marriage….. [William] pleaded for this with Joseph with tears streaming from his eyes. The prophet was also
in tears, but he informed [William] that he could not withdraw the doctrine, for God had commanded him to teach it, and condemnation would come upon him if he was not obedient to the commandment” (L. W. Cook, Law, pp. 27–28, original source in “An Interesting Testimony,” The Improvement Era, May 1903, pp. 507–510). According to A. F. Ehat, Ordinances, pp. 73–73:

Even after Hyrum switched loyalties, Law and Marks did not come out in public rebellion. They were tacitly allegiant to Joseph. In fact, Marks accepted and received with his wife, Rosannah, the ordinances of eternal marriage. Moreover, Law for five months seriously considered entering the practice of plural marriage and wished to be sealed to his wife Jane in eternal marriage. Finally, in late 1843, Marks and Law renounced their support of the prophet and pushed for the abandonment of plural marriage. So if on 26 May 1843 Joseph’s trials were now over from his brother, they only that day seemed to be beginning with Law and Marks. As William Clayton had been reminded by Newel K. Whitney in 1844 shortly after the Martyrdom, it was William Law, William Marks and Emma Smith who were opposed to Joseph and the Quorum over such subjects. But during the Prophet’s lifetime, William Law was the only one to come out in open rebellion.

According to two separate sources, the beginning of this significant rupture in the Quorum began when Joseph Smith told William Law that he and Jane could not be sealed. Joseph apparently told Law this during or shortly after the 26 May 1843 Quorum meeting; for Law was not present at the 28 or 29 May meetings though he and Jane were in the city. Apparently Joseph never told William (and certainly not Jane) why God “forbid” him to administer these blessings to the couple. Perhaps Joseph originally did not seal the couple because he was testing them on plural marriage — a test Law ultimately failed. However, after Law was excommunicated in April 1844, Joseph explained that he refused to seal the couple because God revealed to him that “Law was adulterous.” Although left without explanation, William continued to attend Quorum meetings; and Jane (beginning in October 1843)
attended all the meetings of the Quorum until William made his final decision on plural marriage.

For a summary of arguments by William Marks and the RLDS Church that Joseph Smith intended to abandon the doctrine and practice of plural marriage in the months prior to his death, see B. C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:247–261. Countering such arguments “is some limited evidence that the Prophet may have proposed to other women in the last seven months of his life and ample evidence that he taught the principle to others and encouraged them to live it” (ibid., 2:261).

250  B. Young, 7 October 1866.
251  J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, p. 207.
253  Ibid., p. 283 n. 12.
254  According to Brigham Young (B. Young, 8 October 1866):

Right north of the Masonic Hall in Nauvoo the ground was not fenced. This was in the year 1842. There were some rails laid along to fence up some lots. Hyrum saw me and said, “Brother Brigham, I want to talk to you.” We went together and sat upon the rails that were piled up. He commenced by saying, “I have a question to ask you. In the first place I say unto you that I do know that you and the Twelve know some things that I do not know. I can understand this by the motions and talk and doings of Joseph and I know there is something or other which I do not understand that is revealed to the Twelve. Is this so?” I replied, “I do not know anything about what you know, but I know what I know.” Then he said, “I have mistrusted for a long time that Joseph had received a revelation that a man should have more than one wife, and he has hinted as much to me, but I would not bear it.” We had heard him say hard things. I recollect in one council where Joseph undertook to teach the brethren and sisters, William Law was there and William and Hyrum and a few others were against Joseph. William Law made this expression: “If an angel from heaven was to reveal to me that a man should
have more than one wife, and if it were in my power I would kill him.” That was pretty hard, but Joseph had to submit for it. The brethren were not prepared to receive the doctrine. Brother Kimball and others were in that council. Joseph had meetings in his house time after time and month after month, every Sunday evening. Joseph was worn out with it, but as to his denying any such thing, I never knew that he denied the doctrine of polygamy. Some have said that he did, but I do not believe he ever did. …

I will now go back to where I met Hyrum. He said to me, “I am convinced that there is something that has not been told me.” I said to him, “Brother Hyrum, Joseph would tell you everything the Lord reveals to him if he could.” I must confess I felt a little sarcastic against Hyrum, although he was just as honest as an angel and as full of integrity as the Gods, but he had not that ability which Joseph possessed to see and understand men as they were. I took advantage of this and I said to him, “Brother Hyrum, I will tell you about this thing which you do not know if you will swear with an uplifted hand before God that you will never say another word against Joseph, and his doings’ and the doctrines he is preaching to the people.” He replied, “I will do it with all my heart,” and he stood upon his feet saying, “I want to know the truth and to be saved,” and he made a covenant there, never again to bring forward one argument or use any influence against Joseph’s doings. Joseph had many wives sealed to him. I told Hyrum the whole story and he bowed to it and wept like a child and said, “God be praised.” He went to Joseph and told him what he had learned and renewed his covenant with Joseph and they went heart and hand together while they lived, and they were together when they died, and they are together now, defending Israel.

255 For accounts of the conversion of Hyrum and Emma to the principle, see A. F. Ehat, Ordinances, pp. 56–71; B. C. Hales, Joseph Smith’s Polygamy, 2:33–61.

256 A. F. Ehat, Ordinances, p. 59.

258 See the brief mention of Hyrum’s conversion in W. Clayton, *Diaries*, 26 May 1843: “Hyrum received the doctrine of priesthood.”


260 J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1843–1844*, p. xxi n. 35, citing the *Manuscript History of Brigham Young* (B. Young, *History 1801–1844*, 26 May 1843, p. 79). All those present had, of course, been endowed previously.

261 J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1843–1844*, 28 May 1843, pp. 24–25. James Adams was also sealed to his wife, Harriet Denton Adams. See ibid., p. 25 n. 88. Others were married for eternity the next day (ibid., 29 May 1843, p. 25 and n. 89).


Maria Jane Woodward, a domestic working in the Smith home, overheard an emotional conversation between Emma and Joseph regarding plural marriage. Knowing that Mary Jane had been listening, Emma approached her the next morning:

She told me to sit down on the bed by her and we both sat down on the bed that I was making. She looked very sad and cast down, and there she said to me, “The principle of plural marriage is right, but I am like other women, I am naturally jealous hearted and I can talk back to Joseph as long as any wife can talk back to her husband, but what I want to say to you is this. You heard me finding fault with the principle. I want to say that principle is right, it is from our Father in Heaven,” and then she again spoke of her jealousy.
Then she continued, “What I have said I have got to repent of. The principle is right but I am jealous hearted. Now never tell anybody that you heard me find fault with Joseph or that principle. The principle is right and if I or you or anyone else finds fault with that principle we have got to humble ourselves and repent of it” (M. J. Woodward, Maria Jane Woodward statement, attached to letter from George H. Brimhall to Joseph F. Smith, April 21, 1902 (1: DVD 28). Original in the Church History Library, MS 1325).


265  Ibid., 28 September 1843, pp. 104–105. See also ibid., p. xxi and n. 36. According to W. Clayton, Diaries, 19 October 1843, the Prophet told William Clayton that “E[mma] was turned quite friendly and kind. She had been anointed and he also had been a[nnointed] K[ing].” Glen M. Leonard provides the following description of this ordinance (G. M. Leonard, Nauvoo, pp. 260–261. See also R. K. Esplin, Succession, pp. 314–315; J. Smith, Jr., Words, 27 August 1843, pp. 244–247, and 303–307 nn.):

At least twenty couples, including nine members of the Twelve who had served faithfully together in England, received another temple blessing prior to the Prophet’s death. All of the recipients had already received the ordinances of the endowment and marriage for time and eternity, or what Joseph Smith called Abraham’s patriarchal priesthood. The keys to this priesthood had been conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland temple in 1836. They would now receive the crowning ordinance of the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood. “For any person to have a fulness of that priesthood, he must be a king and priest,” Brigham Young told an audience in Philadelphia on August 6. “A person may be anointed king and priest long before he receives his kingdom” (J. Smith, Jr., Documentary History, 6 August 1843, 5:527, from Wilford Woodruff’s Journal on that date). In a public sermon in Nauvoo three weeks later, Joseph Smith explained this sacred ordinance that he was
about to bestow on a select few before the completion of the temple. It was, he said, a promise of kingly powers and of endless lives. It was the confirmation of promises that worthy men could become kings and priests and that women could become queens and priestesses in the eternal worlds. In its administrative aspects, he said, this leadership calling was “a perfect law of Theocracy holding keys of power and blessings … to give laws to the people” (J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 27 August 1843, p. 322. Cf. J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1843–1844*, 27 August 1843, p. 86).

266 B. C. Hales et al., *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy — Better Understanding*, p. 87. See also B. C. Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 2:114–115. For example, Bathsheba W. Smith, wife of apostle George A. Smith, stated (Affadavit, 19 November 1903, as reproduced in J. F. Smith, Jr., *Blood Atonement*, p. 87):

Near the close of the year 1843, or in the beginning of the year 1844, I received the ordinance of anointing in a room in Sister Emma Smith’s house in Nauvoo, and the same day, in company with my husband, I received my endowment in the upper room over the Prophet Joseph Smith’s store. The endowments were given under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who afterwards gave us lectures or instructions in regard to the endowment ceremonies. There has been no change, to my certain knowledge, in these ceremonies. They are the same today as they were then. A short time after I received my anointing, I was sealed to my husband, George A. Smith, for time and eternity, by President Brigham Young, in the latter’s house, according to the plan taught, to my knowledge, by the Prophet Joseph Smith. When I was married in 1841, I was married for time, and not for eternity.


268 J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 21 May 1843, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook, pp. 207–208.

269 I.e., 2 Peter 1:19.

271 Emphasis added. Likewise, summarizing the thrust of Peter’s arguments, Lee writes (S. S. Lee, Jesus’ Transfiguration, p. 143):

I believe that [the] theological thinking of 2 Peter is almost equivalent to both the Markan discipleship of following Jesus in his suffering, death, and glorification (Mark 8:27–9:13) and Paul’s understanding of the believers’ continuous transformation into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18–4:6).

272 J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 11 June 1843, p. 308.
Abstract: Literary studies, especially intertextual approaches, are relevant for exploring how scriptures are constructed and interpreted. Reading 1 Peter intertextually reveals the thoughtful way that Peter selected suitable, relevant, and applicable Old Testament scripture to encourage faithfulness for his audience. Peter draws from Isaiah 40 in 1 Peter 1:24-25 to preach comfort; Isaiah 40 is one of the hallmark Old Testament chapters focused on comfort. 1 Peter 2:2-3 quotes from Psalm 34 which is a hymn dedicated to the salvation that God’s servants experience when they faithfully turn to Him during times of distress and persecution. And when 1 Peter 1:16 invites people to be holy, that call is grounded in the meaning and significance of a portion of the ancient Israelite Holiness Code, Leviticus 19. In summary, Peter demonstrates his scriptural mastery by dipping his pen into some of the most appropriate Old Testament passages available to support his message of faith and encouragement to his audience.

Thesis

The New Testament book of 1 Peter is replete with scriptural quotations and intertextuality. Thoughtful connections between the text of 1 Peter and the Old Testament point to Peter’s familiarity with the Old Testament text. Additionally, Peter extracts these quotes from Old Testament passages that share substantive thematic support to his larger objectives of encouraging early Christians to trust in the Lord through faith and righteousness. Reading 1 Peter intertextually with the Old Testament allusions reinforces Peter’s message.

Perhaps Peter’s abilities to use existing scripture to make new scripture can be likened to Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s gift for speaking and writing with eloquence. At times, Elder Maxwell’s every sentence is laced with scriptural thought and terminology, not as a slavish devotion to the order and structure of scriptural passages but rather as the full measure of God’s revealed word absorbed and renewed in remarkably fresh and faithful ways. In one example, he says “Brethren, there are clusters of memories embedded in each of your lives. And these can help us to
‘remember how merciful the Lord hath been’ (Moroni 10:3). He certainly has been to me!”

By creating an allusion to the Book of Mormon passage in his sermon, Elder Maxwell encourages his audience to remember the mercies of the Lord in their lives by simultaneously calling upon their own personal memories while activating their memory of the words of prophets who recorded the merciful works of the Lord. Peter uses similar strategies to encourage the faithful: his words both incorporate old scripture while inviting his audience to reflect on the earlier scripture’s message. Laced together, Peter’s new text and the scripture of the past create expanded networks of meaning, significance, and application in the lives of those who read intertextually.

In this essay, I first offer a brief context for 1 Peter. Second, I share some methodological observations on reading intertextually. Third, I present intertextual readings for three passages drawn from 1 Peter that quote specific Old Testament verses. What I hope to demonstrate in these readings is the thoughtful manner in which Peter selected these specific Old Testament passages to support his call for Christians to be faithful to God despite the challenges and hardships they faced. Reading the Old Testament quotes Peter uses in the context of their original narrative units helps us see how these texts provided extended literary support for the message of Peter’s text. Read in this way, each of the quotations taken from the Old Testament seems to be embedded in a surrounding literary context that reinforce Peter’s core message to encourage faith. Literary studies, especially intertextual approaches, are relevant for exploring how scriptures are constructed and interpreted.

**Context for 1 Peter**

The opening passages of 1 Peter provide a clear statement of his purposes for writing:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith — being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire — may be found to
result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (1 Peter 1:3–7, nrs v translation)⁵

Peter seeks to encourage Christians who were young in the faith. Though we do not have final confirming evidence for the makeup of his audience, they were likely pagan converts who were not thoroughly familiar with Israel’s scriptures and literary tradition. Nevertheless, seeking to encourage the flock through scripture, Peter calls upon the witness and words of Old Testament passages to underline, illustrate, or expand upon an idea.⁶ Isaiah is a favorite source text in 1 Peter.⁷

**Methodology**

Literary studies are those that focus on how written texts are read, understood, and interpreted.⁸ One category of literary studies is intertextuality, which “is the dialogue between two or more independent texts”⁹ and is also “the interaction between writers, their texts, and other texts.”¹⁰ One form of intertextuality is literary allusion, which “is specifically a rhetorical device used by writers to give new or additional meaning to their texts”¹¹ by evoking another text. Thus, in order to read the two different texts in a mutually reinforcing way — to read them intertextually — a reader must (1) recognize a quote or allusion in the local text, (2) identify the source of the quoted or alluded text, and (3) then read the local text in light of the quoted or alluded text.¹²

It is important to recognize when engaged in reading intertextually or interpreting intertextually that intertextuality is not about one-to-one correspondences. Intertextuality is more thematic and allusive; it is more playful. Intertextuality intends to broaden interpretive possibilities instead of confining or constraining interpretation to one single normative idea. Because Peter made extensive use of the Old Testament in his epistle, literary and intertextual studies shed light on 1 Peter’s scripture reading and interpretive strategies.¹³ These strategies can help us capture additional meaning and significance that we might miss if we do not understand literary allusion.

**Blueprint for Approach**

I offer three examples to illustrate reading 1 Peter intertextually in connection with Old Testament sources (1 Peter 1:24–25 and Isaiah 40; 1 Peter 2:2–3 and Psalm 34; and 1 Peter 1:16 and Leviticus 19). These intertextual readings are embedded in chapters that strengthen and support the overall message of 1 Peter.
First, I present a text from 1 Peter together with the quoted earlier scripture that creates the sign of the allusion to texts surrounding the Old Testament quote. Second, I provide perspective on the original context of the earlier scripture. Finally, I illustrate how reading the text from 1 Peter in light of the quoted or alluded Old Testament scriptures enhances or supports the meaning of Peter’s overarching message.

What is the Septuagint (LXX) and Why Does it Matter in Our Study of 1 Peter?

When Peter quotes from the Old Testament, he generally makes use of the Greek Septuagint translation (usually abbreviated LXX) of the Old Testament instead of using the Hebrew Bible.14 The LXX was an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible made by Jews living in the Hellenized ancient Near East.15 Due to Alexander the Great's conquest of the ancient Near East (about 330–320 bc), Greek became the primary language for many people in the region.16 Therefore, those who wished to read the Old Testament needed a Greek translation, just like English speakers today rely on English translations of the Old Testament scriptures instead of the original Hebrew.17 Similarly, readers today who wish for the most precise form of textuality between 1 Peter and the Old Testament should work primarily first with the LXX version before working with the Hebrew version.

Examples to Illustrate 1 Peter’s Intertextual Use of Old Testament Scriptures

1 Peter 1:24-25 Quotes Isaiah 40:6-8; and Reading in Context of Isaiah 40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Peter 1:24-25 NRSV</th>
<th>Isaiah 40:6-8 NETS18</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” That word is the good news that was announced to you.</td>
<td>A voice of one saying, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass; all the glory of man is like the flower of grass. The grass has withered, and the flower has fallen, but the word of our God remains forever.19</td>
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For an audience that may feel besieged and persecuted for their new beliefs, the context Isaiah passages preserve are beautiful and meaningful thoughts. When rereading the entirety of Isaiah 40, its relevance to Peter’s message emerges. Peter has tapped into the broad matrix of meaning of Isaiah 40, which has immediate illustrative value for his writing purposes — to build trust in God as temporal and spiritual savior. Peter’s message is enmeshed in the context of an entire chapter (Isaiah 40) devoted to comforting and encouraging the people of God.

Significantly, Isaiah 40 represents the trophy, the turning point where Isaiah transitions from a historical recounting of troubles between Judah and Assyria in Isaiah 36–39 and the series of prophetic calls to repentance in the chapters preceding the historical section (Isaiah 1–35) to speaking in grand words and resounding themes of peace, comfort, and salvation in the mercies of the Lord in Isaiah 40–66. Many scholars have noted the striking tone of this portion of the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 40–66) which “conveys words of consolation and encouragement to his oppressed compatriots in Babylon and promises them salvation and redemption from their captors.”

To underscore this significant theme, the opening verse of Isaiah 40–66, Isaiah 40:1, begins with “Comfort, O comfort my people, says God.” Just as Isaiah speaks comfort to besieged and afflicted Jerusalem, the holy city of God’s chosen people, so too does Peter seek to calm and comfort the early Christians through trust in God.

Reading further in Isaiah 40, several insights arise. Isaiah 40:10–20 says that God is in charge, that no nation can overcome the power and purposes of God, that there are no other gods like him. This passage may have been applicable to early Christians living in the Roman Empire where there may have been growing social expectations that to be a Roman was to accept the emperor as a god. Yet for Christians who accepted the Lord as their God, their pagan neighbors and rulers may have suspected their allegiance to Rome. Such circumstances could have led to problems and suffering for the Christians.

Isaiah 40:21–31 encourages the faithful to remember and recognize that God has no equal and that “those who wait for God shall change their strength; they shall grow wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not hunger” (v. 31). The closing promise of Isaiah 40 is quite fitting for the circumstances that the early Christians encountered as they converted from pagan Roman religions to the new upstart and hence socially suspect religion of Christianity. Given the
thrust of just a few brief thematic connections between 1 Peter and Isaiah 40 identified here, it is no wonder that Peter was drawn to Isaiah 40 (and likely other sections of Isaiah 40–66). The content of that chapter is a seedbed for encouraging words that could strengthen early Christians who faced all sorts of trouble and discouragement.

1 Peter 2:2-3 Quotes Psalm 34:8; and Reading in Context of Psalm 34

| 1 Peter 2:2-3 NRSV | Psalm 34:8 NETS
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation — if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. | O taste, and see that the Lord is kind; happy the man who hopes in him.

In 1 Peter 2:2–3 the author speaks of the importance of seeking pure, spiritual milk. Peter then quotes Psalm 34:8 which states in part, “O taste, and see that the Lord is kind.” The conceptual connection between 1 Peter 2:2–3 and Psalm 34:8 is tantalizing — those who drink the pure milk have tasted of the Lord’s atonement (compare to 1 Nephi 8). Additionally, what further illustrates the author’s ability in making a sustained argument is the context from which he draws his quotes.

Psalm 34 is attributed to David, who is in trouble and distress as a stranger and an outcast both from his own homeland and that of his enemies. David is literally living in a “no-man’s land” in the borderlands between Israel and Philistia. The superscription for this psalm (the contextualizing text at the head of the psalm) identifies the setting: David had been recently thrust out of the presence of king Abimelech of Gath of the Philistines. But why was David living among the Philistines, the historical enemies of the Israelites? 1 Samuel 21, 27–29 provide the most plausible answers. David served in Saul’s court, but Saul’s jealousy and murderous intent against David caused David to flee his native land to seek refuge as a resident alien, or stranger, among the Philistines. In one version of the story (1 Samuel 27–29), David served as a loyal and appreciated mercenary to king Achish of Gath. Eventually, and reluctantly, Achish had to send David away when the Philistines and Israelites were about to engage in war together. In the other version of the story (1 Samuel 21), as soon as David arrived in Gath, thinking he would find refuge from Saul, he found animosity and threats from the
Philistines (David was after all an Israelite, the enemies of the Philistines). So he feigned madness and then fled the presence of Achish.

Now a curious thing has occurred. The superscription to Psalm 34 says that David fled from Abimelech. Yet the stories in 1 Samuel speak of Achish. Did David flee from two different kings? It doesn’t seem likely. Two alternatives are plausible. First, “Abimelech” (a name which likely means “Father of the king” in Hebrew) could have been another name or title for Achish. If Achish had a son designated to eventually ascend the throne as king, which was a commonplace in the ancient Near East, that would make Achish an “Abimelech,” the father of the king. A second possibility is that the author of Psalms 34 changed the named from Achish to Abimelech so that readers of Psalm 34 would read it intertextually with Genesis 20:1–16 and Genesis 26:1–33. Why might a change like this be made? In those chapters Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 20) and Isaac and Rebecca (Genesis 26) were living as strangers and resident aliens in a foreign land (what was later to become the land of Israel, although when they first arrived, it was a foreign land to them). There was a king named Abimelech who took Sarah from Abraham and Rebecca from Isaac. This was a source of deep distress and struggle for the ancient patriarchs and their wives. One could even say Sarah and Abraham exercised faith, perspective, and commitment to God through righteous living as a way to endure and overcome oppression or persecution.

These are important narratives that ancient writers return to regularly, creating allusions across scriptures that invite multi-layered intertextual reading: For 1 Peter to be read in light of Psalm 34 as related to 1 Samuel 21, 27–29 and Genesis 20 and 26. For example, if we read these scriptures intertextually, we see David as repeating the steps of Abraham and that Peter’s audience should likewise follow the faithful examples of David and Abraham. Furthermore, such an intertextual reading means that Psalm 34 is more than just a simple hymn of praise to God. Psalm 34 is a hymnic retelling and representation of God’s faithful servants that later readers could seek to emulate.

Significantly, all of these scriptures (Psalm 34; 1 Samuel 21, 27–29; Genesis 20, 26) deal with a chosen servant of God who is living as a stranger or sojourner in a land and is dealing with some distress that is brought on because of their neighbors who do not treat them with full respect and honor. In all of these scriptures, the chosen ones are really at the mercy of the surrounding peoples and their cultures and customs. In all of these cases, God creates a way for the distress to be resolved and temporal salvation (symbolizing eventual spiritual salvation) to be
delivered to the faithful chosen ones. This reading of the text suggests that Peter was writing to an audience who were potentially dealing with these same kinds of issues, underscoring why such an appeal to these scriptural traditions is viable. If Peter did read these Old Testament passages intertextually in the way suggested, this speaks of Peter’s competent scriptural understanding.

Perhaps Peter calls to memory Abraham, Isaac, and David, three of the most important heroes in the Israelite tradition because they themselves were strangers and resident aliens, they were treated poorly by their neighbors, and they had core aspects of their family and the promises of God potentially fall into jeopardy. These heroes remained steadfast, trusted in the Lord, lived the laws, and were morally upright, so no one had a reason to accuse them of anything (which may be allusively related to 1 Peter’s admonitions in 2:11–17; 3:12–17; 4:12–19). After a trial of faith and righteousness for these biblical heroes, God eventually fulfilled his promises to them. The moral character of these biblical heroes and the positive outcome from God to them recorded in the Bible may have influenced Peter to tap into these stories, intertextually, so as to encourage faithfulness among distressed Christians.

The following passages from Psalm 34 show David’s confidence in God’s care and concern. Note that we can substitute David’s name for any other individual or group who seeks God’s sustenance in times of trial:

- God will deliver David (or Peter’s audience) from fear. “An angel of the Lord will encamp around those who fear him and will rescue them” (Psalm 34:7).
- God will save David (or Peter’s audience) from every trouble. “I sought the Lord, and he hearkened to me, and from all my sojournings [being a stranger or resident alien in a foreign land] he rescued me” (Psalm 34:4).
- God will protect those who worship him (whether David or Peter’s audience). “The righteous cried, and the Lord listened to them, and from all their afflictions he rescued them” (Psalm 34:17).
- God will provide for all the needs of those who worship him (whether David or Peter’s audience). “The Lord will redeem his slaves’ souls, and none of those who hope in him will go wrong” (Psalm 34:22).
- It is noteworthy that the LXX reading of Psalm 34:22 uses the Greek word *doulos*, which is usually translated as “servant”...
in the KJV, but is more appropriately translated as “slave.” In the Greco-Roman world, slaves were an important cog in the economic and social order. Furthermore, we know that they also constituted some of the earliest Christians. Therefore, 1 Peter alluding to Psalm 34:22 and its reference to slaves being redeemed by the Lord would be appropriate since slaves were unquestionably part of Peter’s audience (see 1 Peter 2:18–25).

Peter only quotes a small portion of Psalm 34. However, the entire psalm seems to reverberate with consolation, comfort, and encouragement to trust the Lord no matter the challenging circumstances. This significant Old Testament message with its resounding call to faithfulness in the face of difficulty is an excellent source text employed by Peter to encourage trust in the Lord.

**1 Peter 1:16 Quotes Leviticus 19:2; and Reading in Context of Leviticus 19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Peter 1:16 NRSV</th>
<th>Leviticus 19:2 NETS³³</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”</td>
<td>Speak to the congregation of the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them: You shall be holy, for I am holy, the Lord your God.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

We’ll explore one final example of how Peter selects a single Old Testament quote from within a larger matrix of passages that reinforce the quoted text. In 1 Peter 1:16 he calls upon the early Christians to be holy like God, quoting from Leviticus 19:2. This verse is part of a subsection of 1 Peter (1:13–21) that has been summarized by one scholar as dealing with “hope and holy conduct of the children of God.”³⁴

Leviticus 19 focuses on the need for ritual and moral holiness, the basic building blocks for creating a just society and for establishing a prosperous relationship with fellowmen and God. Leviticus 19 is part of the larger “Holiness Code” that scholars have identified as a major subsection of the book of Leviticus.³⁵ In fact, Leviticus 19 is considered to be “the kernel of the Law” and that all “the essentials of the Torah … are summarized therein.”³⁶ That is, if one only had a single chapter from the Law (also called the Torah, the Pentateuch, or the Five Books of Moses) to choose from for moral guidance, Leviticus 19 would be the most encompassing and representative chapter of the entire Law.³⁷ In 1
Peter 2:13–3:9, Peter delivers a “household code” which may be functionally analogous to the “Holiness Code” of Leviticus.38 The “household code” of 1 Peter establishes for Christians the expectations for living within the political and social order of their society and within their households without having to compromise their commitment to Christ.

Reading 1 Peter and Leviticus 19 intertextually, one sees that the themes in 1 Peter are echoed in Leviticus 19. Peter is seeking for his people to be holy, even in the face of trials and troubles. As a new people born into a community of brotherhood through baptism, God expected them to live after the manner of holiness. Peter provides practical advice and moral guidance for these early Christians living within the Roman Empire on how to achieve this holiness. The intertext created by this quotation in 1 Peter makes accessible, to those willing to explore further, the memory and morality of Leviticus 19 by quoting just one verse (Leviticus 19:2). In this way, he provides structure and additional encouragement to Christians on how they should practice holy living.

Leviticus 19 begins with a call from God for the people to be holy as He is holy. God then details many of the ways in which the people of Israel must practice holiness. Elements for comparing 1 Peter and Leviticus 19 are included in the following pages. Select passages from Leviticus 19 are placed centered in bold; these are calls to action for Israel to demonstrate holiness. Below the bold centered passages from Leviticus 19 are my suggestions of potentially related passages in 1 Peter. The connections are not always a one-to-one correspondence; sometimes the thematic connection between one passage in Leviticus 19 and another passage in 1 Peter is based on a broader conceptual link. Nevertheless, the totality of the interconnections should demonstrate how prevalent the message of Leviticus 19 — be holy as God is holy — seems to be intertextually laced into 1 Peter.

**Passages From Leviticus 19 (LXX English Translation) and Thematically Related Passages in 1 Peter (NRSV)**

Leviticus 19:11 You shall not steal.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may be see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.
Leviticus 19:11 You shall not deal falsely.

Leviticus 19:11 You shall not falsely accuse your neighbor

1 Peter 2:1 Rid yourselves, therefor, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 3:10–11 For “Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.”

1 Peter 3:13–14 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

Leviticus 19:12 You shall not profane the name of your God.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Leviticus 19:13 You shall not act unjustly towards your neighbor.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

1 Peter 3:8–9 Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary,
repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called — that you might inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:13-14 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated.

1 Peter 4:2–3 So as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

1 Peter 5:5 In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

**Leviticus 19:1.3 You shall not plunder**

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

**Leviticus 19:13 The wages of a day laborer shall not rest overnight with you until morning**

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 4:4 They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme.
Leviticus 19:14 You shall not speak badly of the deaf and put an obstacle before the blind.

1 Peter 2:1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

Leviticus 19:14 You shall fear the Lord.

1 Peter 3:14 But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated.

Leviticus 19:15 You shall not do something unjust in judgment.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

Leviticus 19:15 With justice you shall judge your neighbor.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.
Leviticus 19:16 You shall not go around in deceit among your nation.

1 Peter 2:1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 2:16 As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil.

1 Peter 3:10–11 For “Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.”

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

Leviticus 19:16 You shall not conspire against the blood of your neighbor.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 4:14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Leviticus 19:17 You shall not hate in your mind your kin.

1 Peter 1:22 Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.
1 Peter 3:8–9 Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called — that you might inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:13–14 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

**Leviticus 19:17 In reproof you shall reprove your neighbor, and you shall not assume guilt because of him.**

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

**Leviticus 19:18 And your own hand shall not take vengeance.**

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 3:9 Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called — that you might inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:13–14 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.
Leviticus 19:18 And you shall not be angry against the sons of your people.

1 Peter 2:1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 4:14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Leviticus 19:18 And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

1 Peter 1:22 Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

1 Peter 3:8–9 Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called — that you might inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 4:8–10 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

1 Peter 5:5 In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”
Leviticus 19:26 And you shall not practice ornithomancy or divination by means of birds.

1 Peter 1:14 Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance.

1 Peter 4:2–3 So as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.

Leviticus 19:28 And you shall not make any incisions in your body for a soul and make any tattooed characters upon you.

1 Peter 4:2 So as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.

Leviticus 19:29 Do not profane your daughter by making her commit fornication, and the land will not fornicate.

1 Peter 4:2–3 So as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.

Leviticus 19:30 You shall keep my Sabbaths and be respectful of my sanctuaries.

1 Peter 2:11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.
Leviticus 19:31 You shall not follow after ventriloquists, and you shall not attach yourselves to enchanters, to be thoroughly polluted by them.

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Leviticus 19:33–34 (KJV) And if a stranger [resident alien] sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

1 Peter 1:22 Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.

1 Peter 2:11–12 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

1 Peter 3:8–9 Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called — that you might inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 4:8–10 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to
one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

Leviticus 19:35 You shall not do what is unjust in judgment in measures and in standard weights and in balances.  
1 Peter 2:1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.  
1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

Leviticus 19:36 You shall have just balances and just standard weights.  
1 Peter 2:1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.  
1 Peter 2:12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

Leviticus 19:37 And you shall keep my entire law and all my ordinances, and you shall do them; it is I who am the Lord your God.  
1 Peter 1:16 For it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

The extensiveness of the references suggests that Peter understands the thrust and purpose of Leviticus 19. By quoting Leviticus 19:2, 1 Peter may invite an intertextual reading of his epistle with Leviticus 19, to read these two documents in companionship for mutual benefit, understanding, and support, though, to be clear, not to encourage adherence to the Law of Moses. If the early Christians of Peter’s day read 1 Peter intertextually with Leviticus 19, they would have understood themselves as a new Israel, as a people called apart to be holy. Christian readers today can engage in such intertextual reading for similar purposes.

Conclusion
Like other ancient Jewish-Christian writers, Peter is an artful master of scripture. Peter exhorts the saints to faithfulness, underscoring this clarion call by careful and subtle appeal to Old Testament scriptures. Peter invites early Christians to trust God. That same invitation is available to modern readers. Perhaps part of the activation of faith for modern readers who understand intertextuality may involve searching beyond the boundaries of the Old Testament passages Peter quotes in order to drink deeply from the river of larger meaning and significance where these flowers of doctrinal and hortatory beauty were plucked.

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**Endnotes**

1. Intertextuality is the process of reading, exploring, investigating, and revealing the relationship between texts.

2. The question of 1 Peter authorship has not been satisfactorily resolved, I believe. It is not the main intention of this article to attempt to resolve that question. For simplicity sake, I refer to the author of 1 Peter as Peter, without trying to signal a final answer on the question of authorship.


5 See also 1 Peter 4:12; 5:6–10.

6 A notable scholar of intertextuality in scripture made a statement about Paul that describes 1 Peter well. The quote has been slightly modified: “The vocabulary and cadences of Scripture — particularly of the LXX — are imprinted deeply on Paul’s mind, and the great stories of Israel continue to serve for him as a fund of symbols and metaphors that condition his perception of the world, of God’s promised deliverance of his people, and of his own identity and calling. His faith, in short, is one whose articulation is inevitably intertextual in character, and Israel’s Scripture is the ‘determinate subtext that plays a constitutive role’ in shaping his literary production.” Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 16.


9 Justin Langford, Defending Hope: Semiotics and Intertextuality in 1 Peter (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), xvi.


13 I’ve chosen to focus on literary and intertextual approaches even though there are many theoretical and methodological approaches for studying scripture, see for example Robert L. Webb and Betsy Baumann-Martin, eds., Reading First Peter with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of First Peter (London: T & T Clark, 2007); Stanley E. Porter, ed., Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006); Christopher Gosden, Anthropology and Archaeology: A Changing Perspective (London: Routledge, 1999); Louis J. Lawrence, Reading with Anthropology: Exhibiting Aspects of New Testament Religion (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005); and a myriad of other approaches.

14 “What text type does the New Testament prefer when citing the Old Testament? The substantial majority of these [Old Testament] quotes and allusions [in the New Testament] reflect the Septuagint. … That the LXX was the principal Bible of the early church can hardly be refuted if one is to judge on the basis of the text form of the Old Testament most frequently used throughout the entire New Testament in quotations.” Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., The Uses of the Old Testament in the New (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 4–5; It is “clear that Peter was steeped in Old Testament thought and used


17 Knowing something of the LXX, one gets a sense of the experience that many ancient Jews and Christians had with scripture, analogous to the experience that LDS members have with scripture due to their reliance on the King James English translation of the Bible.


19 In the text leading up to these verses, Peter reminds the Christians of their spiritual birth through the imperishable seed of God’s everlasting word. Peter is highlighting the responsibilities and promises inherent in the baptismal covenant. To illustrate the enduring nature of God’s word, Peter then quotes Isaiah 40:6–8,
which explains the difference between natural/earthly seeds, represented by grass and flowers, and eternal seed represented by the word of the Lord. In concluding the thought, Peter explains that the gospel is that enduring word. Moyise, “Isaiah in 1 Peter,” see especially pp. 176–77.


21 In the classical Greek sense of the word, the trophy was where a losing army threw down their weapons and turned to flee when being overpowered. The discarded weapons become trophies of victory for the conquering army. These trophies represented a decisive turning point. So too in Isaiah, chapter 40 represents a decisive turning point, in this instance the victory of God’s mercies and comfort.

22 Paul, Isaiah 40–66, 127.


24 Compare Isaiah 40 to God’s words of perspective and comfort in D&C 121 to Joseph Smith when he languished in Liberty Jail. The words in D&C 121:7–8 provide particular perspective in the midst of suffering, “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.”

25 “It could well have been the similarity of the precarious situations faced by both authors and the power of Isaiah’s response that inspired [1 Peter’s] frequent use of [Isaiah]. As Isaiah addressed Judean exiles in Babylon (43:14; 47:1; 48:14, 20) as a people reproached, reviled (51:7; 53:1–12), and refined by fire (48:10), so our author form his Babylon (5:13) addresses strangers and resident aliens (1:1, 17; 2:11), harried and abused in their society (2:12; 3:9, 13–17; 4:4, 12–19; 5:9) and likewise tested in the fire of affliction (1:6; 4:12). As the exodus and God’s redemptive liberation of his people from darkness to light provided a model for Isaiah (40:3–5; 42:6, 7, 13, 16; 43:1–21; 52:3, 9), so also for 1 Peter (1:13,
18–19; 2:9). As the covenant and Israel’s divine election were for Isaiah’s message grounds for confidence, hope, and praise (Isaiah 41:8, 9; 42:1, 10–13; 43:10, 21; 44:1–2; 49:7; 54:10), so too 1 Peter (1:1; 2:4–10). Isaiah’s optimistic appraisal, to all appearances, of a dire situation likewise is matched by that of the Petrine author. As Isaiah celebrates the glory of God (40:5; 41:16; 42:8, 12, etc.), so too our author (2:12; 4:11, 13, 14; 5:10). And as Isaiah’s proclamation of good news (40:9; 52:7) and encouragement (40:1; 42:10–13) is permeated by a note of joy and exultation (41:16; 49:13; 51:3, 11; 54:1–17; 55:1–13), so too the message of 1 Peter (1:6–8; 2:9; 4:13).” Elliott, 1 Peter, 393.


30 David is probably the exception here. Still, even then, an intertextual reading of 1 Peter, Psalms 34, and Genesis 20 and 26 provides examples (Abraham and Isaac) and non-examples (David) of the outcomes of moral living.


34 Elliott, *1 Peter*, 354.


36 Elliott, *1 Peter*, 363.

37 “The section of Leviticus (ch. 19) that contains these words occupies the central position in Leviticus and therefore in the Pentateuch. … The command regarding holiness articulates the fundamental principle underlying the legislation of the Holiness Code (Lev 17–26): Israel’s sanctification by and union with the holy God who delivered this people from Egypt (19:36; 22:33) and its separation from the contagious pollution of the Gentiles (18:1–5; 20:23). This principle of the Levitical Holiness Code — association with and imitation of the holiness of God the Holy One — also entails dissociation from all who are unholy. It thus has social as well as religious significance in 1 Peter as in Leviticus, and in 1 Peter undergirds the dissociative stance implied in conversion and advocated in v. 15 as well as 4:2–4.” Elliott, *1 Peter*, 363.

38 Other household codes in the New Testament have been found in Ephesians 5:22–6:5; Colossians 3:18–4:1; 1 Timothy 2:1, 8; 3:1, 8; 5:17; 6:1; and Titus 2:1–10. See also David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).
Abstract: Repentance is considered one of the foundational principles of the gospel. As demonstrated in this article, there is a harmony in how repentance is portrayed in the Old Testament, New Testament, and Book of Mormon. In all three books the principle of repentance is shown to be a two-part process of turning away from sin and returning to the Lord through good works. Just as faith has been called “active belief,” repentance could be called “active remorse,” and must be accompanied by good works to be effective in our lives. The goal and end result of sincere repentance is a turning to the Lord with the whole heart, enabling us to return to the presence of God.

As children in our LDS Primary classes we were taught that repentance was a four-step process, also known as the 4-Rs: 1. Recognize the sin, 2. Feel remorse, 3. Make restitution, and 4. Resolve not to do it again. While this may serve a valuable purpose in teaching the doctrine of repentance to the children of the Church, as we progress in our knowledge of the gospel it is important that we develop a deeper understanding of this principle. This paper addresses a broader definition of repentance and demonstrates the doctrinal agreement of the principle of complete repentance as taught in the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

The word repent, in its various forms (repenting, repented, repentance, etc.) shows up with differing rates of recurrence within the scriptures. Repent appears with much greater frequency in the Book of Mormon than it does in the Old or New Testaments. If one places all three books on the same footing by normalizing the data¹, the disparity

¹ Normalizing the data creates a common denominator by assigning the same number of pages as the current version of the LDS Old Testament (1,184 pages), to the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. The “Normalized” column in Appendix 1 shows how many occurrences of repent would theoretically occur.
between the Book of Mormon and the Bible becomes even more apparent. Appendix 1 shows that the normalized usage of *repent* in the Book of Mormon is four times greater than in the New Testament and nearly eighteen times greater than in the Old Testament.

Several factors contribute to this disparity in usage, including that the King James translators did not provide us with the *best* translations for Hebrew and Greek words rendered as *repent* in the Old and New Testaments. The Oxford English dictionary (OED) defines *repent* merely as a feeling — primarily one of contrition, regret, or sorrow for something that one has done or omitted to do, including sins. What is missing from this definition is any hint of restitution — righting the wrong — or even a resolution to abandon the act, the final two Rs of the 4-Rs. Webster’s 1828 dictionary agrees with the OED’s definition.

The cause of this deficiency is a fundamental flaw at the root of the word *repent*. It is derived from the Latin *repoenitet* and simply means “to be sorry again.” “The Vulgate has it ‘do penance’ [*paenitentiam agite*], and Wycliff has followed that,” which led to the defective word continuing into the KJV. Biblical commentators have long agreed that *repent* is a very unfortunate choice — a mistranslation — for the original Hebrew and Greek words. John A. Broadus added:

> This Latin word, penitence, apparently connected by etymology with pain, signifies grief or distress, and is rarely extended to a change of purpose, thus corresponding to the Hebrew word [*nacham*] which we render ‘repent,’ but not

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3 Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language, Noah Webster 1828, Original Facsimile Edition* (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 2010), s.v. “repent.” Webster did not paginate this text, but the volume and signature numbers are printed at the bottom of every fourth leaf.
corresponding to the terms employed in Old Testament and New Testament exhortations.8

To simplify the narration and navigation of this paper we have divided the material into three principal sections: Old Testament, New Testament, and Book of Mormon. We have allowed for some crossover of scriptural passages within each section to enable a more fluid discussion of the subject matter.

Section I — Repentance in the Old Testament

Nacham נחם — “Repent” in the KJV Old Testament

The Hebrew verb nacham (נחם) is the word that is most often translated as repent in the KJV Old Testament. Among its varied connotations, nacham means to be sorry, to be moved to pity, to grieve, to console or comfort oneself, or to have compassion for others.9 The word repent occurs only 45 times in the KJV Old Testament, and 42 of those are derived from nacham. However, “it should be noted that ‘repent’ is not always the best translation for the Hebrew verb nacham, but it is the translation used by the King James Version.”10 While nacham involves feelings of remorse, sorrow or grief, it does not suggest any corrective actions. In this sense it is a good fit for the OED’s definition of repent and may explain why the KJV translators rendered it that way. But nacham does not measure up with the 4 Rs from our Primary lesson nor does it come close to adequately describing the complete Old Testament doctrine of repentance.

Another problem with the translation of nacham as repent is that 83% of the time (35 out of 42 occurrences), it is God who is doing the repenting in the Old Testament (See Appendix 2). “Can God repent? Can he change? This is the question. Virtually all Christian theologians would say, ‘No. He is the Unchangeable One.’ So what does this Hebrew expression mean?”11

8 John A. Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society, 1888), 34.
10 Daniele Pitts, In God I Do Not Have a Past (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2010), 18.
In its most basic sense, nacham only means to grieve or regret. The very first occurrence of the word repent in the KJV is in Genesis 6:6, where we read, “And it repented [nacham] the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” Concerning this verse, Ulmer explained, “The English word repented is actually not the most accurate translation of the Hebrew word. The word translated as ‘repented’ in the King James Version is best translated as grieved.”

The New International Version (NIV) renders this verse as, “The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.”

If Not Nacham, then What?

Of the 45 total occurrences of repent in the KJV Old Testament, three are derived from a different Hebrew verb — shuv (שׁוּב). Among its several definitions, shuv primarily means to turn back or return. The Encyclopaedia Judaica explains that true repentance is much more than mere remorse, or nacham. Real repentance involves concrete action on our part to abandon our error and transform our lives for the better:

Inner contrition must be followed by outward acts; remorse must be translated into deeds. Two substages are involved in this process: first, the negative one of ceasing to do evil (Isaiah 33:15; Psalms 15; 24:4) and then, the positive step of doing good (Isaiah 1:17; 58:5ff.; Jeremiah 7:3; 26:13; Amos 5:14–15; Psalms 34:15–16; 37:27). Again, the richness of the biblical language used to describe man’s active role in the process testifies to its centrality, e.g., incline the heart to the Lord (Joshua 24:23), make oneself a new heart (Ezekiel 18:31), circumcise the heart (Jeremiah 4:4), wash the heart (Jeremiah 4:14), and break one’s fallow ground (Hosea 10:12) However, all these expressions are subsumed and summarized by one verb which dominates the penitential literature of the Bible, שׁוּב (shuv, shwv).

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12 Kenneth C. Ulmer, Passionate God (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2013), not paginated (Chapter 5).
13 Shuv (שׁוּב) is sometimes rendered shuwb, shwv, or shub.
While nacham plays a small role in the Hebrew definition of repentance, shuv is the lead actor. Indeed, shuv (turn or return) is the term that stands out in the repentance vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible, even though the KJV translators rarely rendered it so. “It is noticeable that the prophets nowhere exhort men to ‘repent’ (though telling them to mourn and weep over their sins), but use the simple and practical word ‘turn.’” The two substages of the repentance process — ceasing to do evil, and doing good — demonstrate that repentance is not just a single, but a double turn: shuv + shuv, hereafter shown as shuv₂. “This root [shuv] combines in itself both requisites of repentance: to turn from the evil and to turn to the good” [bracketed text ours]. Shuv shows up with great frequency in the Old Testament, and carries with it many different connotations:

The root-verb שָׁבֵע (shub) generally means to turn back or to return. This very common verb (HAW Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says it’s the twelfth most frequently occurring verb in the Old Testament) is used in the regular, expectable sense of physically turning around and going back to some place (Numbers 23:5, Judges 3:19). But [most significantly] it refers to a mental or spiritual returning, away from evil and vice, and towards virtue and God (Numbers 14:43, Hosea 6:1).

Although shuv is used more than one thousand times in the Hebrew Bible, the great majority of those do not represent repentance in any way. For example, “they returned [shuv] from searching of the land after forty days” (Numbers 13:25). We excluded all such passages from our study. Even so, we were able to identify 176 occurrences of the use of shuv (or one of its derivatives) in which the usage reflects either turning toward sin and away from God, or turning away from sin and toward God. Some of the important derivatives of shuv include meshuvah (משובה, backsliding), shovav (שובה, backsliding), and teshuvah (תשובה, answer or return).

Numerous passages from the Hebrew Bible could be cited to demonstrate the shuv₂ principle, but we have limited our selection to only a small sampling:

16 Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, 34.

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*Spendlove, Turning to the Lord With the Whole Heart* • 181
Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return [shuv] unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55:7)

And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return [shuv] unto me with their whole heart. (Jeremiah 24:7)

It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return [shuv] every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. (Jeremiah 36:3)

Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent [shuv], and turn [shuv] yourselves from your idols; and turn away [shuv] your faces from all your abominations. (Ezekiel 14:6)

Returning to God

There are several verbs in the Hebrew language that involve the idea of turning, including panah (panya), and sur (سار), but it is shuv that most properly expresses the idea of returning to God from our sinful ways.19

The first occurrence of shuv in the Bible is in Genesis 3:19, following the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. In this verse, Adam was told that because of his transgression he would “return unto the ground” from where he was “taken,” and “unto dust shalt thou return.” Newman provided a wonderful explanation of this verse:

The metaphor that most fully captures the process of repentance is that of returning, most often expressed in the verb shuv. In its most basic sense, this designates the process of going back to our origins or returning to our proper, natural place. Powerful examples of this concept are found throughout the Bible.

By the sweat of your brow
Shall you get bread to eat,
Until you return [shuvkha] to the ground—

For from it you were taken.
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return \[tashuv\]. (Genesis 3:19)
As it was,
And the lifebreath returns \[tashuv\] to God
Who bestowed it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

This idea of something being restored to its primary or original location is frequently extended in the prophetic writings to the idea of the people of Israel being returned by God to their land\[bracketed text in original\].

Pamela Gottfried skillfully added to this notion of returning to our place or origin:

In the context of repentance, it would not be logical to return to one’s previous behavior. \textit{Teshuvah} \[repentance, derived from the verb \textit{shuv}\] cannot be about returning to repeat our mistakes. Instead, its essence could be to return to a more pure state of being, to return to the Garden of Eden before mistakes were ever invented. We long to return to a simpler time, when we were free to be human beings yet unburdened by the need to repair a broken world and our broken selves. \textit{Teshuvah} is a return to the beginning when the world was whole, when we were first created, blameless and without sin. It is a return to a wholeness of the spirit; it is a rebirth of the soul.\[21\]

Hugh Nibley contributed to the idea of a metaphorical return to the Garden — of going back to the presence of God:

\textit{Zion} is a \textit{return} to a former state of excellence. The gospel message today is that we must prepare ourselves to \textit{return} to the Garden again, by the wisdom of hard experience. But he [Adam] \textit{was to return}. It is in that state and in those paradisiacal surroundings that he is to spend the eternities. The saints in every dispensation have always worked and prayed for the day when God “shall open the gates of paradise, and [he] shall remove the threatening sword against Adam, and he shall

give to the saints to eat from the tree of life, ... and all the
saints shall clothe themselves with joy.”22 [emphasis added]

Regarding the eventual return of Adam and Eve to the Garden, Nibley also observed:

One commonly thinks of “Cherubim and the flaming sword”
as posted to keep Adam and Eve from returning to the garden
— that may be so, temporarily, but eventually they are to
return; Paradise must be regained; indeed, the purpose of
the ordinances, especially of the Opening of the Mouth, is to
make the return to the garden possible.23 [emphasis original]

Nibley further explained that according to the Pistis Sophia, the
time will come “when the sword will be removed for Adam and he may
reach forth his hand and partake of the fruit of the tree of life.”24 Joseph
Fielding McConkie added that the Garden of Eden is “the archetype of
our temples,” and that it was from there that Adam and Eve “ventured
into the lone and dreary world that they and their posterity might prove
themselves worthy to return again to that divine presence.”25 [emphasis
added]

Returning to God from our wicked ways — often expressed as
a return to the Garden of Eden — is at the heart of the principle of
repentance, and is embodied in the word shuv. “Even from the days of
your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept
them. Return [shuv] unto me, and I will return [shuv] unto you, saith
the LORD of hosts” (Mal 3:7). Transgression drove our parents from the
Garden, and it is only through repentance that we, their posterity, can
return. It is striking that shuv incorporates the whole of the fall and the
redemption of mankind — shuv is both the problem (turning to sin) and
the solution (turning back to God). Our personal fall is the result of our
turning toward transgression, while redemption becomes effective in
our lives only when we turn from sin back to God: “Return [shuv] unto
me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isaiah 44:22). It is only by applying the
principle of shuv (complete repentance) in our lives that we can return
to the presence of God — to our place of origin.

22 Hugh Nibley, Approaching Zion (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989), 11.
23 Hugh Nibley, The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian
Endowment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975), 181.
24 Ibid., 181.
25 Joseph Fielding McConkie, Gospel Symbolism (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft,
1985), 258.
Teshuvah

Teshuvah is the Hebrew term which perfectly embodies the concept of shuv — turning from sin and turning back to God.

Sin requires repentance, which in Hebrew is תשובה (teshuvah — literally “return,” from the verb שבוב — shuv, meaning “to turn”). In Hebrew thought, therefore, the whole person turns from the path of sin and is redirected toward God.26

Although the word teshuvah is found eight times in the Hebrew Bible, it is never used as a reference to repentance. It is used almost exclusively as a way of alluding to the passing of one year to the next (see 1 Kings 20:26). Even though the usage of teshuvah to denote repentance is extra-biblical, “it is derived from the vocabulary of the Bible,” and it “echoes the opinion of Talmudic authority.”27 Over time, the term teshuvah developed into such an important principle in Judaism that the phrase Baal Teshuvah (master of return) came to signify a repentant sinner, although today it is mostly used to refer to those who were “formerly estranged from or ignorant of full Jewish observance, who have now returned to the fully Orthodox way of life.”28

It is remarkable that in the Hebrew Bible the noun repentance is not found “but merely the verb,”29 underscoring that teshuvah is a process rather than an outcome:

This grammatical preference transmits the idea that teshuvah is not “a quality which man could possess as his own; there are no converted men in the Old Testament but only men who are forever being converted.”30

In other words, we can repent, but while in this life we can never be fully repented. Since we are continually turning away from God through sins of omission and commission, in both large and small ways, our challenge is to live our lives in a constant state of returning back toward God. Each of us when baptized made a covenant to serve God and keep

27 The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1907, Volume 10, 376, s.v. “Repentance.”
his commandments (see Mosiah 18:10). “A transgressor who violates the covenant with God ruptures the God-person relationship. Teshuvah is the process by which this break is mended and the covenant renewed.”

In addition to mending the broken covenant, sincere teshuvah makes the atonement effective in our lives:

Repentance demands a sincere determination to change one’s mind and behavior — transformation, not just lip service. Teshuvah, one of the Hebrew words for repentance, literally means “return,” describing an experience that’s meant to bring about a return to one’s true self. With this recognition of our atonement — our “at-one-ment” — with God, the letting go of sins becomes a daily process of reconciliation and renewal.

Meshuvah — The Antithesis of Teshuvah

Meshuvah (משובה), also derived from the root shuv (שוב), is a Hebrew noun with the exact opposite meaning from teshuvah. Instead of returning to God, it means to be turned away from God, and is most frequently translated as backsliding in the KJV. This word is used twelve times in the Old Testament, and Jeremiah is responsible for nine of those. Predictably, Jeremiah often paired meshuvah with shuv in his exhortations: “Return [shuv], thou backsliding [meshuvah] Israel, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 3:12). Whenever Jeremiah uses meshuvah, it always “denotes a negative action of faithlessness, treachery and apostasy.” As we previously noted, the noun teshuvah is not used in the Old Testament repentance vocabulary, indicating that in our weakened mortal state we cannot be in a state of “complete return” to God, but only of “returning.” However, the fact that meshuvah is used shows that we can exist in a “turned away,” or apostate condition.

Teshuvah and Good Works

Many Old Testament passages plainly teach us that turning away from sin is an important step in teshuvah but that as a solitary act it is

insufficient. We must also incorporate good deeds or good works into our lives to fully activate the atonement.

Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. (2 Kings 17:13)

Return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. (Jeremiah 18:11)

But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. (Ezekiel 18:21)

Talmudic authority tells us that “redemption is dependent upon repentance and good deeds.” Buber explained that turning back to God is an action, not just an intellectual or emotional event – it is “something concrete and actual.” Good actions show that our teshuvah is sincere and real because they are at the heart of our return to God:

Teshuvah through maasim tovim, literally “returning through good deeds.” Teshuvah is often translated as “repentance,” but its literal meaning, “turning” or “returning,” is far more revealing. “Repent” means to feel remorse, but teshuvah means to use that feeling of remorse to return to God and godliness. The way of returning to God is through acts of godliness, maasim tovim, especially acts of selfless kindness.

Genuine teshuvah is an holistic approach to repentance (turning away from sin) and reformation (turning back to God). Without the reformation, teshuvah is at best half complete, and we remain lost in our spiritual wilderness.

[Teshuvah] does not mean merely a recommitment to “good values” that are so abstract that they function only to make us feel good when we espouse them. Real teshuvah means

34 The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1907, Volume 17, 152, s.v. “Redemption.”
35 Buber, Two Types of Faith, 26.
36 Rami Shapiro, Tanya, the Masterpiece of Hasidic Wisdom (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2010), 100.
determining in considerable detail exactly what we are going to do differently in our lives.37

**Turning to God with the Whole Heart**

Whether turning toward God (teshuvah) or away from him (meshuvah), both Jeremiah and Ezekiel often use the heart as a symbol for the internal transformation accompanying these actions. Jeremiah accused the people of having a “revolting and a rebellious heart” (Jeremiah 5:23), and implored them to “wash thine heart from wickedness” (Jeremiah 4:14). The Lord told his people that after a period of rebellion “ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). He also promised his people that if they sought him with their whole heart he would “give them an heart to know me” (Jeremiah 24:7), and that he would “give them one heart, and one way” (Jeremiah 32:39).

Referring to the last days, the Lord further promised with an oath that He would put His “law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33). The Lord also promised that He would “give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19). Ezekiel encouraged the people to turn away from sin and to prepare themselves to return to God with a new heart: “Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit” (Ezekiel 18:31).

The reason why these texts are relevant is that the transformation of the heart of the people effects the reestablishment of their relationship with YHWH in the same manner as their repentance does.38

Returning our heart to its natural state parallels our return to the Garden of Eden, our place of origin. This turning or transformation of the heart is a valuable metaphor because it effectively conveys the feeling of reconnectivity with God for those who return to Him. Ezekiel spoke of changing our heart of stone back to flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). This “transformation is described as a change from an unnatural state of existence, characterised by a heart of stone, into the natural state,

characterised by a heart of flesh.”39 This restoration to the heart’s natural state is essential because it represents turning away from an “unnatural state” and returning to the God-given fleshy heart that is receptive to the feelings of love that God has for his children.

This “concept of a wholehearted turning to God is widespread in the preaching of the OT prophets,”40 and is evidence of real teshuvah. Modern prophets, including Joseph Smith, have taught this same principle:

Thus you see, my dear brother, the willingness of our heavenly Father to forgive sins, and restore to favor all those who are willing to humble themselves before Him, and confess their sins, and forsake them, and return to Him with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy, to serve him to the end.41

Agency and the Power of Teshuvah

In the LDS canon of scripture, the first recorded words of the Lord to Adam after placing him in the Garden of Eden were:

> Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee. (Moses 3:16-17)

Adam was free to follow God’s course or choose some other way. Couched in this communication is the unspoken idea that as well as the ability to turn away from God, man was also given the ability to turn back to him. “The motion of turning implies that sin is not an ineradicable stain but a straying from the right path, and that by the effort of turning, a power God has given to all men, the sinner can redirect his destiny.”42

Teshuvah is central to the principle of agency. Without the power to turn back, our ability to turn away from God would counteract God’s work and glory “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Only with sincere teshuvah can God’s mercy and grace become effective in our lives through the act of divine forgiveness. “Man has been endowed by God with the power of ‘turning.’ He can turn from

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39 Scheuer, The Return of YHWH, 120.
41 Joseph Smith, History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, volume 2, 315.
evil to the good, and the very act of turning will activate God’s concern and lead to forgiveness.”

Moses implored the Israelites “to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live” (Deuteronomy 30:16). But, he also acknowledged their right to “turn away” their hearts and perish. “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life” (Deut 30:19). Teshuvah is the path that leads to life, while meshuvah is the path that leads to death. Teshuvah is a wonderful gift from God and is an integral part of agency, another divine gift (Doctrine & Covenants 104:17).

Summary

Old Testament repentance — embodied principally in the word teshuvah (or shuv2) — means to turn away from our sins and return to God with our whole heart, and demonstrating this turning by a sincere commitment to good works. The purpose of repentance is to enable us to return to God — to our place of origin.

Section II — Repentance in the New Testament

Metanoeo (μετανοέω) and Metanoia (μετάνοια)

Two words that stand out in the repentance vocabulary of the New Testament are metanoeo and metanoia. Metanoeo is used 34 times, and is always translated in the KJV as the verb repent. The word’s prefix — meta (μετα) — is a Greek preposition meaning after, against, among or with. The suffix — noeo (νοέω) — is derived from the noun for mind (νοῦς) and means “to exercise the mind,” or think. Metanoeo can be defined as to think again, reconsider, or change one’s mind. Metanoia is the substantive form of metanoeo. It occurs 24 times and is always translated as the noun repentance in the KJV. From here out, where possible, we refer to the two words collectively as metanoia. Metanoia is “a word which is often mistranslated into English as ‘repentance.’”

William Howard encapsulated this idea with these words:

It is evident that repentance is a mistranslation of metanoia. This fact was never more apparent than during the English and American revisions of the King James version of our Bible. Frequent debate centered around this word and it was the opinion of many that a suitable English equivalent should be sought for the Greek expression. It was agreed, however, that no one English word was sufficient to convey all that lay in the Greek. And, although it was admitted that the translation was poor, it was felt that the common term should be retained in the hope that it would come to convey all that its Greek derivative expressed.46

Much discussion has surrounded the original meaning of metanoia. Some have claimed that it was meant to be understood as merely a mental exercise — a “change of mind”47 about past actions and events, a “Change of Mind about Christ,”48 or a “turning of the mind,”49 without any required change of personal behavior or conduct. “But what is repentance, anyway? Is it merely to change one’s mind about Christ, as some argue? Or is it more than that?”50

Many Bible commentators are much more expansive in their definition of metanoia, enlarging it beyond its etymological roots, and arriving at the same general definition as teshuvah51 — a “complete ‘turning,’ a total reorientation of attitude or action”52 toward God. Butler, who regards metanoeo and metanoia as one unified expression, commented:

46 William Howard, as cited by R. Larry Moyer, Free and Clear: Understanding and Communicating God’s Offer of Eternal life (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1997), 86. Note: the “revisers” could have used teshuvah as a suitable translation of metanoia.
47 Garr, Christian Fruit—Jewish Root, 74.
50 Leo (Jake) Hebert III, Garbling the Gospel (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2005), 94.
The word signifies *Change of Mind*, a change in the trend and action of the whole inner nature, intellectual, affectional and moral, of the man, a reversal of his controlling estimates and judgments, desires and affections, choices and pursuits, involving a radical revolution in his supreme life aims, purposes and objects.\(^{53}\) [emphasis original]

Butler continued:

The Scriptural terms applied to man’s action in this radical change are *Metanoia* (misrendered Repentance), meaning *change of mind, heart, will, life* and *Conversion*, or turning *back* to God, both of which, the inward change and the actual turning, are demanded by God from man as his own willing act.\(^{54}\) [emphasis original]

This concept of likening *metanoia* with *teshuvah* is held by a significant number, if not a majority, of scholars and biblical commentators. Below are a few supporting citations:

\[\mu\varepsilon\tau\alpha\nu\omicron\omicron\varepsilon\omicron\omicron\omega\ (\textit{metanoeoo})\]: To change one’s *thinking and way of life* as a result of a change of attitude with regard to sin and righteousness.\(^{55}\)

The words for repentance in Greek (*metanoia*), Hebrew (*teshuvah*), and Arabic (*tawbah*) are all associated with turning or returning. To repent is to reorient oneself with respect to the good through a transformation in one’s emotions, attitudes, dispositions, and values. In repenting, one both accepts responsibility for the past action and repudiates that action as wrongful. One adopts the sincere intention to act better in the future if presented with similar choices.\(^{56}\) [italics original]

In Biblical Hebrew the idea of repentance is represented by two verbs — “shub” (to return) and “niḥam” (to feel sorrow


\(^{54}\) Butler, *Vital Truths Respecting God and Man*, 183.


but by no substantive. The underlying idea has been adequately expressed in Greek by μετάνοια [metanoia], a word which denotes “change of mind and heart.”57 [bracketed text ours]

In 1971, Kenneth Taylor released a new paraphrased Bible called The Living Bible (TLB). It quickly became an acclaimed edition, especially among evangelical Christians. When Taylor died in 2005, Christianity Today published a glowing tribute to him and TLB:

A bestseller after its 1971 release, it has sold more than 40 million copies. Noting that Billy Graham has called the Bible the world’s best evangelist, American Bible Society president Gene Habecker said Taylor’s work made a massive impact. “It may be greater than Billy Graham,” Habecker said.58

Displayed below are two side-by-side passages from the KJV and TLB:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KJV</th>
<th>Luke 13:3</th>
<th>TLB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.</td>
<td>Not at all! And don’t you realize that you also will perish unless you leave your evil ways and turn to God?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KJV</th>
<th>Acts 26:20 (partial verse)</th>
<th>TLB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.</td>
<td>All must forsake their sins and turn to God — and prove their repentance by doing good deeds.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the KJV simply rendered the Greek metanoeo as repent in the verse from Luke, TLB greatly expanded the meaning to be the functional equivalent of teshuvah — “leave your evil ways and turn to God.” Neither Jeremiah nor Ezekiel could have expressed it any better. In the verse from Acts, Taylor did not need to add the phrase turn to God because the apostle Paul had already included it. The end result — forsake their sins and turn to God — is a perfect example of teshuvah. Also interesting are Paul’s final words which Taylor rendered “and prove their repentance by doing good deeds.” As discussed previously, this concept

of doing good deeds is an integral part of Old Testament teshuvah, and apparently of metanoia also.

**Metamelomai (μεταμέλομαι)**

Another Greek word related to metanoia — metamelomai — deserves mention here. This word is used six times in the New Testament, is always translated as repent, and means “to care afterwards, i.e., regret.” According to several commentators, metamelomai is virtually synonymous with nacham, and “as nearly as possible it is the exact equivalent of the word Repent or Repentance,” in line with the OED definition of those words. Perschbacher added that “the Greek has a word meaning to ‘be sorry’ (μεταμέλομαι) [metamelomai]. This corresponds to the English repent” [bracketed text ours]. Although both nacham and metamelomai meet the OED definition of repent, both fall far short of the comprehensive doctrine of sincere repentance that are taught by the words teshuvah and metanoia.

**Strepho (στρέφω) — Turning in the New Testament**

As shown in Appendix 5, in the Septuagint, 82% of the time shuv is rendered as either epistrepho (ἐπιστρέφω) or apostrepho (ἀποστρέφω), both derivatives of strepho (στρέφω), to turn. As could be expected, these Greek words also show up frequently in the repentance vocabulary of the New Testament, and are used in the same manner as shuv in the Old Testament:

The New Testament also frequently employs this general and practical term, variously translated into English by ‘turn,’ ‘return,’ ‘be converted’; and in Acts 3:19; 26: 20, both are combined, ‘repent and turn ‘ (comp. Acts 11:21, ‘believed and turned’). It thus appears that the New Testament exhortation is substantially the same as that of the prophets.

David Dilling also remarked on the connection between shuv in the Old Testament and turn in the New Testament:

The Old Testament word from which we derive the New Testament doctrine of repentance is יָשָׁב (shuv) which means

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62 Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 34.
“to turn back,” or “to return.” This is a crucial term in Old Testament theology which signifies a turning back from evil and a turning toward Yahweh.63

Just as the KJV translators nearly always avoided rendering shuv as repent in the Old Testament, they also consistently bypassed the word repent when translating strepho and its derivatives, opting instead for turn (20 times), convert (10 times), return (once), and pervert (once). Below are some examples of the New Testament usage:

“And many of the children of Israel shall he [John the Baptist] turn [epistrepho] to the Lord their God.” (Luke 1:16)64

“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted [epistrepho], strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:32)

Pilate “said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth [apostrepho] the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him.” (Luke 23:14)

“But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn [epistrepho] ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” (Galatians 4:9)

“Let him know, that he which converteth [epistrepho] the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” (James 5:20)

The Old Testament concept of turning from sin and toward God has long been a staple of Christian preaching and theology. Butler commented that “the Old Testament is in harmony with the New as to the meaning of both metanoia and epistrepho”65 [emphasis original]. In 1727, Joseph Sewall, pastor of Old South Church in Boston, preached that:

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63  David R. Dilling, Hebrews: a Bible-Study Resource created for small-group Bible Study (Lafayette, IN, Kensington Theological Academy, 2007), 120.

64  Regarding this verse, the marginal note for the 1599 Geneva Bible states: “Shalbe a meanes to bring many to repentance, and turne themselues to the Lord from whom they fell.”

65  Butler, Topical Analysis of the Bible, 445.
God hath made abundant Provision for the Salvation of His People in Christ Jesus, who hath offer’d a Sacrifice of Atonement for the Congregation of His People, who look to Him by Faith, mourn for their Sins, and turn from them unto the Lord.\textsuperscript{66} [capitalization original]

In this same sermon, Sewall preached that turning from sin is more than mere outward acts of penance or expressions of remorse of conscience: “It is not enough that a degenerate People sanctify Fasts, confess their Sins, and promise Amendment. No! they must forsake them and reform, or they do not Repent."\textsuperscript{67} [capitalization original].

Both \textit{metanoia} and \textit{strepho} can be considered continuances of the Old Testament doctrine of \textit{teshuvah}. True biblical repentance requires abandonment of sin and amendment of life, as evidenced by a turning to God through improved behavior — by producing good fruit. Jesus taught his disciples that trees and people can both be identified by the same means — by the quality of fruit they produce (see Matthew 7:15–20).

\textbf{The Turning Influence of Grace (\textit{Charis} — χάρις)}

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). To truly comprehend the intended meaning of this verse we need to understand the words \textit{grace} and \textit{faith} as used in the New Testament. \textit{Grace} (\textit{charis} — χάρις) is a word used with great frequency in the KJV New Testament.\textsuperscript{68} Thayer defined it as \textit{pleasure, delight, goodwill, thanks}, and:

\begin{quote}
The merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, \textbf{turns them to Christ}, keeps, strengthens, \textbf{increases them in Christian faith}, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the \textbf{exercise of the Christian virtues}.\textsuperscript{69}[italics original, emphasis added]
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{66} Joseph Sewall, \textit{Repentance: The Sure Way to Escape Destruction. Two sermons on Jrr. 18. 7, 8. Preach’d December 21st on a Publick Fast occasioned by the Earthquake the Night after the LORD’S-Day Octob. 28th And on the LORD’S-Day December 24th 1727} (Boston: D. Henchman, 1727), 38.

\textsuperscript{67} Sewall, \textit{Repentance: The Sure Way to Escape Destruction}, 18.

\textsuperscript{68} The 131 occurrences of \textit{grace} in the KJV New Testament eclipse all of the other LDS Standard Works combined. There are 31 occurrences in the Book of Mormon, 29 in the Doctrine and Covenants, 7 in the Pearl of Great Price, and 39 in the Old Testament, for a total of 106 occurrences in these other books of scripture.

This definition stresses the fruits of grace — a turning to Christ (teshuvah, strepho, or metanoia), increased faith, and greater exercise of Christian virtues — but omits any sense of it being a “free gift” or God’s unmerited favor. If grace is preached as a “free gift,”

1. It can **devalue the severity of sin** and the necessity of preaching of God’s righteousness. Sin is the reason why we need a Savior. Sin is the reason for the Cross. It is important that people are convicted of their sin so that they can place their faith in the right thing: Christ’s sacrifice for sin.

2. It can **undermine the importance of repentance**. One cannot have faith without some degree of repentance from sin. When God opens our hearts to faith in the Gospel, He convicts us of sin. This conviction brings about repentance. This **repentance is a general turning from our sin** that begins the sanctification process. [bolding ours]

Gillum identified the all-too-often Christian perception of “cheap grace” as an incorrect doctrine and a roadblock that impedes us from fully embracing and understanding the principle of true repentance. Schmidt stated that grace in the New Testament “is not the free, one-way, permanent gift that some Christians say that it is.” On the contrary, it is a principle of restoration — one that helps restore our covenant relationship with God through sincere teshuvah.

### Faith and Works — Their Role in the Process of Repentance

Faith, like grace, is a word that can be easily misunderstood. What does it mean to be “saved through faith (pistis πίστις)” (Ephesians 2:8)? Elements of pistis common to both Strong’s and Thayer’s definitions include: conviction, belief, fidelity, and faith. But, faith is more than just mere belief — real faith requires real action:

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70 Thayer defined charisma (χάρισμα), the root of our modern English word of the same spelling, as “a gift of grace; a favor which one receives without any merit of his own,” but he does not define charis (χάρις) in this way.


Belief exists; faith acts. Belief is a passive faith, and faith is an active belief. It has been said that “faith will remove mountains.” We could not here substitute the word belief for faith, because belief is merely the passive quality. Faith impels us to action, and is grounded on our belief74 [emphasis original].

Just as cement is only one of the ingredients in concrete, belief is merely an ingredient and must be mixed with action to produce faith. Some Christian commentators today have sounded a cautionary voice about what they perceive as “theological malpractice,” or a system of watered-down Christianity — religion that requires little to nothing from its adherents. One might call this a religion of Just add belief — No action required. In her chapter entitled “Worshipping at the Church of Benign Whatever-ism,” Dean wrote:

We are doing an exceedingly good job of teaching youth what we really believe: namely, that Christianity is not a big deal, that God requires little, and the church is a helpful social institution filled with nice people focused primarily on “folks like us”—which, of course, begs the question of whether we are really the church at all.

What if the blasé religiosity of most American teenagers is not the result of poor communication but the result of excellent communication of a watered-down gospel so devoid of God’s self-giving love in Jesus Christ, so immune to the sending love of the Holy Spirit that it might not be Christianity at all? What if the church models a way of life that asks, not passionate surrender but ho-hum assent?75 [emphasis added]

This observation of modern Christian practice stands in contrast to Joseph Smith’s teaching: “Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things, never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation.”76 We cannot expect “passionate surrender” — real teshuvah (or metanoia) — if mere “ho-hum assent” is all that is required of us. Jesus taught, “For unto whomsoever

74  G.F. Graham, English synonyms classified and explained; with practical exercises designed for schools and private tuition (New York: American Book Company, 1845), 113.
75  Kenda Creasy Dean, Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is telling the American Church (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.
76  Joseph Smith, Jr., Lectures on Faith, 6:5.
much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48). Paul taught that the “doers of the law” and not the “hearers of the law” are those who are just (or justified) before God (Romans 2:13). James also taught that we must be “doers of the law,” and that those who are “hearers only” deceive themselves (James 1:22).

The apostle James is a well-known defender of the mutualistic relationship between faith and works. The Geneva Bible, also known as the Bible of the Puritans77, was a precursor to the KJV and contained very enlightening marginal notes. Listed below are three verses from the second chapter of James from the `, with the marginal notes to the right of each verse:

14 8 What auaileth it my brethren, though a man saith he hath faith, when he hath no workes? Can that faith saue him? 8 The fifth place which hangeth verie well with the former treatise, touching a true and liuely faith. And the proposition of this place is this: faith which bringeth not fourth workes, is not that faith whereby we are iustified, but an image of faith: or else this, they are not iustified by faith, which shewe not the effects of faith.

22 Seest thou not that the faith wrought with his workes? and through the workes was the faith made “perfect. 22 Was effectuall and fruitfull with good workes. That the faith was declared to bee a true faith, and that by workes.

24 12Ye see then how that of workes a man is iustified, and not of faith onely. 12 The conclusion: he is onely iustified that hath that faith which hath workes following it.

These marginal notes make it very clear that the Geneva Bible translators understood the message of James as a union of faith and works. Faith must be accompanied by work (ergon ἔργον), or it is “but an image of faith.” The Bishop of Durham made an interesting distinction between salvation through faith — without works, and salvation through faith which is without works:

For we are saved by faith — without works; but not by the faith which is without works. The former sense, by admitting that we are saved not by works (for our best works are far short of our duty), but by an atonement of infinitely greater value, does not exclude the necessity of good works; but the latter

supposes the validity of a faith unproductive of good works — a sense contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture.78

Neal A. Maxwell observed:

One of the great blessings of real faith in Jesus Christ is that it gives us enough strength and courage to repent. This is called “faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:16–17). The sad truth is that many do not have enough faith to repent, not enough trust in God to change their life-styles in order to meet emancipating gospel requirements. The process of repentance involves not only avoiding certain things or desisting from certain practices but also doing positive things. For the latter, we need faith in order to initiate and to sustain better behavior, such as learning to love those we do not like. The life which remains unrefined is evidence of a lack of faith (1 John 5:18; Moroni 8:16).79 [bolding ours]

Just as an unrefined life, one that has not been enriched through better behavior, evidences our lack of faith, a refined life, one that includes turning to God through good works, is “the evidence of our faith, for it is by our good works that we show our faith.”80 Erskine described the value of works as the evidence of our faith:

Works are profitable, as the fruits and evidences of true faith. We know that there is sap and life in the tree by the fruits, the leaves, and blossoms, that it puts forth; so we know our faith to be a true faith, by the fruits of holiness and good works. Yea, our good works will be brought forth, at the last day, as the evidence of our faith; and therefore it is said, Revelations xx. 12; “They were judged according to their works.”81

79 Neal A. Maxwell, Not My Will, But Thine (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 59.
81 D. Fraser, The Whole Works of the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine, Minister of the Gospel at Stirling. Consisting of Sermons and Discourses, on important and interesting subjects. To which is added, an enlarged memoir of the author (Philadelphia: Wm. S. & A. Young, 1836), 198.
Confidence in any endeavor, whether mental, spiritual, or physical requires experience and practice. In other words, confidence requires work. In order for our confidence to “wax strong in the presence of God,” (D&C 121:45) we need sincere teshuvah/metanoia which is always accompanied by good works. Without this confidence, we will likely find ourselves naked, and “ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

Henry observed that the apostle James directed his epistle on faith and works principally toward the antinomians of his day, who did not recognize the importance of works:

St. James had to do with those who cried up faith, but would not allow works to be used even as evidences; they depended upon a bare profession, as sufficient to justify them; and with these he might well urge the necessity and vast importance of good works.

Like faith, repentance (teshuvah/metanoia) requires good works, but these good works must be performed as a natural outflowing of our faith, and not as a separate, mechanical action. Just as “faith without works is dead,” works without faith are equally dead. A barren tree — one that does not produce fruit — is worthless. “Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 7:19). While journeying with his disciples, Jesus came across a fig tree “and found nothing thereon, but leaves only,” and he cursed it “and presently the fig tree withered away” (Matthew 21:19). For our faith and repentance to be sincere, we cannot be like this fig tree — full of the “leaves” of the gospel, yet barren of its fruit.

Naked or Robed?

Job, after describing his deeds among the poor, the widowed, and the fatherless exclaimed, “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me” (Job 29:14). Paralleling Job’s affirmation, the Lord said that his apostles would also be “clothed with robes of righteousness” (D&C 29:12). While glorying in his God, Isaiah declared “for [the Lord] hath clothed me

82 Derived from the Greek ἀντί (anti) + νόμος (law), or “against the law.” Often a pejorative term, antinomians are those who believe that as “saved” Christians they are no longer under obligation to obey the laws of God.
83 Matthew Henry, An Exposition of the Old and New Testament: Wherein each chapter is summed up in its contents; The sacred text inserted at large, in distinct paragraphs; Each paragraph reduced to its proper heads; The sense given, and largely illustrated; With practical remarks and observations, volume 6 (Philadelphia: Haswell, Barrington & Haswell, 1838), 770.
with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10). Describing the marriage of the Lamb of God, John explained that the bride of Christ (the righteous saints) wore “fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:8).

A very poignant example of the love and mercy which God has for his children is found in the parable of the prodigal son. When the repentant and contrite young man returned to his father, the father immediately called to “bring forth the best robe, and put it on him” (Luke 15:22). This robe was not just the “best” available to this earthly father. The Greek word (stole, στολή) used here was a robe “worn by kings (Jon. iii. 6), priests, and persons of rank.” 84 This passage demonstrates two great desires of our Father: to accept all who willingly turn from wickedness and return to him through true repentance, and to clothe us in robes of righteousness.

What can we understand by these robes of righteousness? The Zohar, “the central work in the literature of the Kabbalah,” 85 explains that “the garments in which a man ascends to the other world are made out of ‘those days in which he acted virtuously and did not sin.’” 86 Jesus taught a parable of a wedding feast for a king’s son:

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. (Matthew 22:11–12) 87

Concerning the speechless man, Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

He had accepted the invitation (the gospel); joined with the true worshipers (come into the true Church); but had not put on the robes of righteousness (that is, had not worked out his salvation after baptism). 88

Connected to this parable of the wedding party, Nibley shared this additional insight:

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86 Nahum N. Glatzer, Essays in Jewish Thought (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009), 89.
87 Perhaps the cause of this man’s speechlessness was his sudden and alarming realization that he was naked at the wedding feast.
A Coptic missal published in 1915 says in effect: “Let us put on splendid apparel, suitable to the honor that befits this great event this day [that is to say, righteousness and charity and judgment and every good quality, for this is the apparel that pleases God]. Let us never permit ourselves to be stripped bare through carelessness. Woe unto those whom the bridegroom shall see without the wedding garment when he comes.”

If the robes of righteousness represent our virtuous acts while in mortality (working out our salvation after baptism), does nakedness represent the opposite — our wickedness? Although we are told that the wicked will be found naked in God’s presence at the judgment day, there is another possible explanation for their lack of clothing. Adam and Eve, in their naked state, enjoyed regular communion with God while in the garden, “and were not ashamed” of their condition (Genesis 2:25). This nakedness preceded their transgression and evidenced a state of innocence. Therefore, their pre-transgression nakedness could not have represented their sinful acts or even their sinful nature. When placed in the garden, Adam and Eve were “in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin” (2 Ne 2:23). They were not ashamed of their nakedness because they were unaware of their condition — they were innocent. And, they were unable to clothe themselves in robes of righteousness because they were incapable of doing good — “doing no good, for they knew no sin.” There was no fabric or cloth — righteousness, in this case — with which they could clothe themselves.

Satan wanted Adam and Eve to feel uncomfortable in their nakedness. “‘Ho, ho,’ said he, ‘you are naked. You had better run and hide, or at least put something on. How do you think you look to your Father?’” After they ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, the two became engulfed with feelings of shame and guilt — new experiences for them. The feelings of guilt are obvious — they had been disobedient, and in all likelihood knew that they would need to explain themselves to the Father. However, the couple’s state of undress had no correlation with their behavior, so why the sudden feelings of shame when there had been none previously? Chaim Navon proposed that “as long as the man had

ruled over his desires, he felt no shame in his nakedness. When he lost control, his nakedness began to symbolize his shame, his inability to control himself.”

Jeffery R. Holland remarked that “in the imagery of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is always better to be clothed than unclothed, to be robed rather than naked.” At the last day, like Adam and Eve, the wicked will find themselves unrobed, being void of righteousness. However, unlike our first parents, they will not be in a “state of innocence,” so their guilt and shame will be understandable. Through true repentance — *teshuvah/metanoia* — our nakedness can be clothed, but only when we turn to God in righteousness, with good works.

**Summary**

Repentance in the New Testament is a rich combination of the Old Testament doctrine of turning (*teshuvah*), along with new teachings involving the principles of faith and grace. *Metanoia* is understood to be the functional equivalent of *teshuvah*, while *metamelomai* is substantially the same as *nacham*. *Strepho*, a Greek word that is equal to *shuv* in its meaning, is also often used in the New Testament repentance vocabulary, although never translated as *repent* in the KJV.

Faith, like *teshuvah*, was shown to always include good works, lest it be rendered “dead.” While works do not produce or lead to salvation, they serve as an evidence — a proof — of our faith in the atonement of Christ. Grace was demonstrated to be a divine influence which turns us to Christ, increases our faith, and motivates us to improve our conduct.

The righteous will be clothed with the “robes of righteousness” — made from the fabric of good works — at the last day, while the wicked will be ashamed at their nakedness before God. Repentance — turning away from sin and toward God, as embodied in the words *teshuvah* and *metanoia* — always requires that we, through faith and the grace of God, clothe ourselves with righteousness — with good works.

**Section III — Repentance in the Book of Mormon**

Rebellion and Repentance are central themes in the Book of Mormon. The prophets constantly testified of the people’s rebellion, of their turning away from God:

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And now behold, [Satan] had got great hold upon the hearts of the Nephites, yea, insomuch that they had become exceedingly wicked. Yea, the more part of them had turned out of the way of righteousness and did trample under their feet the commandments of God and did turn unto their own ways and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and their silver. (Hel 6:31)

Book of Mormon prophets consistently admonished the people to turn from their rebellion — from their wicked ways — and return to their God:

There came also in the days of Com many prophets and prophesied of the destruction of that great people except they should repent and turn unto the Lord and forsake their murders and wickedness. (Ether 11:1)

Sorrow and Grief in the Process of Repentance

Sorrow and Grief — often exemplified by nacham in the Old Testament and metamelomai in the New Testament — are terms that are used extensively in the Book of Mormon, and represent an important first step in the process of repentance. The prophet Mormon witnessed what he thought was the beginning of the repentance of his people — “their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrowing before the Lord” (Mormon 2:12).93 Sadly, his hope for the Nephites was in vain:

For their sorrowing was not unto repentance because of the goodness of God, but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin. And they did not come unto Jesus with broken hearts and contrite spirits. (Mormon 2:13–14)

In these verses, Mormon spoke of two types of sorrow — that which is unto repentance and the sorrowing of the damned. This parallels Paul’s words to the Corinthians when he spoke of “godly sorrow” which “worketh repentance to salvation,” and “the sorrow of the world” which “worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

93 The text in this verse differs from that published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For all of our Book of Mormon citations, we have used The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text, edited by Royal Skousen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009). All references to this edition are cited as The Earliest Text.
Sorrow and grief, while important in the process of repentance, are insufficient as a means of salvation. A change of heart brought on by sorrow, but without a corresponding change in behavior inevitably creates a state of *cognitive dissonance* — a misalignment of belief and behavior. “Cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent condition which leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction.”94 Since “most individuals have a deep desire to have their beliefs and behaviors aligned and in harmony,”95 we often try to reduce internal dissonance by altering beliefs to agree with behaviors, or by changing behaviors to match beliefs. Choosing the first option — altering beliefs to agree with behaviors — is how we could define apostasy, or *meshuvah*. Repentant persons, however, always change their errant behaviors to agree with their beliefs. Sorrow can be a great aid to beginning this process of change.

The scriptures also often describe God as sorrowing or grieving over his children. In the book of Genesis, we read that “it repented [nacham] the Lord that he had made man on the earth.” However, as stated earlier, *grieved* is a better translation for *nacham* than *repented*:

And it *grieved* the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it *grieveth* me that I have made them. (Genesis 6:6–7) [We replaced the KJV *repent* with *grieve*.]

In the book of Jacob we find very similar language to these verses from Genesis. In chapter five, the Lord *grieved* that he should lose the trees of his vineyard:

And now behold, notwithstanding all the care which we have taken of my vineyard, the *trees thereof have become corrupted*, that they *bring forth no good fruit*. And these I had hope to preserve, to have laid up fruit thereof against the season unto mine own self. But behold, they have become like unto the *wild olive tree*, and they are of no worth but to be hewn down and *cast into the fire*. And it *grieveth* me that I should *lose them*. (Jacob 5:46)

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95 Sara Truebridge, Resilience Begins with Beliefs: Building on Student Strengths for Success in Schools (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014), 59.
Four times in the chapter the Lord grieved that he should lose the tame olive tree, and four times he grieved that he should lose all of the trees of the vineyard. The source of this grief is:

- the trees thereof have become corrupted — Israel has turned from the Lord;
- they bring forth no good fruit — Israel refuses to return to the Lord through sincere teshuvah and good works; and,
- they have become like unto the wild olive-tree — Israel is in a state of meshuvah.

The results of Israel’s apostasy are:

- the trees are of no worth but to be hewn down and cast into the fire; and
- the Lord is grieved at their loss.

The solution to the Lord’s grief, of course, is teshuvah. We, the people of Israel, must turn from our sins — from our state of meshuvah — and return to the Lord with our whole hearts, through good works. The Lord does not want to lose us, the trees of his vineyard. Lehi’s dying words to his rebellious sons echo this same sentiment:

And now that my soul might have joy in you and that my heart might leave this world with gladness because of you, that I might not be brought down with grief and sorrow to the grave — arise from the dust, my sons, and be men, and be determined in one mind and in one heart, united in all things, that ye may not come down into captivity. (2 Nephi 1:21)

Unlike the KJV translation, the word repent in the Book of Mormon does not carry a sense of sorrowing or grieving. Rather, its usage indicates a forsaking or turning from sin. Of the 360 uses or repent in the Book of Mormon, more than 70 specifically mention repenting of sins, iniquities, wickedness or evil doings. Mormon, citing the words of Christ, wrote:

**Turn**, all ye Gentiles, **from your wicked ways** and **repent of your evil doings**, of your **lyings** and **deceivings**, and of your **whoredoms**, and of your **secret abominations** and your **idolatries**, and of your **murders** and your **priestcrafts** and your **envyings** and your **strifes**, and from **all your wickedness**

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96 We analyzed all 360 uses of repent in the Book of Mormon and were able to identify fewer than 20 occurrences where the word repent could realistically be replaced by grieve or sorrow.
and abominations, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 30:2)

In this verse, there exists a clear link between repentance and turning from sin, but no overt sense of sorrowing. This does not minimize the role of sorrow or grief in repentance, but highlights the importance of turning, of forsaking our sins as the heart of the repentance process.

Mormon, who served as the leader of the Nephite army, “did utterly refuse from this time forth to be a commander and a leader of this people because of their wickedness and abomination” (Mormon 3:11). However, after seeing that the people were headed for physical annihilation, Mormon wrote that he “did repent of the oath” which he had made (Mormon 5:1). It is clear from this usage that he did not sorrow or grieve because of the oath. Rather, Mormon’s usage of repent here would be much better understood as turn (šuv) — “did turn from the oath” — in line with the Book of Mormon’s common usage of repent.

**Turning and Teshuvah**

In the Old Testament we read, “as a dog returneth [šuv] to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly” (Proverbs 26:11). In this verse, “returneth to his vomit” is a clear reference to returning to one’s wicked ways. The apostle Peter, taking his inspiration from this verse in Proverbs, said that “the dog is turned [epistrepho] to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22). Mormon, apparently drawing from the same source as Peter, wrote that “the people had turned from their righteousness like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire” (3 Nephi 7:8). These three verses show a positive link between the use of šuv in the Old Testament, epistrepho in the New Testament, and turn in the Book of Mormon.

The following three parallel verses show how šuv from the Old Testament and epistrepho from the New Testament were rendered as convert by the KJV translators. The Book of Mormon translation is also convert, but the original wording must be turn, in agreement with the verse’s Hebrew origin. Interestingly, the current edition of the LDS Book of Mormon has the final line of this verse as “and be converted and be healed,” while The Earliest Text has “and convert and be healed,” in line with the KJV Old Testament text, and a better translation than “be converted.” However, the NIV renders this line from Isaiah even more accurately: “and turn and be healed.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isaiah 6:10</th>
<th>Matthew 13:15</th>
<th>2 Nephi 16:10</th>
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<tr>
<td>Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert [shuv, or turn], and be healed.</td>
<td>For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted [epistrepho, or turn], and I should heal them.</td>
<td>Make the heart of this people fat and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and convert and be healed.</td>
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As with the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon is rich in the language of turning, or *teshuvah*. While numerous examples could be given of this powerful teaching in the Book of Mormon, we have limited our discussion to the following examples.

Nephi, the son of Helaman, while praying upon his tower in the agony of his soul, observed that the people of Zarahemla had gathered to listen to his prayer, and were marveling at his words. Addressing the people, Nephi said, “Why have ye gathered yourselves together? That I may tell you of your iniquities?” He then censured the people, telling them that they would “not hearken unto the voice of the Good Shepherd,” but that the “devil hath got so great hold upon your hearts.” In earnest Nephi plead with the people, “O repent ye, repent ye! Why will ye die? Turn ye, turn ye unto the Lord your God. Why hath he forsaken you?” (Helaman 7:13–18). Nephi’s message to the people was to repent (turn from their sins), and turn back to God. In other words, to perform *teshuvah*.

Amulek taught the Zoramites to “not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end,” and that “if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed [that is, no work performed].” He continued by teaching them that if they delayed their repentance too long, they would be brought to an “awful crisis.” In that crisis, they would not be able to say “I will repent, that I will return to my God” — *teshuvah* would no longer be a possibility (Alma 34:33–34).
Jacob preached to the people of Nephi concerning “the merciful plan of the great Creator,” (2 Nephi 9:6) and of the “cunning plan of the evil one” (2 Nephi 9:28). He also taught them about the fall, the atonement of Christ, and the consequences of sin. Jacob further instructed the people to “turn away from your sins. Shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast. Come unto that God who is the rock of your salvation” (2 Nephi 9:45). This combination of turning away from sin and coming unto Christ — teshuvah — frustrates the “cunning plan of the evil one,” and makes possible “the merciful plan of the great Creator” in our lives.

Speaking of Nephi’s rebellious brothers, the Lord told him that “in that day that they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse” (1 Nephi 2:23). Mormon, citing the words of the Lord to Nephi, wrote that the Lamanites had indeed been cursed by the Lord, “from this time henceforth and forever except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me, that I may have mercy upon them” (Alma 3:14). The condition that the Lord set for the removal of the curse was teshuvah — forsaking wickedness and turning to the Lord.

Following the death of Jesus, great destruction and death transpired in the Americas, leaving the land in profound darkness. Out of the darkness, the voice of Christ was heard:

O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me and repent of your sins and be converted, that I may heal you? Yea, verily I say unto you: if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you. And whosoever will come, him will I receive. And blessed are they which cometh unto me. (3 Nephi 9:13–14)

In these two verses the Lord implored the people to repent of their sins and return to him — to perform teshuvah.

Reproving Corianton for his behavior among the Zoramites, Alma counseled his son to “repent and forsake your sins and go no more after the lusts of your eyes.” (Alma 39:9) He also directed him to “turn to the Lord with all your mind, might, and strength, that ye lead away the hearts of no more to do wickedly” (Alma 39:13). Alma then added the additional exhortation that Corianton “return unto them and acknowledge your faults and repair that wrong which ye have done” (Alma 39:13).97

97 Note the presence of the word repair in The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text which does not appear in the current LDS text.
Although we have divided *teshuvah* into two separate actions — *turning from sin* and *turning to the Lord* — these two are really one unified activity. How can we turn to the Lord without also turning from sin? Alma understood this principle and taught it to Corianton:

> And now the Spirit of the Lord doth say unto me: *Command thy children to do good*, lest they lead away the hearts of many people to destruction. Therefore *I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that ye refrain from your iniquities.*
> (Alma 39:12)

The Lord instructed Alma to *command* his children to *do good*. Interestingly, though, Alma *commanded* Corianton to *refrain from his iniquities*, which on the surface appears to be a somewhat different message. However, since *teshuvah* encompasses both *refraining from iniquity* and *doing good*, Alma, in essence, covered the whole of *teshuvah* in this short sermon.

**Returning to God**

The Lord caused that Adam “should be *cast out from the Garden of Eden, from my presence*, because of his transgression, wherein he became spiritually dead” (D&C 29:41). Along with this spiritual death came a physical death. Samuel, the Lamanite prophet taught that “the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord” (Helaman 14:17). Samuel explained that the resurrection of Christ “bringeth to pass the conditions of repentance,” so that those who repent are “not hewn down and cast into the fire. But whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire. And there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death” (Helaman 14:18).

The wicked are “hewn down and cast into the fire” because they are barren trees, devoid of good fruit. For this reason, the wicked will be cut off from the Lord’s presence a second time. On the other hand, the righteous — those who are “found guiltless before him at the judgment day” — will not be cut down, but will return to “dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom” (Mormon 7:7).

Lehi’s dream, in the initial chapters of the Book of Mormon, focuses on Lehi’s desire that his family members come to the Tree of Life — to that same tree that was in the center of the Garden of Eden, our place of origin. It is interesting to observe Lehi’s persistent desire that his family “come unto me and partake of the fruit” (1 Nephi 8:15, 16, and 18). Lehi’s
words echo those of Christ himself as he spoke through the prophet Alma: “Repent and I will receive you. Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely. Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be cut down and cast into the fire” (Alma 5:33–35). These words spoken by the Lord, “Repent,” “Come unto me,” and “bring forth works of righteousness,” testify of the importance of teshuvah in our journey back to the Lord’s presence.

Grace, After All that We Can Do

While the word grace is found much less frequently in the Book of Mormon than in the New Testament, its meaning in both books is the same. Jacob instructed,

Reconcile yourselves to the will of God and not to the will of the devil and the flesh. And remember that after ye are reconciled unto God that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved. (2 Nephi 10:24)

A key word in this verse — reconcile — can be defined as:

To conciliate anew; to call back into union and friendship the affections which have been alienated; to restore to friendship or favor after estrangement; as, to reconcile men or parties that have been at variance.98 [emphasis added]

Thayer described grace as a powerful influence that “turns [souls] to Christ.”99 Reconciliation is synonymous with the act of teshuvah, or turning to Christ. Sin creates variance with God, and teshuvah, working alongside with grace, is the agent that helps restore our friendship with God after estrangement. Although reconciliation with God through teshuvah is imperative, salvation is not the result of our reconciliation. “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Extending our understanding of this principle, Nephi explained that it is “by grace that we are saved after all that we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). And “all that we can do” is to reconcile ourselves to God — through active faith — by the performance of sincere teshuvah.100

98 Webster, American Dictionary of the English Language, s.v. “reconcile.”
100 Speaking to his people, Anti-Nephi-Lehi said: “And now behold, my brethren, since it has been all that we could do, as we were the most lost of all mankind, to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed
The Book of Mormon also helps us understand the power of God’s grace in staying the course — enduring through faith — even in the face of difficulty and hardship. In a letter to his son, Mormon gave all the encouragement he could while his world was falling apart around him:

> I am mindful of you always in my prayers, continually praying unto God the Father in the name of his Holy Child, Jesus, that he, through his infinite goodness and grace, will keep you through the endurance of faith on his name to the end. (Moroni 8:3)

Again, this principle taught by Mormon ties in perfectly with Thayer’s other definition of grace — a power that “keeps, strengthens, [and] increases them in Christian faith.” Moroni ended the Book of Mormon with a beautiful explanation of the interplay between grace and teshuvah (see Moroni 10:32–33). In these verses he counseled us how to perform teshuvah:

- Deny yourselves of all ungodliness (turn from our sins); and,
- Come unto Christ (return to God)

Once we perform this teshuvah — after reconciling ourselves to God — Moroni explained that:

- then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and,
- then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God.

Moroni finished his message explaining that the combined result of our teshuvah and God’s intervening grace is the “remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33). The Book of Mormon teaches that grace enables truly repentant disciples to “restore broken covenant relationships by finding their way back into God’s presence.”

**The Relationship between Faith, Works and Repentance**

Faith is a precursor and a necessary component of true repentance. Four times while preaching to the Zoramites Amulek taught that we must “exercise” our “faith unto repentance” (see Alma 34:15–17). According to Gillum, the Book of Mormon teaches us that faith must be always and to get God to take them away from our hearts – for it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stains” (Alma 24:11).

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present in the process of repentance. In fact, Samuel the Lamanite explained that it is the combination of faith and repentance that brings about a change in our hearts (Helaman 15:7).

Together with the Bible, the Book of Mormon clarifies that faith is more than naked belief — belief must be clothed with action to be counted as real faith. Tyndale taught that “as good works naturally follow faith, so eternal life followeth faith and good living.” As written in Acts 26:20 that we “should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance,” Alma likewise instructed the Nephites to “humble yourselves before God and bring forth fruit meet for repentance” (Alma 9:30). To evidence their faith in the atonement of Christ, and their complete repentance, the Anti-Nephi-Lehites made a complete life change:

Rather than to shed the blood of their brethren, they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother, they would give unto him; and rather than to spend their days in idleness, they would labor abundantly with their hands. (Alma 24:18)

As a testimony before God and others, these converted Lamanites abandoned their evil deeds and replaced them with good works. Like the Bible, the Book of Mormon teaches us that we will be judged according to the evidence of our faith — our works:

It is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good. And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil. (Alma 41:3–4)

Citing the words of Isaiah, Nephi wrote, “Say unto the righteous that it is well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings” (2 Nephi 13:10). The English Standard Version (ESV) renders Isaiah’s words as, “Tell the righteous it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds [maalal]” (Isaiah 3:10). Commenting on this verse, Barnes wrote:

103 Gillum, "Repentance Also Means Rethinking," 406–437.
105 Maalal (maalal) is “an act (good or bad):—doing, endeavour, invention, work.” Strong, The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, 70. (of the Hebrew and Chaldee
That is, they shall receive the appropriate reward of their works, and that reward shall be happiness. As a husbandman who sows his field and cultivates his farm, eats the fruit of his labour, so shall it be with the righteous.\textsuperscript{106} [emphasis in original]

This instruction from Isaiah merits comparison with Alma’s sermon to the people of Zarahemla, which we have formatted as an extended alternate below:

\begin{quote}
Come unto me  
and ye shall participate in the fruit of the tree of life; yea,  
ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely. Yea,  
come unto me  
and bring forth works of righteousness,  
and ye shall not be cut down and cast into the fire. (Alma 5:34–35)\textsuperscript{107}
\end{quote}

In these verses, “ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life” parallels the phrase “bring forth works of righteousness.” In the end, the righteous will “eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely” rather than be “cut down and cast into the fire” as barren trees.

The scriptures often speak metaphorically of our works being the fruit that we bring forth, or produce. However, Isaiah 3:10 (2 Nephi 13:10) also connects the good works that we produce with the fruit that we eat. To the contrary, Alma taught his son Corianton that rather than “partake of the fruit of the tree of life,” which fruit represents works of righteousness, the wicked will instead be “consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors — or their works which have been evil” (Alma 40:26). And, rather than drink of “the waters of life freely,” as the righteous will do, the wicked will “drink the dregs of a bitter cup” (Alma 40:26).

During his preaching to the Zoramites (Alma 32), Alma presented an allegory comparing the word of God to a seed which eventually


\textsuperscript{107} See Donald W. Parry, \textit{Poetic parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: the complete text reformatted} (Provo, Utah: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007), xxiii. Note: Our formatting of this extended alternate differs from Parry’s formatting.
grows into a “tree of life” (verse 40). The steps in this process can be summarized as:

1. Planting the seed in our heart (verse 28);
2. The seed swells and becomes “delicious” to us (verse 28);
3. The seed sprouts and begins to grow into a tree (verse 30);
4. If we “neglect the tree and take no thought for its nourishment,” it withers away and dies (verse 38);
5. If we “nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow by your faith with great diligence and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root. And behold, it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (verse 41);
6. “And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst” (verse 42);
7. “Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith and your diligence and patience and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you” (verse 43).

As Alma explained in this allegory, the fruit of the tree of life that the righteous “feast upon” is the result or “rewards” of their faith, diligence, patience, and long-suffering in planting the seed and nourishing the tree. In other words, the fruit is the result of their righteous works. This may help explain why Adam and Eve were forbidden to partake of the fruit of the tree of life following their transgression in the Garden — the fruit of that tree was not the product of their own labors. They needed a “space for repentance” (Alma 42:5) — a time to plant the seed and nourish the tree. They needed time to do the work of sincere teshuvah.

Lehi, recounting his vision of the tree of life, told his family: “I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.” (1 Nephi 8:10) Lehi also spoke of a group of people that arrived at the tree of life, but then left because they were ashamed: “And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:28). Ashamed of the tree and its fruit, they abandoned the Lord (symbolized by the tree of
life), and left behind the fruit (their good works) for “forbidden” paths. Proverbs tells us that the wicked will “eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices” (Proverbs 1:31).

Joseph Smith taught that faith is “the principle of power,” and that all things, including salvation, “exist by reason of faith.” As demonstrated previously, real faith, like sincere repentance, is always partnered with good works.

Therefore blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God, for these are they that shall be saved. And may God grant in his great fullness that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace according to their works. (Helaman 12:23–24)

Echoing the words of Paul, Amulek and Mormon both taught that we need to “work out” our salvation before God (Alma 34:37, Mormon 9:27, Philippians 2:12). The Greek word for “work out” in Philippians is κατεργάζομαι (katergazomai), and means to “to work fully, i.e., accomplish; by implication, to finish, fashion: –cause, to (deed), perform, work (out).” Thus, the concept of working out our salvation ties in harmoniously with the principles of faith and repentance.

Turning with the Whole Heart

The heart is a powerful symbol of rebellion and repentance in the Book of Mormon. Frequently used as a metaphor for apostasy and rebellion (hard, or proud heart), it is also used to express repentance and turning to the Lord (soft, or broken heart). The most common condition of the heart in the Book of Mormon is a “hard heart,” occurring 97 times, and accounting for 41% of all descriptions of the heart (see Appendix 6). Nephi constantly struggled with the hardness of his brothers’ hearts: “Being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, I cried unto the Lord for them” (1 Nephi 2:18). Hardness of the heart is a sure indicator of apostasy or meshuvah:

109 Joseph Smith, Jr., Lectures on Faith, 1:15.
Therefore thus saith the Lord: Because of the hardness of the hearts of the people of the Nephites, except they repent, I will take away my word from them and I will withdraw my Spirit from them. And I will suffer them no longer, and I will turn the hearts of their brethren against them. (Helaman 13:8)

The heart is also used as a symbol of sincere teshuvah in the Book of Mormon. Limhi, the grandson of Zeniff and king over a group of captive Nephites, promised his people that the Lord would free them from bondage if they would return to him:

But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart and put your trust in him and serve him with all diligence of mind – and if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage. (Mosiah 7:33)

The Lord told the Nephites that he would gather them “as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart” (3 Nephi 10:6).

While ministering to the remaining Nephites after his resurrection, the Lord taught them how to deal with repentant and unrepentant members of the church. They were told to “minister unto” and “pray for” the wayward sinner. If the individual repented, the people were to “receive him.” But, “if he repenteth not, he shall not be numbered among my people” (3 Nephi 18:30–31). However, an important counsel followed this instruction:

Nevertheless ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister. For ye know not but what they will return and repent and come unto me with full purpose of heart and I shall heal them, and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them. (3 Nephi 18:32)

We should continue to minister to the unrepentant because they may “return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart” — they may perform sincere teshuvah.

The turning of our hearts needs to be not just to God, but also to our fathers, to our progenitors. The final verse of the KJV Old Testament reads:

And he shall turn [shuv] the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. (Malachi 4:6)
This same verse from Malachi was repeated by the Lord in the Americas, underscoring the importance of turning our hearts to our ancestors as well as to the Lord. In fact, Malachi’s message of turning our hearts to our fathers is cited in every book of LDS scripture, highlighting the importance of this principle (see Luke 1:17, 3 Nephi 25:6, D&C 110:15, and Joseph Smith – History 1:39).

**Agency Makes Repentance Possible**

Agency, like faith and teshuvah, is a word that requires action. Agency has been defined as “the quality of moving or of exerting power; the state of being in action; action; operation; instrumentality.”111 The Lord said that “in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency” (Moses 7:32), or in other words, his ability to act for himself. With agency comes choice, and God expressed his desire that his children “should choose me, their Father” (Moses 7:33). However, knowing that mankind would not always choose him or his ways, along with agency God gave us the ability to repent and return to him through teshuvah. “Remember that ye are free to act for yourselves, to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life” (2 Nephi 10:23).

Corianton’s sins were a hindrance to the missionary effort among the Zoramites, and his father seized upon this as a teaching moment. Alma taught Corianton about the role of Adam and Eve in bringing about moral agency. After being removed from the Garden of Eden, they were “cut off, both temporally and spiritually, from the presence of the Lord. And thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will” (Alma 42:7). From that time forward mankind has existed in a fallen state. However, as Lehi explained, our merciful Father had created a plan whereby we could act for ourselves and return to him:

> The Messiah cometh in the fullness of time that he might redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall, they have become free forever, knowing good from evil, to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given. (2 Nephi 2:26)

The redemption of Christ made agency possible — it is what made us “free forever.” Alma further clarified this principle:

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111 Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. “agency.”
Wherefore he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good. (Alma 12:31)

Being a perfect and loving Father, God has given us, by his grace, the gift of agency. This gift, made possible through the redemption of Christ, allows us to turn from sin and return to him. Without this ability to act for ourselves, teshuvah would not be possible.

Will We be Naked or Robed?

Hans Christian Anderson wrote the story of The Emperor's New Clothes (Kejserens nye Klæder). In this parable, we learn of a king who placed a very high premium on his appearance, particularly on his clothing. Two “weavers” boasted that clothes made of their “fabric possessed the wonderful peculiarity of being invisible to every one [sic] who was either unfit for his situation, or unpardonably stupid.” Confident of his own worthiness, the king employed the two swindlers to make a suit of clothing for him to wear in a grand procession. All of the barons, advisors and even his minister, raved about the color, the patterns of the fabric, and the wonderful fit of the suit. Only one innocent child told the truth — that the emperor was naked.

Nephi saw in vision that “the silks and the scarlets and the fine-twined linen and the precious clothing and the harlots are the desires” of a “great and abominable church” (1 Nephi 13:8). As with the king in Anderson's story, the clothing of this church represents the pride of the world. And just as the king was revealed to be naked, the wicked will also discover their “nakedness before God” (Mormon 9:5) at the judgment day — a nakedness resulting from their absence of righteous works — their failure to perform teshuvah.

Jacob taught that if we are wicked, we will have “a perfect knowledge of all our guilt and our uncleanness and our nakedness” before God. On the other hand, “the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14). In order to not be found naked in the presence of the Lord we must clothe ourselves “with the robe

of righteousness.” In other words, we must put off our “uncleanness” and put on good works — we must turn away from sin and turn to God through teshuvah.

The Book of Mormon makes an interesting parallel between righteousness, prosperity and earthy attire. In Zeniff’s record, he created a thought-provoking link between clothing the people’s nakedness and their prosperity in the land:

And I did cause that the women should spin and toil and work all manner of fine linen, yea, and cloth of every kind, that we might clothe our nakedness. And thus we did prosper in the land; thus we did have continual peace in the land for the space of twenty and two years. (Mosiah 10:5)

On several other occasions in the Book of Mormon the prosperity of the people is linked with their manufacture of cloth and clothing to cover their nakedness (see Alma 1:27–29, Helaman 6:13, and Ether 10:24–28). The Book of Mormon also instructs us to clothe those in need, beginning in our own homes (see Mosiah 4:14). We find similar directives throughout the Book of Mormon (see Jacob 2:19, Alma 1:30, Alma 34:28, and Helaman 4:12).

At the dedication of the Kirtland temple, Joseph Smith prayed, “that our garments may be pure, that we may be clothed upon with robes of righteousness” (D&C 109:76). These robes of righteousness can only be woven on the looms of righteousness living. This is an imperative of teshuvah. In a final act of sanctification, our robes also must be “washed white” — “cleansed from all stain through the blood of him of whom it hath been spoken by our fathers which should come to redeem his people from their sins” (Alma 5:21).

**Summary**

We have demonstrated that the doctrine of repentance as taught in the Book of Mormon is consonant with both the Old and New Testaments. The Book of Mormon also adds incremental insights into the principles of faith, grace and good works.

The Book of Mormon teaches us that we must turn from our wicked ways and return to God with real intent — with our whole heart. Agency — a gift given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and a product of the redemption of Christ — makes repentance possible. We need to clothe ourselves in righteousness through good works in order to fully
activate the redeeming power of the atonement of Christ, through which our robes will be “washed white.”

**Conclusion**

In 1757, Robert Robinson penned these words to the hymn *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*:

> Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love;
> Here’s my heart, O take and seal it, Seal it for Thy courts above.113

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Mormon, Robinson acknowledged our tendency to turn from the God that we love toward a state of apostasy, or *meshuvah*. The solution to this apostasy is a sincere turning away from sin and turning to God — best exemplified by the words *teshuvah* of Old Testament origin, and *metanoia* in the New Testament.

Sincere sorrow and grief — *nacham* in the Old Testament and *metamelomai* in the New Testament — are an important part of repentance, and must always be followed by a sincere turning to the Lord with the whole heart — by *teshuvah*:

> Turn [shuv] ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn [shuv] unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth [nacham] him of the evil. (Joel 2:12–13)

The purpose of repentance is to activate the atonement in our lives and enable us to return to the presence of God — to our place of origin — clothed in the robes of righteousness that are woven from the fabric of righteous living. Although our good works cannot save us, they are powerful proof of our faith in the atonement of Christ, and will be used as evidence in the final judgment. Joseph Smith taught that “through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Article of Faith 3). “Faith is an act of obedience. . . . [F]aith gives law to us, and we must be obedient to it.”114

Repentance is an amazing gift — one that enables us to “have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7). Agency and grace, additional gifts from God, make repentance possible by

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allowing and empowering us to turn from our sins and return to God through *teshuvah*.

**Appendix 1 — Occurrences of “Repent” in the Scriptures**

The LDS version of the KJV Old Testament, containing nearly 1,200 pages, is relatively sparse in its use of *repent*, with only 45 occurrences of the word. By contrast, the New Testament, with only a third of the pages of the Old Testament, uses the word nearly 1½ times as often. Nevertheless, the Book of Mormon tops them both, using the word eight times more often than the Old Testament, and five times more than the New Testament. Even if the Old and New Testaments are combined, the Book of Mormon still uses the word three times more often than the entire Bible, and with far fewer total pages. Normalizing the data creates a common denominator by assigning the same number of pages as the current version of the LDS Old Testament (1,184 pages), to the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. The “Normalized” column shows how many occurrences of repent would theoretically occur.
## Appendix 2 — Nacham in the Old Testament

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<td>Job 42:6</td>
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<td>Jer 42:10</td>
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<td>Ezek 24:14</td>
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<td>Hosea 11:8</td>
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<td>Hosea 13:14</td>
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<td>Joel 2:13</td>
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<td>Joel 2:14</td>
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<td>Amos 7:3</td>
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<td>Amos 7:6</td>
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<td>Jonah 3:9</td>
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<td>Jonah 3:10</td>
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<td>Jonah 4:2</td>
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<td>Zech 8:14</td>
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**Nacham Total**

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<td>1 Kgs 8:47</td>
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<td>Ezek 14:6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ezek 18:30</td>
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</table>
Verses in which the word *repent* (and its derivates) appear in the KJV.

**Appendix 3 — Shuv in the Old Testament**

Jeremiah used the word *shuv* — denoting both repentance and apostasy — more than any other Old Testament author. He was responsible for 30% of the total Old Testament usage. “In his study of the use of the root שׁוּב [shuv] in Jeremiah, Krašovec concludes that ‘it occurs here in a richer variety of nuances than in any other book of the Hebrew Bible’” [bracketed text ours].

Born into a priestly tradition in the city of Anathoth around 645 BCE, Jeremiah lived during the same time and in the same general location as Lehi and his family. He spent his life warning the people of Jerusalem’s impending destruction, and was a personal witness to

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115 The left axis of the graph measures the total words per book (in Hebrew), while the right axis indicates the number of occurrences of *shuv* and its derivates by book. Books without at least one occurrence were omitted.


the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah’s preaching underscored the “cause and effect relationship between YHWH’s\textsuperscript{118} mercy and the people’s repentance.”\textsuperscript{119} If Israel would turn from her sins and return to God, he would also return to her, and spare her from destruction. Jeremiah was the first to proclaim God’s oath to the Israelites that he will “be their God, and they shall be my people” if they will perform sincere \textit{teshuvah} and return to him (Jeremiah 31:33). Scheuer added that:

The Book of Jeremiah offers a great variety of exhortations to improved conduct, or to return to YHWH. The addressees are instructed to a repentance-like action in a number of ways. The vocabulary used comprises the verbs \textit{טבש}, “to be good,” (Jeremiah 7:3; 18:11; 26:13), \textit{כבס}, “to wash,” (Jeremiah 4:14), and most frequently, the verb \textit{שוב}, “to return.”\textsuperscript{120}

\textbf{Appendix 4 — Nacham in the Septuagint}

The Septuagint provides us with a valuable insight into an ancient understanding of the words \textit{nacham} and \textit{shuv}. When the Septuagint was translated from the Hebrew more than 2,000 years ago, \textit{nacham} was expanded to 13 different Greek words (see below). The three Greek words most frequently preferred by the translators were \textit{metanoeō} (14 times), \textit{metamelomai} (8 times), and \textit{parakaleō} (8 times), accounting for 30 of the 42 occurrences of \textit{nacham}. At their root, all three of these words are “feeling” rather than “action” words. Strong’s Concordance uses phrases like “to think differently or afterwards,” “reconsider,” “to care afterwards,” or “to be of good comfort” to define them.\textsuperscript{121} Like \textit{nacham}, technically speaking, none of these definitions transmits any sense of turning from evil or turning toward God.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[118] The tetragrammaton YHWH (יהוה) is one of the Hebrew names for God in the Old Testament, and is commonly rendered Jehovah in English.
\item[119] Scheuer, \textit{The Return of YHWH}, 109.
\item[120] Scheuer, \textit{The Return of YHWH}, 106.
\item[121] Strong, \textit{The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible}, 47 (metanoeo and metamelomai), 54 (parakaleō), (of the Dictionary of the Greek Testament accompanying the Exhaustive Concordance).
\end{footnotes}
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<th>Strong's Number &amp; Definition</th>
<th>Verses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>μετανοέω metanoeō</td>
<td>3340 — To think differently or afterwards, i.e., reconsider (morally, feel compunction): — repent.</td>
<td>1 Sam 15:29 (2), Jer 4:28, Jer 8:6, Jer 18:8, Jer 18:10, Jer 31:19, Joel 2:13, Joel 2:14, Amos 7:3, Amos 7:6, Jonah 3:9, Jonah 4:2, Zech 8:14</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>μεταμέλομαι metamelomai</td>
<td>3338 — To care afterwards, i.e., regret: — repent (self).</td>
<td>Gen 6:7, Exodus 13:17, 1 Sam 15:11, 1 Sam 15:35, 1 Chr 21:15, Psalms 106:45, Psalms 110:4, Jer 20:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>παρακαλέω parakaleō</td>
<td>3870 — To call near, i.e., invite, invoke (by imploration, hortation or consolation): — beseech, call for, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give) exhort(-ation), intreat, pray.</td>
<td>Deut 32:36, Judges 2:18, Judges 21:6, 2 Sam 24:16, Psalms 90:13, Psalms 135:14, Ezekiel 24:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>παύω pauō</td>
<td>3973 — To stop (transitively or intransitively), i.e., restrain, quit, desist, come to an end: — cease, leave, refrain.</td>
<td>Jer 26:3, Jer 26:13, Jer 26:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἀναπαύω anapauō</td>
<td>373 — (reflexively) to repose (literally or figuratively (be exempt), remain); by implication, to refresh: — take ease, refresh, (give, take) rest.</td>
<td>Jer 42:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἀνίημι aniēmi</td>
<td>447 — To let up, i.e., (literally) slacken or (figuratively) desert, desist from: — forbear, leave, loose.</td>
<td>Jer 15:6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qty</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἀπειλέω</td>
<td>546 — To menace; by implication, to forbid: — threaten.</td>
<td>Num 23:19</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἐνθυμέομαι</td>
<td>1760 — To be inspired, i.e., ponder: — think.</td>
<td>Gen 6:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἡγέομαι</td>
<td>2233 — To lead, i.e., command (with official authority); figuratively, to deem, i.e., consider: — account, (be) chief, count, esteem, governor, judge, have the rule over, suppose, think.</td>
<td>Job 42:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἱλάσκομαι</td>
<td>2433 — To conciliate, i.e., (transitively) to atone for (sin), or (intransitively) be propitious: — be merciful, make reconciliation for.</td>
<td>Exodus 32:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἰλεῶς</td>
<td>2436 — Cheerful (as attractive), i.e., propitious; adverbially (by Hebraism) God be gracious!, i.e., (in averting some calamity) far be it: — be it far, merciful.</td>
<td>Exodus 32:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>μεταλλάσσω</td>
<td>3337 — To exchange: — change.</td>
<td>Hosea 11:18</td>
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</table>
### Appendix 5 — Shuv in the Septuagint

For the 176 occurrences of shuv (and its derivatives), the Greek supplied 21 different words in the Septuagint (see below). The two words that dominate the Greek usage are epistréphō (87 times) and apostréphō (58 times), accounting for 82% of the total usage. Both of these words are derived from the root strephō (στρέφω), meaning to twist, turn around, reverse or convert.¹²² In this sense, these two Greek words very closely reflect the meaning of shuv, and represent a good translation from the Hebrew.

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| 87  | ἐπιστρέφω  
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<td>6</td>
<td>ἀναστρέφω</td>
<td>390 - To overturn; also to return; by implication, to busy oneself, i.e. remain, live:— abide, behave self, have conversation, live, overthrow, pass, return, be used.</td>
<td>Prov 2:19, Jer 3:7, Jer 8:4, Jer 15:19, Jer 33:26, Jer 46:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qty</td>
<td>Septuagint</td>
<td>Strong's Number &amp; Definition</td>
<td>Verses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>κατοικία katoikía</td>
<td>2733 - Residence (properly, the condition; but by implication, the abode itself):— habitation.</td>
<td>Jer 3:6, Jer 3:8, Jer 3:12, Hosea 11:7, Hosea 14:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ἀφίστημι aphístēmi</td>
<td>868 - To remove, i.e. (actively) instigate to revolt; usually (reflexively) to desist, desert, etc.:—depart, draw (fall) away, refrain, withdraw self.</td>
<td>Josh 22:23, Jer 3:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>αἰχμαλωσία aichmalōsía</td>
<td>161 - Captivity</td>
<td>Jer 31:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἁμαρτία hamartia</td>
<td>266 - a sin (properly abstract):— offence, sin(-ful).</td>
<td>Jer 14:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἀνακάμπτω anakámptō</td>
<td>344 - To turn back:—(re-)turn.</td>
<td>Jer 3:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἀτιμόω atimóō</td>
<td>821 - To maltreat:— handle shamefully.</td>
<td>Jer 31:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qty</td>
<td>Septuagint</td>
<td>Strong’s Number &amp; Definition</td>
<td>Verses</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>δέχομαι</td>
<td>1209 - Middle voice of a primary verb; to receive (in various applications, literally or figuratively):— accept, receive, take.</td>
<td>Deut 30:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>διαλείπω</td>
<td>1257 - To leave off in the middle, i.e. intermit:—cease.</td>
<td>Jer 8:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἐξωθέω</td>
<td>1856 - To expel; by implication, to propel:—drive out, thrust in.</td>
<td>Jer 50:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ἐπέρχομαι</td>
<td>1904 - To supervene, i.e. arrive, occur, impend, attack, (figuratively) influence:—come (in, upon).</td>
<td>Prov 26:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ἰταλικός</td>
<td>2483 - Italic, i.e. belonging to Italia:—Italian.</td>
<td>Jer 49:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qty</td>
<td>Septuagint</td>
<td>Strong’s Number &amp; Definition</td>
<td>Verses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>κακία kakía</td>
<td>2549 - Badness, i.e. (subjectively) depravity, or (actively) malignity, or (passively) trouble:—evil, malice(-iousness), naughtiness, wickedness.</td>
<td>Jer 2:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>καταλείπω kataleípō</td>
<td>2641 - To leave down, i.e. behind; by implication, to abandon, have remaining:— forsake, leave, reserve.</td>
<td>Isa 10:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>οἴκεω oikéō</td>
<td>3611 - To occupy a house, i.e. reside (figuratively, inhabit, remain, inhere); by implication, to cohabit:—dwell.</td>
<td>Isa 21:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>πάλιν pálin</td>
<td>3825 - Anew, i.e. (of place) back, (of time) once more, or (conjunctitionally) furthermore or on the other hand:—again.</td>
<td>Neh 9:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qty</td>
<td>Septuagint</td>
<td>Strong’s Number &amp; Definition</td>
<td>Verses</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>σύντριμμα syntrimma</td>
<td>4938 - Concussion or utter fracture (properly, concretely), i.e. complete ruin:— destruction.</td>
<td>Jer 3:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>σώζω sōzō</td>
<td>4982 - To save, i.e. deliver or protect (literally or figuratively):— heal, preserve, save (self), do well, be (make) whole.</td>
<td>Isa 10:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ὑπερῴον hyperōion</td>
<td>5253 - A higher part of the house, i.e. apartment in the third story:— upper chamber (room).</td>
<td>Prov 1:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>removed</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Isa 1:27, Jer 3:11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 6 — Conditions of the Heart in the Book of Mormon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qty</th>
<th>Heart Condition</th>
<th>Verses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>1 Ne 2:16, 1 Ne 7:5, 1 Ne 7:19, 1 Ne 18:19, 1 Ne 18:20, 2 Ne 10:18, Mosiah 21:15, Mosiah 23:28, Mosiah 23:29, Alma 24:8, Hel 12:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lowly</td>
<td>1 Ne 2:19, Alma 32:8, Alma 32:12, Alma 37:33, Alma 37:34, Moro 7:43, Moro 7:44, Moro 8:26, Moro 8:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qty</td>
<td>Heart Condition</td>
<td>Verses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>2 Ne 25:16, Jacob 2:10, Jacob 3:1, Jacob 3:2, Jacob 3:3, Mosiah 4:2, Alma 5:19, 3 Ne 12:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sorrowful</td>
<td>2 Ne 4:17, Alma 31:2, Alma 31:31, Hel 7:6, Hel 7:14, 3 Ne 1:10, 3 Ne 28:5, Ether 15:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Broken</td>
<td>2 Ne 2:7, 2 Ne 4:32, 3 Ne 9:20, 3 Ne 9:20, 3 Ne 12:19, Moro 6:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Joyful</td>
<td>Mosiah 4:20, Alma 2:8, Alma 17:29, Alma 26:11, Alma 30:35, 3 Ne 4:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Purposeful</td>
<td>Mosiah 7:33, 3 Ne 10:6, 3 Ne 12:24, 3 Ne 18:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sincere</td>
<td>Mosiah 4:10, Mosiah 26:29, Hel 3:27, Moro 10:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>1 Ne 16:38, 3 Ne 11:29, 3 Ne 11:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>2 Ne 28:13, Alma 32:3, Alma 32:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thankful</td>
<td>Jacob 4:3, Alma 37:37, Alma 48:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Turned aside</td>
<td>1 Ne 19:13, 1 Ne 19:14, 1 Ne 19:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Holy</td>
<td>Mosiah 18:12, 3 Ne 4:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rejoicing</td>
<td>Alma 22:8, Morm 2:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Stout</td>
<td>2 Ne 19:9, 2 Ne 20:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Uncircumcised</td>
<td>2 Ne 9:33, Hel 9:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wicked</td>
<td>Jacob 2:6, Alma 10:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Boasting</td>
<td>Alma 31:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Corrupted</td>
<td>Ether 9:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Depressed</td>
<td>Alma 26:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Faint</td>
<td>2 Ne 17:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>2 Ne 16:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Alma 34:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Glad</td>
<td>Alma 51:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grieved</td>
<td>Alma 31:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Groaning</td>
<td>2 Ne 4:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>4 Ne 1:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moved</td>
<td>2 Ne 17:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Murderous</td>
<td>1 Ne 17:44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qty</td>
<td>Heart Condition</td>
<td>Verses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>3 Ne 19:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pained</td>
<td>1 Ne 17:47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Puffed up</td>
<td>2 Ne 28:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Real intent</td>
<td>Moro 7:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Removed</td>
<td>2 Ne 27:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sick</td>
<td>Alma 31:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stolen away</td>
<td>Alma 31:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stubborn</td>
<td>Alma 32:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Turned from Lord</td>
<td>3 Ne 7:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>United</td>
<td>Mosiah 18:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unsteady</td>
<td>Hel 12:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Weeping</td>
<td>2 Ne 4:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Willful</td>
<td>Moro 9:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>237</td>
<td>Total</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 7 — Meshuvah in the Septuagint and Peshitta

On a curious note, the Septuagint and the Peshitta often remove any sense of apostasy from the Hebrew word meshuvah by substituting the words for house or inhabitant, giving the translated texts a neutral meaning. For example, Jeremiah 3:12 in the KJV reads, “Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD.” The same verse from the Septuagint reads “be returned to me, O house of Israel, says the Lord!”

In the preceding verse, Jeremiah 3:11, the Septuagint completely removed the word meshuvah without replacing it with any alternate wording. Thus, “the backsliding Israel” is rendered as simply “Israel.” The translators of the Septuagint apparently wanted to avoid expressing the idea that Israel was in an apostate or backsliding state, and tried to soften the language. In the Peshittta, the translator sometimes changed the word meshuvah to a neutral meaning, swapping the Hebrew root shuv (שוב) for the Syriac cognate of yashav (ישב), which means “to sit

123 A Syriac translation of the Hebrew Bible completed around the third century CE.
125 κατοικία (Katoikía), meaning residence or habitation, is the most common replacement for meshuvah in the Septuagint, being used five times.
or dwell” in Hebrew. While the two Hebrew words (רשה and ישב) are visually similar, they are not known to share a common etymology, showing that the Peshitta “translator felt free to exercise a considerable degree of literary initiative.”

Appendix 8 — Extended discussion of the relationship between Faith, Works and Repentance

According to Buber, the Hebrew word that embodies the Jewish concept of faith is Emunah (אמונה) — a “great trust in God.” Emunah is further defined as firmness, security, and “faithfulness, in fulfilling promises.”

It seems clear that the Pauline/Johannine/Christian conception of faith represents a distinctly thinner conception of human relationship with God than its more robust Jewish counterpart. For Buber sees Christian understanding of Pistis less as ‘Here I stand’ than as ‘I acknowledge something to be the case’, which diminishes, even if it does not entirely lose, existential engagement and trust (and when Judaism moves in this direction, as Buber acknowledges has often been the case, it is always, in Buber’s judgement, a falling away).

The scriptures teach us plainly that the telos [aim or purpose] of our faith is the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:9). We are also instructed that “faith [is] unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5), and that we are “saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). Additionally, we are counseled to become “wise unto salvation through faith” (2 Timothy 3:15). Clearly, real faith — an active belief that is always accompanied by action — is essential to salvation.

Motyer, commenting on the second chapter of James, summarized James’s teachings on the interplay between faith and works:

1. Faith promotes works: works are not an exercise by themselves. Faith co-operates with them as a senior partner with a junior.
2. Faith needs works: by engaging in the activity of ‘works’ faith grows to maturity.

127  Buber, Two Types of Faith, 154.
3. Faith precedes works. Faith is the first and basic reality in Abraham’s relationship with God.\textsuperscript{130} [emphasis added]

Matthew Henry also commented on these verses from James, explaining that faith (rather, bare faith that is devoid of fruit) alone cannot justify or save us:

The apostle shews the error of those who rested in a bare profession of the Christian faith, as if that would save them, while the temper of their minds and the tenor of their lives were altogether disagreeable to that holy religion which they professed. To let them see, therefore, what a wretched foundation they built their hopes upon, it is here proved at large, \textit{that a man is justified, not by faith only, but by works}.\textsuperscript{131} [emphasis original]

Henry followed these comments about James’s teachings of faith and works with observations about possible conflicts with the writings of Paul:

Now upon this arises a very great question, namely, how to reconcile St. Paul and St. James? St. Paul, in his \textit{epistles to the Romans} and \textit{Galatians}, seems to assert the directly contrary thing to what St. James here lays down, saying it often, and with a great deal of emphasis, \textit{that we are justified by faith only, and not by the works of the law}.\textsuperscript{132} [emphasis original]

Henry explained that there exists a very “happy agreement” between the teachings of James and Paul on the subject of faith and works:

When St. Paul says, that \textit{a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law}, (Romans 3. 28.) he plainly speaks of another sort of works than St. James does, but not of another sort of \textit{faith}. St. Paul speaks of works wrought in obedience to the law of Moses, and before men’s embracing the faith of the gospel; and he had to deal with those who valued themselves so highly upon those works, that they rejected \textit{the gospel}; (as Romans 10. at the beginning, most expressly declares;) but St. James speaks of works done in obedience to the gospel, and as the proper and necessary effects and fruits of a sound believing

\textsuperscript{130} J.A. Motyer, \textit{The Message of James} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), Chapter 9, unpaginated.

\textsuperscript{131} Henry, \textit{An Exposition of the Old and New Testament}, 770.

\textsuperscript{132} Henry, \textit{An Exposition of the Old and New Testament}, 770.
in Christ Jesus. Both are concerned to magnify the faith of the gospel, as that which alone could save us, and justify us; but St. Paul magnifies it, by shewing the insufficiency of any works of the law before faith, or in opposition to the doctrine of justification by Jesus Christ; St. James magnifies the same faith, by shewing what are the genuine and necessary products and operations of it.133 [emphasis original]

Finally, Henry summarized his examination of the teachings of James and Paul concerning faith and works with the following:

Those who cry up the gospel, so as to set aside the law, and those who cry up the law, so as to set aside the gospel, are both in the wrong; for we must take our work before us; there must be both faith in Jesus Christ, and good works the fruit of faith.134 [emphasis original]

Martin Luther, a devoted proponent of salvation through faith alone, wrote the following regarding faith and works:

Faith is God’s work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn’t stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever.135

As we can see, Luther and Henry agreed that real faith always leads to works; works are the “fruit of faith.” Faith must produce works, and as Luther wrote, “Faith cannot help doing good works constantly.” Faith is the agent and works are the action — faith is the tree and works are the fruit. Luther continued:

It is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire! Therefore, watch out for your

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own false ideas and guard against good-for-nothing gossips, who think they’re smart enough to define faith and works, but really are the greatest of fools.\textsuperscript{136}

We are all familiar with the teachings from the “Sermon on the Mount.” During this sermon, Jesus taught his disciples:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But \textit{lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven}, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matt 6:19–21)

In his New Testament commentary, Charles John Ellicott, Lord Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, published this explanation of “treasures in heaven”:

Treasures in heaven. — These, as in the parallel passage of Luke xii. 33, are the good works, or rather the character formed by them, which follow us into the unseen world. (Revelations xiv. 13), and are subject to no process of decay. So men are “rich in good works” (1 Timothy vi. 18), “rich in faith” (Jas. ii. 5), are made partakers of the “unsearchable riches of Christ and His glory” (Ephesians iii. 8, 16).\textsuperscript{137}

Ellicott equated being “rich in good works” with being “rich in faith.” Many, including various Latter-day Saint leaders, have spoken in favor of works as an evidence of our faith: “Works are the evidence of our faith, works alone cannot save us, but works are the evidence that we have been saved.”\textsuperscript{138} George Albert Smith declared, “Let me say to you that the best evidence of our faith in [the word of wisdom], that we believe it came from God, is a consistent observance of it in our lives”\textsuperscript{139} [bracketed text ours]. Anthony W. Ivins taught:

Strange as it may seem to some, [observance of the law of tithing] is one of the most potent means by which we evidence

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{136} Luther, An excerpt from "An Introduction to St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans.”
\footnotetext{138} Michael Juckett, Serenity of James (Mustang, Oklahoma: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2010), 137.
\footnotetext{139} George Albert Smith, in Conference Report, April 1907, 18.
\end{footnotes}
our real faith in the Lord and in his work; for we give evidence of our faith by our works.\textsuperscript{140} [bracketed text ours]

In Hebrews 11:1 we read that “faith is the \textit{substance} of things hoped for, the \textit{evidence} of things not seen.” In order for faith to be \textit{evidence} (\textit{elegchos}, ἔλεγχος) there must be something “which manifests or makes evident” the faith\textsuperscript{141} — there must exist some type of \textit{substance} (\textit{hupostasis}, ὑπόστασις). Paul counseled, “Let every man prove his own work” (Gal 6:4). The apostle John, envisioning the final judgement, said that he saw that the dead “were judged every man according to their works” (Revelations 20:13). Paying tithing, living the word of wisdom, and giving service — in summary, keeping the commandments of God — “are profitable, as they are the fruits and evidence of a true and lively faith.”\textsuperscript{142} Ever the pragmatist, Brigham Young taught the saints:

> When I exhort the brethren to have faith, I really had rather that they would have good works; I do not care half so much about their faith as I do about their works. Faith is not so obvious a principle, but in good works you see a manifestation, an evidence, a proof that there is something good about the person who is in the habit of doing them.\textsuperscript{143}

The author of Hebrews described hope as “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Heb 6:19). The prophet Ether greatly expanded on this idea, explaining that:

Hope “cometh of” or is the product of faith;

- which “maketh an anchor to the souls of men;”
- rendering “them sure and steadfast;” and,
- causing them to be “always abounding in good works.”

(Ether 12:4)

Good works, like hope, are the product of faith, and evidence that we are anchored, sure and steadfast in Christ. Without this anchor, we will be “led about by Satan, even as chaff is driven before the wind, or as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves without sail or anchor or without any thing wherewith to steer her” (Morm 5:18).

\textsuperscript{140} Anthony W. Ivins, in Conference Report, April 1928, 19.
\textsuperscript{142} Fraser, \textit{The Whole Works of the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine}, 198.
\textsuperscript{143} Brigham Young, in \textit{Journal of Discourses}, 3:154.
Appendix 9 — Dead Works

The phrase *dead works* occurs only twice in the New Testament, and both times it is found in the book of Hebrews (6:1 and 9:14). In the New Testament literature, at least three basic views exist about the meaning of dead works: 1. Any and all works we perform to try to gain salvation; 2. Good works performed without real intent; and 3. Evil works, or in other words, sin.

Representative of the first position — that all attempts to gain salvation through works are dead works — is this:

"Repentance from dead works", therefore, is the doctrine that says we must repent from trusting in our own works to save us, which are dead works. Instead, we must trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.144

This belief that salvation comes through *divine grace alone* (*faith that is without works* rather than *faith — without works*) is often referred to as antinomianism, and was strongly rejected by Martin Luther and others. Luther accused the antinomians “of both teaching and denying Christ.”145 Many were good preachers, according to Luther, but in rejecting the severity of sin and the necessity of repentance, they denied the atonement of Christ. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, “repentance is the prerequisite of all atonement.”146

Liddon expressed well the second opinion — that dead works are those which we perform without real intent:

"Dead works:" works that are not good, in that their motive is good, nor bad, in that their motive is bad, but dead in that they have no motive at all “in that they are merely outward and mechanical,” affairs of propriety, routine, and form, to which the heart and spirit contribute nothing.147

In other words, anything that we do out of tradition, habit or even necessity, but that does not spring from a desire to glorify and serve God

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are dead works. The Lord may have been speaking of this type of dead works in this revelation concerning baptism:

Wherefore, although a man should be baptized an hundred times it availeth him nothing, for you cannot enter in at the strait gate by the law of Moses, neither by your dead works. For it is because of your dead works that I have caused this last covenant and this church to be built up unto me, even as in days of old. (D&C 22:2–3)

The Lord wants our sincere and heartfelt commitment rather than mere routine observance. How many of our own efforts are performed because of cultural, family, or even church traditions? “How many acts in the day are gone through without intention, without deliberation, without effort, to consecrate them to God!”

The third category of dead works — literally, works which lead to spiritual death, or in other words, sins that we commit — is supported by many commentators:

Agreably [sic], Repentance is called Repentance from dead works, Heb 6. I. i.e., Sins, which are dead Works; for they proceed from the body of Death in us, and if persisted in, end in Death. Sin when it is finished bringeth forth Death.

MacArthur commented that “Repentance from dead works is turning away from evil deeds, deeds that bring death” [bolding original]. He also explained that in addition to turning from our dead works, we also need to turn toward God through Jesus Christ. The 1599 Geneva Bible contains this wording and marginal note for dead works from Hebrews 9:14:

148 Liddon, Passiontide Sermons, 80.
149 Matthew Henry commented that “repentance from dead works” is “conversion and regeneration” – teshuvah. He continued, “The sins of persons unconverted are dead works; they proceed from persons spiritually dead, and they tend to death eternal.” (An Exposition of the Old and New Testament, 717.) Adam Clarke referred to dead works as “works of those who were dead in trespasses, and dead in sins.” The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, volume 2 (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1833), 687.
150 Sewall, Repentance: The Sure Way to Escape Destruction, 18.
14. How much more shall the blood of Christ which through the eternall Spirit offered himselfe without fault to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serue the liuing God?  

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This final concept of dead works — evil works — brings with it the invitation to come to God through repentance. Henry commented that “repentance from dead works, and faith towards God, are connected, and always go together; they are inseparable twins, the one cannot live without the other.”\(^{152}\) This combination of repentance from dead works — turning from sin — and faith towards God (which always includes good works) is the Old Testament definition of sincere *teshuvah*.

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**Many Witnesses to a Marvelous Work**

Daniel Peterson


Abstract: At the end of October each year, speakers from the Church Educational System, as well as other gospel scholars, gather at Brigham Young University to make presentations at the Sidney B. Sperry Symposium. The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder is a compilation of the addresses given at the forty-fourth symposium, in 2015. This volume does not so much delve into the doctrine of the Book of Mormon as it studies the history behind its coming into the world. Just as the doctrine itself is inspirational, the story behind the coming forth of the Book of Mormon serves as an inspiration and a testament to its truthfulness.

One way of explaining the Book of Mormon, assuming Joseph Smith’s own explanation is rejected, is to regard it merely as the product of Joseph’s subjective imagination — whether that imagination is judged to have been sincerely deceived or, for whatever motives, deceptive and dishonest.

The historical evidence, however, seems lethal to such theories. And it’s instructive to note that, while modern skeptics commonly assume that the golden plates never existed, many of Joseph’s earliest persecutions came because some of his neighbors were convinced that he had them.
“These records,” Joseph later wrote,
were engraved on plates which had the appearance of gold, each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long and not quite so thick as common tin. They were filled with engravings, in Egyptian characters and bound together in a volume, as the leaves of a book with three rings running through the whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness.\(^1\)

Why, if he were merely pretending, go into such details? Wouldn’t it have been easier to simply claim inspiration without manufacturing ancient civilizations or claiming to possess tangible ancient artifacts? After all, as Anthony Sweat observes in his excellent chapter in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, this was how most of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants were received:

Joseph Smith did not describe the coming forth of the Book of Mormon the way he described many of his revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants: as inspired words of the Lord that came to his mind and that he then dictated to a scribe. No, Joseph said the Book of Mormon came forth from a nearby hill, by removing dirt, using a lever to lift a large stone, and removing actual engraved plates and sacred interpreters for the translation of its inscriptions. The Book of Mormon didn’t just pass through Joseph’s trance-induced revelatory mind: its palpable relics passed through a clothing frock, hollowed log, cooper’s shop, linen napkin, wooden chest, fireplace hearth, and barrel of beans.\(^2\)

Sweat’s article lays out some of the salient evidence by examining “multiple historical accounts of persons who interacted with actual, physical, tangible objects” that, “taken collectively … provide compelling evidence to the truthfulness of Joseph Smith’s account of the Book of Mormon’s ancient origins.”\(^3\) Such accounts don’t prove the Book of Mormon ancient, divine, or even correctly translated — no single piece or type of historical evidence can cover everything — but what


\(^{3}\) Ibid.
Sweat powerfully terms the “indisputable physicality” of the plates and related relics⁴ goes a very long way toward establishing the plausibility of Joseph’s overall story and claim.

For example, Sweat considers the stone box in which the artifacts of the Book of Mormon were preserved on the side of the Hill Cumorah. Several witnesses, both believers and nonbelievers, apparently knew the place where it had been, and some may even have seen it. Lucy Mack Smith reported that she had seen and held both the Urim and Thummim and the breastplate found in the box, describing both in strikingly concrete detail. And, if there were no “actual relics hefted and handled, touched and transported, from one place to another and by one person to another,”⁵ all the stories about such things, and about the great efforts expended to protect the plates from people seeking to steal them, represent nothing more than a charade.

Looking at the same sorts of evidence, Terryl Givens remarks of Joseph Smith:

This continual, extensive, and prolonged engagement with a tangible, grounding artifact is not compatible with a theory that makes him an inspired writer reworking the stuff of his own dreams into a product worthy of the name scripture.⁶

If the “keystone” of Mormonism was delivered wrapped in fabrications, regarding it as nevertheless somehow “true” becomes, to put it mildly, much more difficult. Like the bodily resurrection of Christ from death, the physicality of the Book of Mormon — purportedly recovered from a dead pre-Columbian civilization — resists attempts to treat it as merely symbol or metaphor. It forthrightly demands to be understood as literally, tangibly true. It virtually forces a sharp decision.

I strongly suggest Anthony Sweat’s summary of the available evidence to any who might be interested in pursuing this subject. Believers will be heartened by it. Honest skeptics should find themselves challenged.

Some, unable or unwilling to take the witnesses to the Book of Mormon at their word, question their claims of seeing and hefting the golden plates, insisting instead that the witnesses “saw” only with “spiritual eyes” — which means, effectively, in their imaginations.

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⁴ Ibid., 55.
⁵ Ibid., 43–44.
Recently, the preferred method of disposing of the witnesses has been to suggest — quite falsely — that they never claimed to have literally seen or touched anything at all or to insinuate that they were primitive and superstitious fanatics who, unlike us sophisticated moderns, could scarcely distinguish reality from fantasy; honest they were, perhaps, but misguided.

It seems implausible, though, to assume that the witnesses, early nineteenth-century farmers who spent their lives rising at sunrise, pulling up stumps, clearing rocks, plowing fields, sowing seeds, making barrels, carefully nurturing crops, herding livestock, milking cows, digging wells, building cabins, raising barns, harvesting food, bartering (in an often cashless economy) for what they could not produce themselves, wearing clothes made from plant fibers and skins, anxiously watching the seasons, and walking or riding animals out under the weather until they retired to their beds shortly after sunset in “a world lit only by fire,” were estranged from everyday reality.

It’s especially unbelievable when the claim is made by people whose lives, like mine, consist to a large extent of staring at digital screens in artificially air-conditioned and lighted homes and offices, commuting between the two in enclosed and air-conditioned mechanical vehicles while listening to the radio, chatting on their cell phones, and fiddling with their iPods (whose inner workings are largely mysterious to them); people who are clothed in synthetic fibers and buy their prepackaged food (with little or no regard for the time or the season) by means of plastic cards and electronic financial transfers from artificially illuminated and air-conditioned supermarkets enmeshed in international distribution networks of which they know virtually nothing and for whom the rhythms of their daily lives are largely unaffected by the rising and setting of the sun. Somehow, the current generation seems ill-positioned to accuse the witnesses’ generation of being out of touch with reality.

Responding to the fashionable notion that those who testified of the plates and the angel were unable to distinguish reality from religious fantasy, historian Steven Harper explains in an article titled “The Eleven Witnesses” that “this explanation is appealing to some because it does not completely dismiss the compelling testimonies of the Book of Mormon witnesses, but it categorizes them as unreal.”7

Harper’s essay is followed immediately by one from Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, titled “A Multiplicity of Witnesses: Women and the

Translation Process.” Viewed together, these two articles examine the role of eleven men and four women who saw, felt, heard, and knew. We can accept their testimonies, or in my judgment, we can attempt to evade them.

Harper examines the surviving evidence of the witnesses, citing the basic, uncontroversial historical principle that, all else being equal, firsthand testimony should be preferred over secondhand reports when such testimony is available.

How does that principle apply in this case? Besides their formal testimonies printed in every edition of the Book of Mormon since 1830, two of the Three Witnesses and three of the Eight Witnesses are known to have left behind written accounts of their experience. And numerous statements survive from others who heard the testimonies of one or more of them.

Yet, Harper observes, critics of the Book of Mormon — to the extent that they engage the witnesses at all — “repeatedly choose to privilege selected hearsay more than the direct statements of the witnesses,” interpreting it by means of speculations and conjectures.8 (He writes of “selected hearsay” because the overwhelming majority even of the secondhand accounts are consistent with the official witness testimonies; only a small minority clash with them.)

Harper recounts the story of the intelligent but skeptical William McLellin, a onetime member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who lived for five decades in embittered estrangement from the church. Yet McLellin never lost his conviction, founded upon lengthy and searching interviews with the witnesses, that their testimonies were true and that, consequently, the Book of Mormon was of God.

“Why not make the same satisfying choice?” Harper asks.

Why not opt to believe in the direct statements of the witnesses and their demonstrably lifelong commitments to the Book of Mormon? This choice asks us to have faith in the marvelous, the possibility of angels, spiritual eyes, miraculous translation and gold plates, but it does not require us to discount the historical record or create hypothetical ways to reconcile the compelling Book of Mormon witnesses with our own skepticism.9

8 Ibid., 127.
9 Ibid., 129.
His excellent question gave me pause; it is one that allows us to accept the accounts of and by the Book of Mormon witnesses at face value, without the need to selectively and creatively recast accounts to satisfy our biases of “what must have been.”

In their essay, Easton-Flake and Cope contribute to our understanding of the Latter-day Saint past by addressing the “gap in scholarship and historical memory” connected with the role of women in the formative events of the Restoration. They concentrate specifically on four women — Mary Musselman Whitmer, Lucy Mack Smith, Lucy Harris, and Emma Hale Smith — in their capacity as witnesses to the Book of Mormon and testators of its appearance.

I’ll mention the most surprising of them first: Lucy Harris. We’re accustomed to thinking of Martin Harris’s wife as an antagonist to the Book of Mormon, to Joseph Smith, and, for that matter, eventually to her own husband. But this oversimplifies a very complex person: before she became an opponent, she actually contributed money to help Joseph while he was translating the record. She did this after a remarkable dream in which an angel showed the plates to her. Later, she and her daughter were permitted to hold the wooden box in which the plates were kept, and both were impressed by how heavy they were. This is a more important point than it might seem at first glance: gold, like lead, is extremely dense and heavy — much more so than mere rocks. At one point before his experience as a witness, Martin Harris too lifted the box in which the plates were allegedly concealed, to see what he could determine. “I knew from the heft,” he recalled with perhaps unintended humor, “that they were lead or gold, and I knew that Joseph had not credit enough to buy so much lead.”

Lucy Mack Smith and others in her family, as well as Emma Smith, were allowed to touch the plates and related objects through thin cloths. These were mundane experiences, perceived not in some mystical state or in a religious ecstasy but by means of their ordinary senses. They heard the metallic sound that the plates made when they scraped together. They felt the rings that bound the plates together.

Finally, Mary Whitmer (David Whitmer’s mother) was shown the plates by an apparent angel while she was out in the family barn to

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milk the cows.12 She may have been the first person to see them after Joseph Smith, followed by Josiah Stowell. (I’ll address Stowell shortly.)

These articles by Anthony Sweat, Steven Harper, Amy Easton-Flake, and Rachel Cope represent the latest scholarship on the Book of Mormon witnesses, who remain as formidable and as convincing today as they were when William McLellin interviewed them back in the early 1800s.13 The new articles should be accompanied, in this regard, by the work of historians Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat who, in their recent book, From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon, take a fresh look, enabled by their work with the ongoing Joseph Smith Papers Project, at a story that most active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints already know fairly well.14 MacKay and Dirkmaat also have two chapters in The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon. In “Firsthand Witness Accounts of the Translation Process” and “Joseph Smith’s Negotiations to Publish the Book of Mormon,” they further treat topics covered in From Darkness unto Light.

Some readers, having heard the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon all of their lives, may therefore imagine that there’s

14 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: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2015).
nothing new to be learned about those familiar narratives of the early Restoration covering the years 1827–1830.

However, I think they’ll be surprised as I was. E. B. Grandin, for example, who printed the first edition of the Book of Mormon, emerges both as more hostile to the project than I’d realized and, frankly, as more greedy. And the sheet supposedly suspended between the Prophet and his scribes while he dictated turns out to have little support in the sources.

MacKay and Dirkmaat also provide fascinating details about the breastplate given to Joseph Smith, as well as about the “spectacles” that aided in the translation process. (They proved so cumbersome that Joseph eventually replaced them with a single seerstone.) The complex relationship between Lucy and Martin Harris, and between both of them and the Book of Mormon, is also depicted more fully than I’ve seen before.

Moreover, the motivation for Martin Harris’s trip to New York City, during which he famously met with Professor Charles Anthon, is substantially transformed, as follows: 1. Joseph likely didn’t yet know about “reformed Egyptian.” 2. the authors persuasively argue that Joseph sought expertise not on Egyptian or Hebrew but on Native American languages, 3. because of his expertise, Samuel Mitchell rather than Anthon was the crucial person in the original story, and 4. as I independently but privately surmised a few years ago, Joseph at first wanted someone else to translate the plates, unaware that he himself was to be the translator.

Richard E. Bennett, the senior historian represented in The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon, concurs with them in offering a fresh look at “Martin Harris’s 1828 Visit to Luther Bradish, Charles Anthon, and Samuel Mitchill.” He suggests a rather different understanding of the undisputed fact that Martin Harris returned from his visit to the East fortified in his determination to contribute financially — and probably few of us fully recognize how massively he did so — to the publication of the Book of Mormon.

Along with Anthony Sweat, McKay and Dirkmaat also offer new information about the stone box in the Hill Cumorah that had once contained the plates. Many in the area, it seems, knew of the box or at least of the hole in which it had once rested.

“Ironically,” MacKay and Dirkmaat comment, while the detractors of Joseph Smith spent the remainder of his life claiming that he had never found any gold plates, had
any visitations from angels, or received any visions, Joseph’s initial problems with his enemies in 1827 were precisely because they were certain that he had in fact obtained some golden treasure from the hill, and therefore they wanted to take it from him, forcibly if they had no other choice. Those who were most acquainted with Joseph Smith in Palmyra did not doubt he had received the plates but instead took steps to obtain them for themselves or at the very least find remnants of the buried treasure possibly still lying in the hill.\textsuperscript{15}

Numerous statements from multiple sources support the literal materiality of the contents of that box. “Most of Joseph’s closest friends and family,” write MacKay and Dirkmaat, “testified to touching, hefting, or seeing the plates.”\textsuperscript{16}

For me, the most surprising piece of new information in the book involves Josiah Stowell.\textsuperscript{17} He was apparently “the first person other than Joseph to feel and heft the plates.”\textsuperscript{18} Later, however, Stowell actually testified under oath that he saw the plates the day Joseph first brought them home. As Joseph passed them through the window, Stowell caught a glimpse of the plates as a portion of the linen was pulled back. Stowell gave the court the dimensions of the plates and explained that they consisted of gold leaves with characters written on each sheet.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 10
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{17} Or Stoal; see Joseph Smith-History 1:56–58.
\textsuperscript{18} MacKay and Dirkmaat, \textit{From Darkness unto Light}, 13.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. Another significant step forward is MacKay and Dirkmaat’s entirely unembarrassed description in \textit{From Darkness unto Light} of a translation process for which Joseph Smith used a stone placed at the bottom of a hat. Related to this is an appendix to the book by Anthony Sweat, who teaches LDS church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University and who, equipped with a degree in art, contributed the book’s illustrations. In “By the Gift and Power of Art,” on pages 229–243 of \textit{From Darkness unto Light}, he offers a helpful perspective on the fact that artwork illustrating events in LDS church (and other) history is often historically inaccurate. Some critics have used such artistic inaccuracies as weapons against the Church and the confidence of the Saints. I’ve actually argued, though, that Joseph’s use of the rock in the hat, properly understood, is strongly faith-affirming. See Daniel Peterson, “Joseph, the stone and the hat: Why it all matters” (\textit{Deseret News}, 26 March 2015): http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865625005/Joseph-the-stone-and-the-hat-Why-it-all-matters.html.
Thus, Josiah Stowell can now be listed as yet another eyewitness who could testify to the existence of the Book of Mormon plates.

But what of the contents of those plates? What about the substance of the Book of Mormon itself?

Even before its publication in March 1830, most people knew what to expect from “that spindle shanked ignoramus Jo Smith,” as Abner Cole would shortly describe him.20 And opinions didn’t change after the Book of Mormon actually appeared.

When Samuel Smith placed a copy with him in the summer of 1830, the Methodist preacher John P. Greene quickly dismissed it as a “nonsensical fable.”21 It was a “miserable production,” sniffed the *Ashtabula [Ohio] Journal* in 1831.22

On the church’s first birthday (April 6, 1831), the editors of the *Brockport [New York] Free Press* pronounced the Book of Mormon “a fiction of hobgoblins and bugbears.”23 The volume is “a bungling and stupid production,” said one 1840 periodical.24 Another critic described it in 1841 as “mostly a blind mass of words … without much of a leading plan or design. It is in fact such a production as might be expected from a person of Smith’s abilities and turn of mind.”25 In 1842, Daniel Kidder found it “nothing but a medley of incoherent absurdities,” and J. B. Turner called it “a bundle of gibberish.”26 In 1930, the literary critic

Bernard DeVoto declared it “a yeasty fermentation, formless, aimless, and inconceivably absurd.”

From the beginning, however, others responded differently, and more than 150 million copies of the Book of Mormon having now been printed in over a hundred languages, it has been ranked among the most influential books in American history. Merely hearing the term “Gold Bible,” said the early-nineteenth-century religious seeker Solomon Chamberlain, “there was a power like electricity (that) went from the top of my head to the end of my toes. The Lord revealed to me by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost that this was the work I had been looking for.” “As I read,” Parley Pratt wrote of his own experience, “the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true, as plainly and manifestly as a man comprehends and knows that he exists.”

John P. Greene’s wife, Rhoda, convinced him to give the book another chance, and between his 1832 baptism and his death in 1844, he served eleven missions for the Restored Church. That same copy of the Book of Mormon brought Heber C. Kimball, a future apostle and counselor in the First Presidency, into Mormonism, along with the Young brothers — Phineas, Lorenzo, Joseph, and Brigham. After two years of careful examination, Brigham recalled, “I knew it was true, as well as I knew that I could see with my eyes, or feel by the touch of my fingers, or be sensible of the demonstration of any sense.”

Although rare, even a non-Mormon editor or two evaluated the Book of Mormon with reasonable fairness and accuracy. For instance, Robert Dale Owen, editor of New York City’s Free Enquirer, published a “comparison between the Book of Mormon and the Scriptures of the

Old and New Testaments, or the Golden Bible vs. the Holy Bible” in 1831. Nearly a full page long, it was written by his brother William who, “after a pretty careful perusal,” concluded that

The Golden Bible will bear a very good comparison with the holy Bible. I find nothing in the former inconsistent with the doctrines or opposed to a belief in the latter; on the contrary, the one seems to corroborate the other; and I can discover no good reason why the generality of Christians should scoff, as I have generally found them do, and hoot at the idea of believing in such a monstrously absurd book.32

For the Book of Mormon is demonstrably neither “bungling” nor “gibberish” nor “incoherent” nor “aimless.” (Grant Hardy’s Oxford University Press volume Understanding the Book of Mormon has recently destroyed that venerable claim yet again.33) Many critics have, in fact, tended to fault the Book of Mormon not for what it actually is but for what they assume it must inevitably be. As the Catholic sociologist Thomas O’Dea quipped in 1957, “the Book of Mormon has not been universally considered by its critics as one of those books that must be read in order to have an opinion of it.”34

“It is a surprisingly big book,” remarked Hugh Nibley, supplying quite enough rope for a charlatan to hang himself a hundred times. As the work of an imposter it must unavoidably bear all the marks of fraud. It should be poorly organized, shallow, artificial, patchy, and unoriginal. It should display a pretentious vocabulary (the Book of Mormon uses only 3000 words), overdrawn stock characters, melodramatic situations, gaudy and overdone descriptions, and bombastic diction …. Whether one believes its story or not, the severest critic of the Book of Mormon, if he reads it with care at all, must admit that it is the exact opposite. …. It is carefully organized, specific, sober, factual, and perfectly consistent.35

33 See the publication data on Hardy’s Understanding the Book of Mormon above, in note 25.
While they’ll discount his obvious assumption that it was composed in the nineteenth century, believing Latter-day Saints will, I think, appreciate the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Daniel Walker Howe’s judgment that “the Book of Mormon should rank among the great achievements of American literature.”

Most, though not all, of the early reactions to the book cited above are discussed in Jeremy Chatelain’s interesting chapter in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, titled “The Early Reception of the Book of Mormon in Nineteenth-Century America.” Chatelain examines public reaction to the recovery of Mormon’s record from 1829 through 1831.

The Book of Mormon was more heavily addressed in newspapers in these three years than in the next nine years combined. The primary sources used for the study are from a newly assembled collection of over 10,000 articles on Mormonism in more than 660 newspapers from 1829 to 1844. Among these sources are at least 583 articles that mention the Book of Mormon by name. More than two-thirds of those articles were written the first three years.

Steven C. Harper’s “The Probation of a Teenage Seer: Joseph Smith’s Early Experiences with Moroni” takes an admirably candid look at how a frontier American farm boy grew over four years, learning how to rise to his calling as a prophet before he could commence his public ministry. The chapter contributed by J. B. Haws, “The Lost 116 Pages Story: What We Do Know, What We Don’t Know, and What We Might Know,” surveys the best scholarship on a somewhat puzzling episode and even produces a very subtle but intriguing argument for the consistency and prophetic authenticity revealed in the story. (I can’t recall having ever seen the loss of the first Book of Mormon manuscript used to promote and defend the faith, but the argument advanced by Haws is well worth pondering.)

In his contribution, “The Book of Mormon among the Saints: Evolving Use of the Keystone Scripture,” Casey Paul Griffiths pursues the earlier landmark work of Noel B. Reynolds even further, showing how Latter-day Saints have begun to move beyond the underutilization

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38 Ibid., 174; compare 191.
of the Nephite record that was so surprisingly typical of believers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He identifies several genuine heroes in this process — including not only President Ezra Taft Benson but Elder George Reynolds, Elder Joseph F. Merrill, and Professor Sidney B. Sperry — who deserve more credit for their roles than they have thus far received. An important part of the church’s rediscovery of, and renewed emphasis on, the Book of Mormon has been its translation into well over a hundred languages since the original inspired 1830 translation into English. This story is told in a chapter by Po Nien (Felipe) Chou and Petra Chou, titled “‘To Every Nation, Kindred, Tongue, and People.’”

*The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon* opens with a chapter (“The Coming Forth of Plain and Precious Truths”) by Elder Merrill J. Bateman, emeritus member of the Seventy, former presiding bishop of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and former president of Brigham Young University. Also not to be missed are “‘They Are Not Cast Off Forever’: Fulfillment of the Covenant Purposes” by Jared W. Ludlow and “‘To the Convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ’” by Shon D. Hopkin, who has been a valued participant in the Interpreter Foundation’s “scripture roundtables.”

*The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon* is filled with insightful and inspiring stories about how we received the Book of Mormon. There is very good material in this book, which I enthusiastically recommend.

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Abstract: How long did it take Nephi to compose his portions of the “small account?” Careful text analysis and data mining suggest that “Nephi’s” texts may have been composed across periods as great as forty years apart. I propose a timeline with four distinct periods of composition. The merits of this timeline are weighed, and some thoughts are explored as to how this timeline alters the reader’s perceptions of Nephi. The net effect is that Nephi becomes more sympathetic, more personable, and more relatable as his record progresses and that the totality of Nephi’s writings are best understood and interpreted when the factor of time is considered.

In her teens, my eldest daughter was a prolific journal keeper. As my wife and I were recently going through her high school memorabilia, we filled an entire suitcase with these journals. Because she is in her thirties now and has her own basement, we decided to dump this suitcase on her doorstep. She immediately became enthralled with the writings of her past, rereading and reliving the words and memories of her youth. She laughed, grimaced, and reminisced. Seemingly insignificant trinkets such as a “Skittles” candy wrapper triggered a flood of thoughts and emotions. She smiled over best friends long forgotten, recalled bouts of silliness, recognized life episodes that had planted tiny seeds of faith, and cringed over some of the “weird” things she once held dear. Foremost, she was struck by her own personal growth and how she had matured since her last college journal entry when for her, the process of physically writing in the journal had given way to electronic recording methods such as blogging. My present-day daughter — although she consciously remembers writing those journals — is today an entirely different person...
and could never produce them again. The passage of a decade or two has changed who she is, how she thinks, and how she writes.

Nephi identified himself as the primary author of the first two books in the Book of Mormon. In that text there is evidence of a considerable time gap from when the earliest portions of the text were authored and when Nephi wrote his final farewell, perhaps as long as forty years. Is there also evidence that the persona Nephi sketched for his audience evolved during this same period? The passage of time changes each of us — how we speak, how we write, what we believe, and what we feel is important. I propose that the careful reader of the Book of Mormon can witness both subtle and dramatic changes in Nephi’s writings and doctrines best explained by the “softening” of his heart via the passage of time, an expanded appreciation of the importance of his record, and his relationship with his brother Jacob. I argue that Nephi’s writings become even more accessible if the reader approaches his record holistically and contemplates the overall arc of the life he had chosen to share with us.1

Contemporary Scholarship on Nephi’s Compositional Timeline

Considerable scholarship has focused on Nephi with notable volumes examining his role as an editor, his use of Isaiah, the Tree of Life vision, his prophecies, the Old World context of his travels, and his reliance on biblical motifs.2 Little, however, has been written about the span of time it took Nephi to author the plates, how the persona that he presented to his audience evolved, and how his understanding of the purpose of his record changed. Book of Mormon readers and scholars have generally assumed that Nephi wrote the small account during a relatively short

1 Nephi is both a character in this drama as well as the purported author. For the purposes of this paper, I will take Nephi at his word but fully understand that many do not. The best that I can hope to do is try to evaluate the character that Nephi presented to us, as readers, independent of whatever the objective historical reality is.

2 A complete bibliography would be too exhaustive for our purposes. Book-length treatments include Grant Hardy’s Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide; Hugh Nibley’s Lehi in the Desert & the World of the Jaredites; Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, edited by Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch; The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision, edited by Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson; Bradley J. Kramer’s Beholding the Tree of Life: A Rabbinic Approach to the Book of Mormon; Joseph M. Spencer’s An Other Testament: On Typology; Brant A. Gardner’s Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon; and First Nephi: The Doctrinal Foundation, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr.
period (e.g., a few years at most) later in his life with a specific purpose in
mind while referring to an assemblage of documents which included but
were not limited to the brass plates, Lehi’s records, sermons, recorded
blessings, and Nephi’s own writings. Another oft-implied assumption is
that Nephi had a master plan or outline with which he used to organize
his writings.

Recent scholarship has begun to question these traditional
assumptions. Authors such as Joseph M. Spencer are willing to “explore
the possibility — heretofore unexplored in Book of Mormon scholarship
— that the character of Nephi’s project changed dramatically after he
finished writing 1 Nephi 1–18 … It might be, then, that Nephi eventually
took his record in a different direction than he had intended.” Likewise,
Brant A. Gardner recently published a short article touching upon these
themes. Gardner highlights a point of demarcation between 2 Nephi 5
and the remainder of 2 Nephi and concludes that this is the moment
where Nephi took his record down a completely different path.

First Nephi is very clearly a planned text and was written after
Nephi had already created the dynastic record. In 2 Nephi 5:28,
he declares that he is writing thirty years after they had left
Jerusalem. He certainly had the time to prepare what he would
write in this second set of plates. Careful examination of the
way Nephi constructed his text shows intricate planning at
least during the creation of his first book on the small plates
… For Nephi, we have the structurally complex book we call
2 Nephi. Even a cursory reading of 2 Nephi shows it to be
quite different from 1 Nephi. Although chapters 1-5 appear
to follow the model established in 1 Nephi, chapter 6 abruptly
changes into something quite different. Nephi, who had rarely

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3 This is the sense, for example, given by Noel B. Reynolds in *The Political
Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates* (BYU Studies 27.4, Fall 1987) when he writes
“when Nephi undertook late in his life to write an account of the founding events
of the Lehite colony” and John W. Welch in *FARMS Update in Insights* (April 1999),
2, when he writes that “Nephi wrote his small plates soon after important events
such as Lehi’s death, Nephi’s separation from his rebellious brothers, and the
establishment of the reign of kings” [emphasis added].

4 Joseph M. Spencer in *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, OR:
Salt Press, 2012), 42, argues for a “fourfold structure” of a) Creation, b) Fall, c)
Atonement and d) Veil. John W. Welch in *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Provo, UT:
FARMS), 199-201, feels both 1 and 2 Nephi were intentionally organized using
chiastic structures.

quoted from another source to this point, quotes a sermon from his brother Jacob. There is no transition from the more historical information at the end of chapter 5. In fact, the end of chapter 5 has a tone of finality.6

Benjamin L. McGuire argues that Nephi, in his role as editor, regularly spoke directly to his audience, setting and resetting what they, as readers, should expect of the text. McGuire argues that 1 Nephi 1, 6, and 9 and 2 Nephi 33 are all “narrative beginnings” designed to alter how Nephi’s audience should approach his words.7 “By the time we finish Nephi’s texts, we have journeyed through four narrative beginnings. At each step we are encouraged to change both our understanding of the text and the way in which we read it.” 8 McGuire concludes that the manner with which Nephi, himself, perceived his own text evolved during the process of writing the record.

Nephi starts his text by lending his presence: he stands behind his text, he declares it to be “true.” On the journey of his writing, he discovers that it is true only in a uniquely personal way. His audience, should they follow his suggestions, will discover their own revelation, their own experience, and their difference from his.9

While Grant Hardy does not propose an explicit timeline as to when each portion of Nephi’s text was composed, he does demonstrate an acute awareness of the various life stages during which Nephi authored each of his texts and bases much of his literary analysis upon this awareness. For example, Hardy tells us that when we as readers reach 2 Nephi 5, that we

6 Brant A. Gardner, “Two Authors: Two Approaches in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015), 257-258. While Gardner is highlighting the difference between 1 and 2 Nephi, he maintains that Nephi carefully planned the structure of 1 Nephi.

7 Although McGuire does not specifically mention time, his argument for separate narrative beginnings implies that considerable time passed between the periods of composition. This is reminiscent of the observation regarding Moroni’s three attempts to conclude the record, first proposed by Mark D. Thomas, “Moroni: The Final Voice,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003) and later discussed by Grant Hardy in *Understanding the Book of Mormon*. The suggestion is that Moroni believed he was closing the record three separate times and that a substantial amount of time passed between these three authorship periods.


9 Ibid., 72.
should reread the earlier text because we now have the realization that, “Nephi is not recording events as they happen. Instead, he is a middle-aged man recounting incidents from his teens and early twenties, with the full knowledge that life in the Promised Land has soured, that there has been an irreparable breach with his brothers, and that his closest relatives have spent years trying to kill each other.”

Hardy, like McGuire, also argues that how Nephi perceived his record changed during the compositional process. For example, after discussing Nephi’s prophecy that references the writings of “thy” seed (which contemporary readers generally equate with the Book of Mormon), Hardy poses the question “when does Nephi come to realize that the book he is writing is actually the same book he saw in vision several decades earlier?” He argues that when Nephi began the small plates, he seemed to have a single audience in mind, but by the time he closed his record, he was writing to at least two audiences.

From the beginning, Nephi had some audience in mind (“Therefore, I would that ye should know … But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you …” 1 Nephi 1:18, 20). At first, these intermittent personal references seem directed to his people, and he is writing either as a king or as an ancestor, despite one somewhat tentative appeal “unto all the House of Israel, if it so be that they should obtain these things” (1 Nephi 19:19). But by the time he begins to comment in 2 Nephi 25-33, he is addressing a second audience as well.

Hardy argues that Nephi’s understanding of why he was writing the small plates changed and that his acknowledgement of a latter-day audience is evidence of this evolution. Hardy suspects that the editorial comment Nephi made in 2 Nephi 4 “has to do with his [Nephi’s] evolving

10 Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13. As another example Hardy says, “Of course we have heard Nephi’s mature voice from the opening verse, but the first time he quotes his teenage self we read … ” (36).

11 Hardy quotes 1 Nephi 13:35. “For behold, saith the Lamb, I will manifest myself unto thy seed that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious. And after that thy seed shall be destroyed and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, behold, these things shall be hid up to come forth unto the Gentiles by the gift and power of the Lamb.”

12 Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 77.

13 Ibid., 78.

14 Throughout this article, I generally refer to the “small account” (Words of Mormon 1:3) or these “other plates” (2 Nephi 5:30) as the “small plates.”
sense of his own contribution to the now doubly foretold book and an awareness of his readership for whom he was ultimately writing.”

Although Hardy does not explicitly state this, he implies that such an evolution in Nephi’s thought process while he composed his text is linked to the passage of an extended period of time.

**Proposed Timeline of Authorship**

Nephi recounted the historical portion of his narrative in a rigid chronological manner. Each event is told in its proper order. This characteristic of Nephi’s storytelling is helpful for establishing a timeline of text composition. Nephi occasionally interrupted his story with editorial commentaries, which often are designed to explain the nature of the present text (small plates) in relation to other texts preserved by the Nephites. These editorial asides can help us piece together a theoretical timeline of text composition we can then evaluate against the entire work to determine if it tells us anything new and worthwhile about Nephi. The model I propose organizes Nephi’s text into four distinct compositional periods, and I suggest likely dates for each period.

Nephi tells us that he was commanded to fashion the small plates sometime between thirty and forty years after his party had left Jerusalem.

> And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness. And thirty years had passed away from the time we left Jerusalem. And I Nephi had kept the records upon my plates which I had made of my people thus far. And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good

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15 Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 78.

16 Both Hardy and McGuire also stress the importance of realizing that Nephi, in his role as editor, selected what to share with his audience and what to withhold. McGuire states “being an unreliable narrator does not mean, of course, that the character Nephi in his text is speaking untruths. What it means is that he has not necessarily told us everything and we discover the unreliability in the contradictions and motivations presented to us in the text.” McGuire, “Nephi: A Postmodernist Reading,” 59. For me, this simply means that as readers, we need to be conscious of Nephi’s maturation and growth as he returns again and again to his record. The writings of a young Nephi are only “unreliable” in the context of the writings of a more mature Nephi.

17 Although not entirely clear in the text, I concur with most commentators that this date refers to the time the family left the city of Jerusalem and not when they left Bountiful.
in my sight for the profit of thy people. Wherefore I Nephi, to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things … And it sufficeth me to say that forty years had passed away, and we had already had wars and contentions with our brethren. (2 Nephi 5:28-34; emphasis added)²⁸

Although he had previously mentioned their existence, Nephi told the story of creating the small plates when he reached the appropriate chronological point along his historical timeline.¹⁹ Just prior to the thirty-year mark, Lehi had passed away, the family schism had occurred, the Nephites had constructed a temple, and Nephi had consecrated Jacob and Joseph as priests. The text also states that Nephi already had been keeping the larger, more historical record of his people. Sometime after the thirty-year mark, he was commanded to “make other plates,” a commandment which he followed. He fashioned these “other plates” and began to engrave upon them. Chronologically, this seems to be the only important historical event Nephi noted on the small plates during this ten-year period. However, Nephi included a telling comment immediately after mentioning the passing of “forty years.” He remarked that they “already had wars and contentions with our brethren.” Following Nephi’s strict chronological telling of events, I take this to mean that between when he fashioned the small plates and when “forty years” had passed, there was enough time for “wars and contentions” to have occurred (note the plural). Contrast this with Nephi’s comment just prior to the passing of “thirty years” where he noted that the people lived “after the manner of happiness.” It is logical that Nephi would have begun a project such as the small plates during a time of harmony and prosperity and that during a time of “wars and contentions,” the “king,” Nephi, would likely have been distracted and thus, the authorial process stopped and started.

Due to the “happiness” reported at year thirty compared to the contention leading up to year forty, I feel it is more likely that Nephi began his text closer to year thirty (30 – 33) and composed 1 Nephi – 2 Nephi 5 over the course of that decade.²⁰ By the time we reach 2 Nephi 5:34,

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¹⁸ Royal Skousen’s *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009) is the default Book of Mormon text used for this paper.

¹⁹ 1 Nephi 1:1-3, 16-17, 1 Nephi 6, and 1 Nephi 19:1-6.

²⁰ For the remainder of this paper I refer to points upon the proposed timeline in this manner. Year thirty, therefore, refers to thirty years after the family left
we can be certain that at least forty years have passed. Therefore, it is a reasonable conclusion that Nephi had been working on the small plates for between 5 and 10 years at this point in the text.

While Nephi told us he began his work on the small plates after year thirty, he also informed us that he abridged much of his history from earlier sources. Nephi reported that he made an abridgment of the record of his father (1 Nephi 1:17) and his own writings — the plates that he created just after arriving in the new world (1 Nephi 19:1). Does this mean Nephi completely rewrote his source material or that he selectively determined what to quote and what to exclude? The evidence from the text favors the latter scenario. For example, in 1 Nephi 5, Nephi recounted the content that the family found on the “plates of brass,” and then he added an editorial aside explaining that at this point he was breaking from the source record and would not include “the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record.” Likewise, Nephi’s account of Lehi’s vision of the “rod of iron” (1 Nephi 8) quoted Lehi directly until verse 29, where Nephi reasserted control of the narrative with the statement “and now I, Nephi, do not speak all the words of my father” and thereafter gave a short summary of the remainder of the vision. In this instance, Nephi seemed to be quoting directly from an older source and then intentionally interjected his own, later, editorial voice. While Nephi often inserted his editorial voice, he was usually transparent when he did this, typically employing the distinctive phrase “and now I, Nephi” as an indicator that he was about to comment. But the vast majority of 1 Nephi seems to be direct quotations from Nephi’s original source material. It is useful for our purposes, therefore, to consider the likely composition dates of the older, original plates from which Nephi extracted much of his early history.

A few years after he arrived in the Promised Land, Nephi is commanded to “make plates of ore” to “engraven them with the record of Jerusalem.

21 Nephi did not tell us how far past forty years the time line had passed. He could have written 2 Nephi 5:34 anywhere between year forty and year fifty. If, at this point in his text, he had been writing later than year fifty, I believe he would have mentioned that in the text.

22 “Behold, I make an abridgement of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life.”

23 1 Nephi 6:1

24 1 Nephi 8:29

25 See 1 Nephi 1:16, 1 Nephi 6:1, 1 Nephi 8:29, 1 Nephi 10:1 as examples.
of my people.”26 While the record is not entirely clear when the party arrived, it is reasonable to assign a date of approximately 15 years post-Jerusalem for the construction of these plates. This implies that Nephi began these earlier plates about 15 years prior to when he fashioned the small plates. It does not mean, however, that the family had not written down the stories of their exodus in some other manner or had developed an oral tradition.27

As Gardner notes, Nephi’s record took a radical turn immediately after 2 Nephi 5. Nephi’s writings no longer recounted the history of his people. His record is now something altogether different; he quoted a sermon by his brother, recorded extensive passages from Isaiah, he shared his own prophecies, and he closed with what Hardy refers to as an appendix.28 When was the latter half of 2 Nephi written? One clue comes from the first chapter of Jacob, when we are told that fifty-five years after Jerusalem, Nephi put Jacob in charge of “these small plates.”29 It is likely that Nephi attached his final ending to his record (“appendix”) just prior to handing over responsibility for the plates.30 And when did Nephi write the remainder of 2 Nephi? Based on evidence which I summarize

26 1 Nephi 19:1. I place the formation of the “plates of ore” within a few years of the family’s arriving in the Promised Land. Immediately after arriving in the Promised Land, the family planted seeds, had abundant success, explored the wilderness, and discovered precious metals including gold, silver, and copper. These activities would likely have required only a few years to complete. On the other hand, the chronological events that occur in the text after Nephi created the plates are a) Nephi used the plates of brass to preach to his people, b) he had a conversation about Zenos/Isaiah with his brethren, c) Lehi gave blessings to his children, d) Lehi died, e) the family divided, f) a city and a temple were built, g) Nephi’s ascended as ruler, and h) Joseph and Jacob were consecrated as priests. These are events that seem more significant and time consuming. Since all of this occurs within a period of approximately twenty years, I suggest a date of three years after arrival in the Promised Land for formation of the large plates.

27 It is highly likely that many of the historical stories found in 1 Nephi were part of a family oral tradition and told often. One evidence for this discussed in a forthcoming paper is the prevalent use of chiastic poetic form when Nephi quoted from abridged source material versus his comparative abandonment of the form when he wrote content specifically for the small plates.

28 2 Nephi 30 closes with a sense of finality (“and now my beloved brethren, I must make an end of my sayings”). The final three chapters of 2 Nephi (31-33) appear to be a final ending, which is why it is referred to as an appendix.

29 Jacob 1:1

30 Nephi’s last words have a strong sense of finality as he bids an “everlasting farewell.” It is unlikely that Nephi penned these words until he had a sure knowledge that they were his last.
throughout the remainder of this article, I prefer a later date (year fifty or later) for 2 Nephi 6-30 as well.  

Figure 1 summarizes my proposed compositional timeline for Nephi’s writings. There appears to be a nearly forty-year gap between some of the earliest of Nephi’s stories that he quoted directly from external sources (i.e., Laban, tree of life, and wandering in the wilderness) and his final appendix. Now that we have a proposed timeline, we can reexamine Nephi’s writings through the lens of this model, specifically looking for new insights that this model might bring to the text and about its author, Nephi.

### Narrative Beginnings and Editorial Asides

If the proposed timeline is correct, it would not be surprising if Nephi’s designs and purposes for his record changed as he aged. As mentioned previously, McGuire argues that Nephi wrote four separate narrative beginnings designed to reset and refocus the expectations of his reader. I concur and argue that there are an additional four editorial asides that Nephi employed to mark further changes in how we should perceive his

31 The reasons for a substantial time gap include evidence of a change in Nephi’s writing style, the impact of Jacob and Isaiah upon Nephi’s later doctrinal writings, a general softening on doctrinal topics such as eternal life, and a deeper understanding about the fate of his people.
record (see Figure 2 for a list and summary of all of Nephi’s editorial asides).32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text Highlights</th>
<th>Appropriate Readers’ Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 1: 1-3</td>
<td>And I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge</td>
<td>Nephi’s language of his father, Nephi favored of God, based on Nephi’s knowledge, his proceedings, record is true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 1: 16-17</td>
<td>I make an abridgment of the record of my father; upon plates which I have made with mine own hands</td>
<td>Not a full account but an abridgment based on record of his father, will tell his father’s story and then his own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 6: 1-5</td>
<td>The fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham...and be saved</td>
<td>No genealogy, not a full historical account, write what is pleasing unto God, intent is to persuade men to come unto God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 9: 2-5</td>
<td>Wherefore the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not</td>
<td>These plates for the ministry and other plates for reign of kings, Nephi commanded to make these plates for what purpose he knows not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 19: 1-7</td>
<td>I proceed according to that which I have spoken; and this do I that the more sacred things may be kept for the knowledge of my people</td>
<td>Will only write that which he consider sacred, will give an account of how these plates were made later, if he err it is because of the weakness in him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 4: 14-15</td>
<td>And upon these I write the things of my soul, and many of the scriptures which are engraven upon the Plates of Brass</td>
<td>Will not include all of Lehi’s sayings, will include things of Nephi’s soul and scriptures from Plates of Brass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 15: 29-34</td>
<td>And it came to pass that the Lord God said to me, “Make other plates; and thou shalt engrave many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people”</td>
<td>When and why he made this record, has engraved what is pleasing unto God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 13: 1-4</td>
<td>...cannot write all the things which were taught among my people, neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking...</td>
<td>Not mighty in writing (weakness), many that harden hearts against his words, great worth to Nephi and his people</td>
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</table>

Nephi began his record brimming with self-confidence, a sense of which he conveyed to his audience (“I know that the record which I make is true”). This is likely reminiscent of the period of relative tranquility in which he wrote this portion of the record (shortly after year thirty), a

32 There are many other editorial comments in which Nephi speaks directly to his audience but that do not, in my opinion, invite us to rethink how we should approach the totality of Nephi’s record or discuss Nephi’s overall purpose. These include the aforementioned 1 Nephi 8:29 where Nephi told us that he was going to give a quick summation of the rest of Lehi’s story and 2 Nephi 11:8, where Nephi introduced the words of Isaiah with an invitation to “liken them unto you.”
tranquility that would be shattered by “wars and contentions.” We find no hint of second guessing, no indication of self-doubt. His stated purpose in his first narrative beginning is to “make a record of my proceedings in my days.” He did not tell his readers that this record is meant to be uniquely spiritual. Rather Nephi planned to abridge the record of his father and then record his own history. Before long, however, he modified his audience’s expectations slightly and indicated that his genealogy will not be included in the record. McGuire points out that a typical reader of an ancient document would have expected a genealogy. He also told us that he did not include a full history but rather that he abridged existing records so that he could focus these plates on “the things of God.” For the first time, Nephi told us his purpose for writing this record; “For the fullness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved” (1 Nephi 6:4).

Shortly thereafter, Nephi gave his readers another narrative beginning. This time Nephi appeared more honest and circumspect with regard to his intent for these plates. He admitted that he is unsure as to why he has created this smaller set of plates, although he knew that they are “for the more part of the ministry” (1 Nephi 9:4). Nephi wrote, “wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not” (1 Nephi 9:5). This is an important clue as to the timing of when Nephi wrote these editorial asides. Later in the record, Nephi reported that he has learned through revelation and his study of the plates of brass that his words would ultimately come forth in the form of a book and be of “great worth unto the children of men, and especially unto our seed, which is a remnant of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 28:2). But as of 1 Nephi 9, there is no foreshadowing of his later knowledge about the ultimate purpose of the record, suggesting that Nephi wrote these comments prior to receiving that revelation. Nephi reported being unsure about the ultimate purpose of his record as late as when he wrote 1 Nephi 19:3 (“for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord”).

33 1 Nephi 1:2
35 Joseph Spencer asserts that 1 Nephi 19 through 2 Nephi 5 is a unified text because of Nephi’s promise in chapter 19 that he will give an account of “my making these plates”; a promise that he fulfills in chapter 5 of 2 Nephi. A careful reading of the text does not require the conclusion that this is a unified text (although it certainly could be). Nephi could simply be telling his story in chronological order. After arriving in the Promised Land, Nephi was commanded to create plates of
McGuire argues that Nephi’s final words also serve as another narrative beginning. Here Nephi spoke with a spirit of humility reflective of one who has carried heavy burdens throughout his life. Nephi lamented that his “eyes water my pillow by night.” He also wrote as one who has read and pondered the words he has previously written and was reflective about the process. Like my daughter’s experience with her journals, he seemed slightly nostalgic and slightly hesitant about the words he had written. By employing the phrase, “I have written what I have written,” when he described his personal reflections upon reviewing his record, Nephi told us much about his heart and his state of mind at that time. The earlier exuberance and confidence had waned. He was a more mature writer who understood that others will have different reactions to his words than what he might have hoped. While he felt the record to be of great worth, he acknowledged that others might not feel the same way. In his final narrative beginning, Nephi seemed obsessed with the writing process and at three separate points acknowledged his own weakness as an author (“neither am I mighty in writing”). He then realized that his words, in and of themselves, were not sufficient to persuade his readers to come to Christ unless the Spirit strengthens his words. Thus, he invited the reader to reexamine his writings from a new perspective and, conjointly, we are invited to revisit what we know of Nephi as author and as a person.

Comparing and contrasting Nephi’s first narrative, beginning with his last, is instructive (see Figure 3). When Nephi began his record, he believed he was writing another autobiographical narrative. Over time, his true writing purpose came into focus; he was attempting to convince his future audiences to reconcile their own wills to that of the Savior. While he found personal worth in his writings, he understood that he — the story of which Nephi related at the appropriate point in the text. When he mentioned that he will tell the story of the small plates at the appropriate chronological moment in his record, Nephi did not necessarily imply that he had a master plan other than that which he had already shared with us, to give his and his father’s histories — Spencer, An Other Testament: On Typology, 34-5. He relies heavily here on the work of Frederick W. Axelgard, “1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole,” BYU Studies 26/4 (Fall 1986).

36 2 Nephi 33:3
38 Nephi mentioned the writing process seven separate times in 2 Nephi 33:1-11.
39 2 Nephi 33:1; The other instances are “the things which I have written in weakness” (2 Nephi 33:4) and “I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness” (2 Nephi 33:11).
others may not react the same way. When he began his record, rejection was limited to Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael. As he closed his record, however, we get the impression that he has experienced much more personal tragedy and rejection. In short, Nephi’s final beginning was written with more humility and meekness than his first and is reflective of a maturation indicative of a lifetime of trials and heartbreak.40

The proposed timeline helps explain Nephi’s evolved understanding of the purpose of his record. His purposes changed dramatically from when he started writing the plates (after year thirty) and when he concluded the plates (around year fifty-five). Initially Nephi did not know the ultimate purpose of these “other” plates; he was simply being obedient. His headnotes to 1 and 2 Nephi made no mention of spiritual writings to be included in the record (e.g., quotations from Isaiah, tree of life vision, Lehi’s blessings, and Nephi’s final prophecies).41 Over time he modified this record to be more focused on the spiritual vis-a-vis the historical and, simultaneously, he altered his purpose for writing

40 Nephi’s final tone is reminiscent of an aged Lehi as he implored his sons to “hear the words of a trembling parent” (2 Nephi 1:14).

41 The headnote to 2 Nephi implies that the bulk of 2 Nephi was an afterthought. It gives no indication of what was to come after 2 Nephi 5. It simply reads “an account of the death of Lehi. Nephi’s brethren rebelleth against him. The Lord warns Nephi to depart into the wilderness, etc. His journeyings in the wilderness, etc.”

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<th>Figure 3: Comparison of Nephi’s First and Last Narrative Beginning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Beginning</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1 Nephi 1:13; 16:17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose          To make a record of Nephi’s and his father’s proceedings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone             Confident bordering on arrogant (Nephi knows the record is true because he makes it with his own hands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority        Nephi claims to have been highly favored of the Lord in all of his days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated      That the reader will automatically accept this record as an accurate history of Nephi’s life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception</td>
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the text. In an early vision, he had learned of “other books” that would “come forth” unto the Gentiles in the latter days, but not until he received his revelation about the coming forth of the “sealed” book did he fully realize the role this specific record of his would play.42

**Further Evidence Supporting the Timeline**

In addition to direct comments found in the text, the four narrative beginnings, Nephi’s additional editorial asides, and the way Nephi’s understanding of the purpose of the small plates evolved, there is more evidence that supports the proposed timeline. This section summarizes these additional arguments.

It is interesting to note that Nephi initially expected to hand over the responsibility of maintaining these plates “unto my seed.”43 But surprisingly and possibly tragically, this is the last mention in Nephi’s writings of his direct lineage. He mentioned his people generically (i.e., “thy seed”), but never again did he refer to his own children. Even Laman and Lemuel’s offspring were specifically given a blessing by Lehi. But as Grant Hardy has conjectured, the blessing that Nephi likely received from his father (along with that of his offspring) has been omitted from the text.44 We can surmise, therefore, that somewhere between 1 Nephi 6:6 and the end of the text, something occurred to Nephi’s seed as he ultimately handed over responsibility of the record to Jacob and appointed “a man” as ruler in his stead.45

Grant Hardy speculates about the fate of Nephi’s children and suggests three possibilities; a) that Nephi only had daughters, b) that his sons died at a relatively young age, or c) that they joined forces with Laman and Lemuel.46 While this is all speculative, it is interesting to consider what the proposed timeline suggests about this topic. Nephi’s mention of his offspring came early in his record, likely between year thirty and thirty-four, which would be before the “wars and contentions” that Nephi referenced. Although Nephi claimed that his brethren tried to take his life several times, the only blood shed during 1 Nephi appears to be that of Laban. On the other hand, casualties are implied by Nephi’s use of the term “wars.” It is quite possible that Nephi lost someone close

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42 1 Nephi 13:39, 2 Nephi 27:7
43 1 Nephi 6:6
44 Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 51.
45 Jacob 1:9
46 Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 48. Another possibility is that Nephi’s sons were not as worthy successors as was Jacob.
to him during these initial battles with the Lamanites. And as son(s) of the king, Nephi’s children would have been responsible for defending the kingdom. This reading makes some sense out of Nephi’s mention of his children early in the record, his later reluctance to reference them, and his “anger” towards his enemies at the time when he penned his so-called psalm.47

Another evidence supporting the timeline comes from textual analysis of Nephi’s words. While a treatise explaining the emergence of the digital humanities field is beyond the scope of this paper, it is sufficient to state that text analysis involves using advanced computing along with statistical and data mining techniques to better understand written information. Two techniques in particular, authorship attribution and topic modeling, are well-suited to contribute to our understanding of Nephi’s writings. If, as the timeline suggests, Nephi composed the text of the small plates over four notably different periods, it is reasonable to conclude that his writing style likely changed and that we should expect to find statistical evidence of this as we analyze his writing style. For example, Roper, Fields, and Schaalje examined one set of texts from Sidney Rigdon dating to the 1830s and another set dating to the 1860s and concluded that the data strongly suggest that “Rigdon’s early writing style had evolved into another style later in his life.”48

An authorship attribution model that uses text samples from Nephi, organized using the proposed timeline, is charted in Figure 4 via two-dimensional principal components mapping (I have also included the Isaiah texts as an anchor).49 While this type of analysis is meant to be directional and not statistically definitive, the data does suggest four rather interesting conclusions that are supportive of the timeline. First, Nephi’s writing style evolved slowly over time in nearly a linear fashion. For example, the first text he authored is mathematically closest in style and form to the second text he authored and furthest from the

47 2 Nephi 4. I speculate that this was written between years forty and forty-two, certainly after the period of peace and happiness referenced by Nephi around year thirty.


49 A stylometric model using lexical features (words and phrases) was developed. Each of the relevant texts was scrubbed to include only the specific content that can be sourced directly to the stated author. The results were then displayed via principal components analysis to highlight the differences between the text samples in two-dimensional space. The larger the mapped distance between the sample texts, the greater the mathematical difference between the two.
final texts he authored. The only exception to this rule is Nephi’s final appendix, where he reverted back to a style more closely aligned with his late history. Second, Nephi’s editorial asides and narrative beginnings, although physically located in the text alongside his abridged history, are better aligned statistically with his later history, a finding predicted by the timeline. Third, Nephi’s word and phrase usage changed dramatically over the course of his life, indicating a shift in interests, ideas, and influences upon Nephi. For example, the famous phrase “and it came to pass” was used 133 times by Nephi in his abridged and later histories (year 15 to year 42) but was completely abandoned thereafter with not a single use (years fifty to fifty-five). Fourth, late in his life, Nephi’s study of Isaiah was so in-depth and comprehensive that his writing style began to emulate that of the Old Testament prophet. The result of this is that the two writing signatures are mathematically indistinguishable in our model.

Figure 4: Nephi’s Writings Portrayed in a Factor Map

Each point is based on a statistical analysis of all the word and phrase usage from each text and summarizes that information in a two-dimensional space. The closer the points, the more statistically similar the texts in terms of their word and phrase usage. Conversely, the farther the points, the more dissimilar the texts.

The two writing styles are represented at both a control and an anchor.
Jacob and the Softening of Nephi’s Heart

Figure 4 vividly illustrates just how different Nephi’s early abridged historical writing style (year 15 from the large plates and other sources) was from that of his later prophecies (year fifty). Closer analysis reveals that these differences reflect a common theme; Nephi’s approach to doctrine, leadership, and his audience became more mature and gentle. In short, Nephi’s heart softened. His verbal landscapes were no longer painted strictly black and white; Nephi discovered more grey in the world. Although several possible factors can account for this transformation, I wish to highlight one — Nephi’s burgeoning relationship with his younger brother, Jacob.

Jacob first appeared in Nephi’s record when he was “begat” in the wilderness (a line probably written between years twenty and thirty). At this moment in the text, Nephi gave his readers no indication of how important Jacob would become later on. This nonchalant introduction leads us to suppose that Jacob and Joseph will be personality-free characters in Nephi’s drama, much like Sam. Lehi was the vehicle whom Nephi used to more fully introduce Jacob to his readers (via Jacob’s blessing). This blessing laid the groundwork for much of the soteriological discussion, doctrine, and speculation that followed later in the Book of Mormon from other writers such as Mosiah, Amulek, Alma, and Mormon. It is interesting that Lehi addresses this sermon to his son Jacob.50 There seemed to be a special bond between Lehi and Jacob, as he was the one who took Lehi’s ideas and advanced them.51 And, ultimately, it was through Jacob and his lineage that the records were passed from generation to generation.

Although Nephi presented himself as a prophet and shared many of his visions and prophecies, he did not seem to enjoy endless speculation about the things of God. Nephi’s abridged text highlighted his willingness to ask for direct guidance from the Lord and then obediently follow that guidance. Nephi’s vision of the Tree of Life was akin to a Q&A session with an angel of the Lord. Nephi was not trying to answer all of life’s mysteries, he simply wanted to know what all of the symbolism presented in the vision meant. He noticed different details than his father did. Nephi also was the first to “liken” the scriptures unto himself;

50 Midway through this sermon, Lehi included an invitation to all of his children to pay attention to his words. I argue that the primary recipient of his message, however, remains Jacob because Lehi continues the blessing with the same tone and context as before.

51 2 Nephi 9-11 for example.
his study of the “brass plates” led to a midrash-like practice in which he selectively quoted scripture to support his authority and teachings.  

He organized his abridged history (likely the large plates) using thematic elements from the Exodus; employed the words of Zenos, Neum, Zenock and Isaiah to prophesy of Christ; and selectively quoted from Isaiah 29 as he discussed the latter-day coming forth of his record.

Nephi had a telling exchange with his brethren as they struggled to understand Lehi’s vision of the tree of life. His brethren remarked to Nephi, “We cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles.” Nephi’s response was, “Have ye inquired of the Lord?” He then gave them an interpretation but appears frustrated that they have not done what he did (“I desire to behold the things which my father saw”).

Towards the end of his life, Nephi could at least sympathize with those who did not comprehend the mysteries of God, yet he did not fully understand why they made plain things difficult. Speaking to a later audience as he closed his record, Nephi acknowledged that many would find it difficult to follow his counsel. But Nephi struggled to understand why his readers would “ponder” these things in their hearts and not simply just pray for divine guidance.

And now behold, my beloved brethren, I suppose that ye ponder somewhat in your hearts concerning that which ye should do after that ye have entered in by the way. But behold, why do ye ponder these things in your heart? Do ye not remember that I said unto you that after ye had received the Holy Ghost, ye could speak with the tongue of angels? ... And now my beloved brethren, I perceive that ye ponder still in your hearts. And it grieveth me that I must speak concerning this thing. For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray, ye would know that ye must pray.

Lehi, on the other hand, was portrayed as a visionary man with a passion for theology. Lehi’s visions and dreams were quite different from

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52 1 Nephi 19:23  
53 See Brant A. Gardner’s Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 44-46 for a summary of the Exodus parallels.  
54 1 Nephi 15:7-8  
55 1 Nephi 11:3
Nephi’s Q&A sessions. His were full of symbolism, which he seemed to understand, perhaps due to his maturity at the time when he received these visions. Lehi took the plates of brass and was able to surmise the existence of a fallen angel, knowledge previously unknown to the family. From the outset, Jacob appeared to have more in common with his father than did his brother Nephi. Although he also received direct revelation, Jacob’s discourses, like Lehi’s, were more theoretical and theological. For example, Jacob’s choice of topics and words revealed a deep interest in Christology and soteriology. We first find the term “atonement” in the Book of Mormon text during Lehi’s blessing of Jacob. In his writings, it is clear that Jacob was not content just to have known about the atonement, he wanted a deeper and more personal understanding of how it works. He coined a new phrase, “infinite atonement,” which he used in his first recorded sermon. Jacob made mention of the atonement 19 times in his writings; Nephi mentioned it only once. And Nephi paraphrased Jacob the one time he did mention the term “atonement.” As Figure 5 shows, Jacob’s word choice reflected his interests in Christology (atonement, resurrection, grace) and soteriology (death and hell, justice, restored); he utilized terms related to these topics at a much higher frequency than Nephi.

In the text, Jacob is presented as more personable and relatable than Nephi. He used words like “souls,” “love,” and “your” more often. Even when Jacob was called by the Lord to rebuke his audience, he did it softly and with great personal trepidation. He prefaced his admonitions with phrases like, “it grieveth my soul and causeth me to shrink with shame before the presence of my Maker” and “and stumble because of my overanxiety for you.” While Nephi never steered his story back to the Lamanites after the schism, Jacob returned to them quite often and reported on attempts to unify the two communities. Jacob, like his father, never gave up on the Lamanites and even spoke favorably of them during his temple discourse.

56 “Nephi’s prophetic mode was quite different from his father’s, more direct and less symbolic.” Brant A. Gardner, Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, 77.
57 And likely the Hebrews of the time.
58 Jacob 2:6
59 Jacob 4:18
60 Jacob 3
Did Jacob have a softening effect on Nephi? Based on my reading of the text, the answer is affirmative; Jacob appears to have had a profound impact on Nephi which can be best summarized by a single significant phrase shown in **Figure 6**. In the small plates the first recorded words that Jacob spoke are “Behold, my beloved brethren.” This phrase, “my beloved brethren,” proved to be a favorite term of endearment for Jacob when addressing an audience; he used it often. Prior to Jacob (2 Nephi 6:1), the phrase had not been used in the text by any other speaker. However, Nephi soon adopted the phrase and made it his own.61 Almost exclusively, where Nephi previously would have addressed “my brethren,” he then addressed “my beloved brethren.”

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61 While I presume that Nephi adopted this phrase from Jacob, I cannot be 100% certain that Jacob did not adopt it from Nephi.
Another example of Nephi’s softening came from the way he internalized Jacob’s deep theological insights. During his prophecy phase (year fifty), Nephi borrowed liberally from the words of Lehi, Isaiah, and Jacob, intermingling their ideas with his own to produce an amazingly coherent whole.\(^\text{62}\) While not as pronounced as his use of Isaiah, Nephi gathered doctrinal and theological ideas from the one sermon of Jacob’s that he had recorded in the record; over and over Nephi restated Jacob’s foundational arguments with little alteration. In Figure 7, I have listed four such instances of restatement found in 2 Nephi 25-30.

As mentioned, Jacob used the word “atonement” 19 times in total and introduced the scripturally unique concept of an “infinite atonement.” Nephi, on the other hand, only used the term once (2 Nephi 25:16), and he was clearly sampling from Jacob because he linked the words “atonement” and “infinite” together during his one mention. Note that Jacob came to the conclusion that the atonement is infinite through theological reasoning (“it must needs be”) whereas Nephi’s “which is infinite” in reporting this conclusion, reflected none of the conjecture and uncertainty which was characteristic of Jacob’s thought process. Likewise, Nephi quoted Jacob’s viewpoints on endless torment, grace, and secret combinations almost verbatim.\(^\text{63}\)

\(^\text{62}\) He also included several references to his brother Joseph’s blessing (see Grant B. Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 79-80).

\(^\text{63}\) Joseph M. Spencer performs a detailed exegesis comparing 2 Nephi 10:24 and 2 Nephi 25:23 and states that the “similarity between the two texts is obvious.” He concludes that “the parallel between Jacob’s and Nephi’s uses of the word ‘after’ can dispel the most common interpretation of 2 Nephi 25:23. Nephi cannot be
Nephi’s Soteriology: A Lifetime Filling in the Details

The path to eternal life, according to Nephi’s early abridged account (year 15), is relatively straightforward. Monikers such as “inasmuch as ye shall keep my commands”\(^{64}\) and “a strait and narrow path”\(^{65}\) are the dominant messages he conveyed to his readers with regard to their salvation. Nephi never strayed from this vision of salvation even as his brothers struggled with obedience to both their father and to the Lord. In fact, Nephi closed his first book with the following matter-of-fact formula for salvation:

Wherefore if ye shall be obedient to the commandments of God and endure to the end, ye shall be saved in the last day. And thus it is. Amen. (1 Nephi 22:31)

But it was never as simple for Lehi, who struggled mightily as a parent of wayward children, who always held out hope for their ultimate salvation and who agonized over their refusal to partake of the fruits of saying that grace is only what makes up for what goes beyond an individual’s ‘best efforts’” (Spencer, An Other Testament: On Typology, 92-95).

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64  1 Nephi 2:20

65  1 Nephi 8:20
righteousness. It was also never as simple for Jacob, whose empathetic manner inherently made him more understanding toward those caught in the snares of sin. As Nephi matured and was influenced by Jacob, his thoughts on how to obtain eternal life changed as well. Theologically, where Nephi’s thoughts on salvation ultimately evolved to is quite different and more nuanced than where his views were when he closed 1 Nephi. While he never abandoned this original foundational model (salvation=obedience + enduring to the end), Nephi noticeably expanded on the details as he wrote the closing to 2 Nephi.

At the end of his portion of the small plates, Nephi authored a statement (or appendix as Hardy refers to it) in which he shared, among other things, his ending thoughts on salvation. In 2 Nephi 31, Nephi laid out, step by step, a formula for obtaining eternal life (“ye shall have eternal life”), and he shared the sources from whence he learned of each step (see Figure 8). The formula begins with baptism (as revealed by Lehi’s vision), the receipt of the Holy Ghost (as revealed to Nephi by the voice of the Son), standing firm in that baptism (as revealed by the voice of the Son), holding fast to the iron rod (quoting Lehi’s vision), and enduring to the end (revealed by the voice of the Father).

After he reviewed these steps, Nephi asked his audience a hypothetical question. “And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done?” One can only imagine a younger Nephi replying with a resolute “yeah” with the caveat that we need to endure to the end. But Nephi answered his own question with a resounding “Nay!” This is so unexpected that it is worth examining his final words in greater detail. Here is how Nephi answered his own hypothetical:

Behold, I say unto you: Nay. For ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope and a love of God and of all men; wherefore if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the words of Christ and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father, ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:19-20)

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67 2 Nephi 31:19
Nephi recognized that we cannot progress without the grace of Christ (his “word”) and an unshaken faith in him (thus it is by grace we are saved). We are to rely on him who is mighty to save (via his “atonement”). Both expressions are creative ways of describing the ideas put forward by Lehi and Jacob on grace and atonement. Then Nephi took his analysis one step further. So far he had relied heavily on other sources (e.g., direct revelation, Lehi’s Vision, Jacob) and made them his own. But Nephi concluded his summary with his own personal thoughts on salvation, which are not as easily sourced. Nephi exclaimed that the reader must retain a perfect brightness of hope and press forward in Christ. This implies developing a long-term relationship with Christ filled with prayer, hope, and united companionship. Then Nephi stated that we must have a genuine love of God and of all men. The requisite works of obedience are actually works of love. Although the topic of love is more likely to be discussed by Jacob, Jacob never gave us a love-based model of salvation. Nephi’s model of salvation replete with grace, love, hope, and faith is doctrinally softer and more appealing than his earlier model of strict obedience (e.g., grasp the rod of iron and hold on to the
end). One might say it is more Christlike. While obedience remained important to Nephi, it was no longer the central feature of his model. 68 In its place was true devotion to Jesus Christ; “this is the way and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God.” 69

Words Spoken in Anger

In his final chapter, Nephi reflected upon his own writings and questioned how they would be received. He seemed genuinely concerned that his audience “will be angry at the words which I have written.” 70 Just like my daughter’s experience with her journals, Nephi seemed comfortable with the fruit of his efforts (“I esteem it as of great worth”), 71 but this does not mean that he was entirely satisfied with all of the words he had written. In this section I want to explore a portion of his writings that I believe Nephi tried to take back.

The text suggests that one undesirable trait of Nephi’s personality was his quickness to harshness and anger. In his psalm, Nephi lamented, “why am I angry because of mine enemy?” 72 Lehi reported that one of Laman and Lemuel’s complaints against Nephi was that “he hath used sharpness … that he hath been angry with you.” 73 If the proposed timeline is correct, Nephi’s psalm would have been composed around year forty, after the initial rounds of “wars and contentions” with the Lamanites. It is likely that during this period Nephi’s anger would have been piqued. It was also at this time when Nephi penned one of his most controversial passages.

And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint. Wherefore as they were white and exceeding fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people, therefore the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them. And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people save they shall

68 Nephi’s final words are “for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey” after all (2 Nephi 33:15).
69 2 Nephi 31:21
70 2 Nephi 33:5
71 2 Nephi 33:3
72 2 Nephi 4:27
73 2 Nephi 1:26
repent of their iniquities. And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed, for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it, and it was done. (2 Nephi 5:21-23)

Book of Mormon readers have long struggled with the meaning of this passage. Using the timeline as a guide, however, can help us put this verse into the broader context of Nephi’s life. His people were at war with the Lamanites (around year forty), and it was quite probable that close family members had been killed in these wars, possibly even his aforementioned son(s). We can begin to appreciate Nephi’s likely sense of frustration and bitterness as he authored this passage. Although there has been considerable discussion as to whether or not Nephi meant this specific passage literally or metaphorically, the reader can sense a real anger in Nephi’s tone.74

This passage may reflect Nephi’s feelings at the time of the “wars,” but does it reflect how he continued to feel throughout the rest of his life? Did the passage of time somehow soothe some of the anger? Do we have evidence that Nephi ever regretted authoring this passage? I suggest that Nephi attempted to soften the impact of this specific passage twice in his later writings. And the text records that immediately upon Nephi’s death, Jacob is forced to confront and rebuke the remnants of ethnic prejudice that had crept into Nephite society.

As discussed earlier, it is unclear when Nephi received the visions and/or prophecies recorded in the last half of 2 Nephi.75 Although he recorded pessimism about the fate of his people as early as 1 Nephi 13, he did not provide much detail about their fate.76 Later in his record, however, he reported being shown the fate of his people and that of his brethren. He had learned that their fates are intertwined, he then knew of their ultimate demise, and that this record was partially meant for

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75 Nephi’s visions and prophecies encompass most of 2 Nephi 26-30. Nephi indicated that this is a vision(s) or prophecy via language such as “I have beheld that many generations shall pass away” (2 Nephi 26:2), “For I, Nephi, have seen it” (2 Nephi 26:7), and “now, I would prophecy somewhat more concerning” (2 Nephi 30:3).

76 Shown wars and the loss of faith so that they become a “dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people.”
them. So when Nephi prophesied of the time when the gospel shall be shared “unto the remnant of our seed,” he used language reminiscent of the above passage and returned to the idea of a physical curse upon his brethren.\(^\text{77}\) This time, however, I suggest Nephi had a broadened understanding of his role in their (the Lamanites) redemption.

And their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes.
And many generations shall not pass away among them save they shall be a white and a delightsome people.\(^\text{78}\) (2 Nephi 30:6)

In this later passage, Nephi implied the curse to be more symbolic than physical. He prophesied that the scales of darkness shall begin to fall “from their eyes.” By qualifying the curse with this phrase, Nephi softened his earlier claim of a literal “skin of blackness” and opened up the possibility of an interpretation allowing for darkness and whiteness as metaphors for sin and purity. This is the conclusion, for example, that Brant A. Gardner arrives at in his commentary on Nephi.

These verses, to modern ears, seem to have racial overtones. In this case, however, it is clear that the “scales of darkness” must refer to something rather than skin color, since this darkness will fall from their eyes and not from their skins.\(^\text{79}\)

Thus, when Nephi returned to the topic of the Lamanites and darkness, his softened tone suggested that he meant for his earlier comments to be taken metaphorically. And, surprisingly, it is Nephi who authored what is considered by modern-day readers to be the definitive Book of Mormon statement on prejudice and physical discrimination.\(^\text{80}\)

And he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness. And 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)

Had Nephi’s initial pejorative attitudes at the time of “wars and contentions” changed over time? These two texts imply that they had

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\(^{77}\) 2 Nephi 30:3

\(^{78}\) Joseph Smith changed the term “white” to “fair” in the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon.


\(^{80}\) As an example, 2 Nephi 26 is referenced three times in the essay on Race and the Priesthood on LDS.org.
and that it was a substantive change. It is informative that Nephi felt the need to return to the topic at all. Since it is not likely that he had metal plate “white out” available to him, Nephi did the next best thing by reinterpreting the Lamanites’ darkness as symbolic rather than physical and making a clear declaration that all are alike unto God regardless of their physical appearance.81 This is how I feel Nephi “took back” 2 Nephi 5.

After Nephi’s death, Jacob was also concerned with the prejudicial attitudes of his people towards the Lamanites. In his temple sermon, Jacob admitted that his people “hate [the Lamanites] because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins.” He then gave his people a direct commandment that they must overcome this false sense of racial superiority.

A commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers. (Jacob 3:9)

Both Nephi and Jacob probably held discriminatory attitudes towards their brethren initially. But as they witnessed the effect that such prejudice had upon their people and after Nephi saw visions of the fate of the combined peoples, their stances seemed to have changed. Both authored texts designed to soften such thoughts and feelings, with Jacob going so far as to issue a commandment against such attitudes. Nephi’s initial writings on the topic, therefore, should be considered in the context of the time and his later explanations. In an essay about racial attitudes within the Book of Mormon, Jared Hickman argues that texts such as 2 Nephi 5 challenge readers to reconsider how we approach canon and scripture.

Insofar as the Book of Mormon purports to be scripture, its self-deconstruction draws attention to that which the literalist hermeneuts of Biblicist America were keen to ignore — the contingent human conditions of scripture writing and scripture reading, in other words, precisely the conditions

81 It is possible that this was Nephi’s feelings all along and that there was not a change of heart in this regard. My own personal reading is that Nephi “mellowed” and realized how inflammatory his initial remarks were.
from which might conceivably arise spurious notions of theological racism.82

Through identifying Nephi’s humanity via charting the roadmap of his life, we are no longer required to revere each of Nephi’s words equally. Rather, we can map the arc of his entire journey, jointly experiencing his revelations and insights while, hopefully, avoiding the pratfalls.

Conclusions

Due to our desires as readers for textual harmony and our tendency to simplify characters, I believe that we have missed the subtle character evolution that is reflected in Nephi’s writings (“line upon line”). This has led to the general LDS and scholarly preference of 1 Nephi texts over 2 Nephi texts and a willingness to create an oversimplification of Nephi as a didactic Boy Scout. When we do this, I contend, we are missing the main points of Nephi’s life and record. Consider Hardy’s assessment of Nephi’s role as editor.

A careful reading of what Nephi chooses to reveal and to obscure suggests that his faith was also accompanied by sorrow, frustration, and spiritual anguish. Nephi never doubts, but his position in the family and even with God may not have been as clear-cut as would appear from a first reading. There is much more to Nephi.83

I could not agree more with Hardy; there is much more to Nephi than initially meets the eye. There is depth, growth, personal learning, reflection, sorrow, tragedy, anger, frustration, mistakes, loyalty, regret, self-doubt, and redemption. Viewing Nephi’s text through the lens of a lifespan allows the reader to better understand and discover a multifaceted Nephi.

A detailed analysis of Nephi’s writings reveals substantial character growth best explained by the passage of time as Nephi composed his portion of the small plates. The proposed timeline suggests that there might have been forty years between when he authored his original source texts and his final appendix. The evidence for this time gap is compelling. Nephi displayed confusion about the true nature and purpose of these plates and seemed to be lacking knowledge about how the story would eventually end. He set and reset his audience

82 Jared Hickman, “The Book of Mormon as Amerindian Apocalypse,” *American Literature* 86/3 (September 2014), 444.
83 Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 44.
expectations via his narrative beginnings and editorial asides. He began his tome with great confidence and bravado yet ended by apologizing three times for his perceived weaknesses. After a brief mention of his children, they disappeared, and the record is passed on through Jacob’s progeny. His writing style changed over the years and is detectable via authorship attribution models. The influence of his father waned, and the influences of others such as Isaiah and Jacob grew. He softened his stance with regard to the curse put upon his brothers and even appeared to attempt to clarify some early passages to counteract growing prejudice within his community. His final treatise on salvation showed a deftness and maturity unfound in the younger Nephi. All in all, Nephi’s heart softened as he matured, and he began to address each of us, his readers, as his “beloved brethren” instead of just his “brethren.”

Just as my daughter experienced a personal epiphany of sorts as she looked at her own journal, we can better understand Nephi as he looked back on his record and exclaimed “I Nephi have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth.”

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Abstract: Although it is common to believe that the Ammonites were pacifists, the report of their story demonstrates that this is a mistake. Appreciating the Ammonites’ non-pacifism helps us think more clearly about them, and it also explains several features of the text. These are textual elements that surprise us if we assume that the Ammonites were pacifists, but that make perfect sense once we understand that they were not. Moreover, in addition to telling us that the Ammonites were not pacifists, the text also gives us the actual reason the Ammonites came to eschew all conflict — and we learn from this why significant prophetic leaders (from King Benjamin to Alma to Mormon) did not reject the sword in the same way. The text also reveals the intellectual flaw in supposing that the Ammonites’ early acts of self-sacrifice set the proper example for all disciples to follow.

The Received View: The Ammonites as Pacifists

The basic story of the Ammonites is familiar. They were a group of Lamanites converted by the sons of Mosiah, who, following their conversion, buried their weapons in the earth, entered a covenant to eschew all conflict, and took upon themselves the name “Anti-Nephi-Lehies.” They subsequently refused to defend themselves when under Lamanite attack and allowed themselves to be slaughtered on two occasions by their Lamanite brethren. Following the second assault, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies emigrated to the Nephite land of Jershon, where the Nephites protected them from further Lamanite attack. At this point they began to be called the “people of Ammon,” which explains why they are commonly referred to simply as “the Ammonites” today.¹

¹ Central passages in understanding the Ammonite story are found in Alma 23, 24, 27, and 53.
It is difficult to find a more compelling instance of repentance, humility, and sustained devotion to the Lord anywhere in scripture. The Ammonites are universally admired and for sound reason.

It is also widely thought that the Ammonites’ rejection of war was a total renunciation of conflict as a matter of moral principle. This, of course, is the central tenet of pacifism. It is the view that “participation in and support for war is always impermissible,”2 or, as another has put it: “War, for the pacifist, is always wrong.”3 It is important to be mindful of this definition since the term “pacifism” is not always applied with rigor. It has been used by some to indicate an attitude as vague as a general abhorrence of violence, by others to capture the fundamental attitude of favoring peace over war in resolving conflict, by others to refer to active efforts to create mechanisms for ensuring a peaceful world, and so forth.

The difficulty with such usages of the term “pacifism” is their conceptual vagueness. It is not always obvious whom they exclude. Indeed, some usages are so attenuated that even prominent Book of Mormon warriors like Captain Moroni, Teancum, Gidgiddoni, Lachoneus, Mormon, and Moroni can qualify as pacifists even though they were highly involved in conflict and led thousands of men into war. That is why applying the term “pacifism” in a conceptually casual way is not particularly useful; doing so rids the idea of all distinctiveness and thus denudes the term itself of meaning.

The standard definition of pacifism, on the other hand — the rejection of all war as a matter of moral principle — has clear conceptual boundaries and thus is of genuine philosophical interest.4 And of course it was precisely this view that, it is widely assumed, the Ammonites held, and that is why it has become common to refer to them as pacifists.


Although the view of the Ammonites-as-pacifists is common, Hugh Nibley has perhaps given the most frequent expression to this outlook. For example, Nibley emphasizes more than once that the Ammonites equated the killing that occurs in war with the act of murder. He believes (1) that the acts of killing reflected upon by the Ammonites were acts they had performed in conventional war, (2) that it was these normal wartime acts that the Ammonites came to see as “pure murder,” and (3) that this was why they came to reject even war of self-defense.\(^5\) Nibley thus has no hesitation in considering the Ammonites “complete pacifists”\(^6\) and also has no hesitation in considering the Ammonites’ well-known act of self-sacrifice in the face of aggression “the perfect example of what to do when faced with a conflict: refuse to take up arms.”\(^7\) So not only were the Ammonites pacifists, but their pacifist response to aggression set the perfect example for all disciples to follow.

All of this makes evident that Nibley’s usage of the term “pacifist” is identical to the characterization set forth above — namely, that “participation in and support for war is always impermissible.” Nibley demonstrates the established sense in which he uses the term “pacifism” by ascribing to the Ammonites the view that there is no difference between the act of murder and the act of killing in war. It is no mere abhorrence of violence or some general preference for peace over war that he has in mind; rather, it is the genuine rejection of all war.

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7  This is the summary of Nibley’s view by his official biographer. See Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 221.
Others join Nibley in regarding the Ammonites this way. “Rigorously pacifist”8 and “the great pacifist martyrs”9 is the way Eugene England refers to them, adding that the Ammonite episode is “the most powerful Book of Mormon teaching of the nonviolent ethic (besides Christ’s ‘Sermon on the Mount’ to the Nephites).”10 More recently, additional authors have also either stated or assumed the pacifist character of the Ammonites.11 The outlook is held today as strongly as it was when Nibley first wrote decades ago.

It is easy to understand why this view is so common. After all, the Ammonites:

- sorely repented of the killings they had committed prior to their conversion (Alma 24:10, 15);
- permanently buried their weapons following their conversion (Alma 23:7; 24:6–19);
- entered a covenant that they would never stain their swords with blood again, under any circumstances (Alma 24:18; 53:10–15); and
- allowed themselves to be slaughtered on two separate occasions rather than violate this covenant (Alma 24:21-22; 27:2–3).

Such features of the Ammonite record seem to suggest that they held pacifist motivations, and that is why the view has found and maintained currency for decades.

Examining the matter of Ammonite pacifism requires looking into a number of issues, including both pacifism itself and various dimensions regarding war in the Book of Mormon generally. Since all such matters are covered in detail in Even unto Bloodshed,12 and since brevity is a

11 See, for example, essays by J. David Pulsipher, F.R. Rick Duran, Gordon Conrad Thomasson, Loyd Ericson, Eric A. Eliason, and Mark Henshaw et al. in Patrick Q. Mason, J. David Pulsipher, and Richard L. Bushman, eds., War and Peace in Our Time: Mormon Perspectives (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2012).
12 Duane Boyce, Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2015). For example, while a brief consideration of pacifism was
virtue in essays, I will occasionally refer to sections of that volume where readers can find additional information.

**Why the Received View is Mistaken**

As mentioned, it has become common to think of the Ammonites as pacifists — as a people who, as a matter of principle, saw all conflict to be morally impermissible. Despite the persistence and ubiquity of this outlook, however, the view is mistaken. While the elements of the record listed above seem to suggest that the Ammonites might have been pacifists, other elements of the text disprove this.

Note, for instance, that although the Ammonites refused to enter war to defend themselves, they willingly permitted the Nephites to protect them through force of arms (Alma 27:22–24; 43:15–22; 53:10, 12). It is difficult to see how they could have allowed this if they had genuinely believed that use of arms was sinful. If the Ammonites thought that self-defense was equivalent to murder, and if they rejected self-defense in order to avoid committing murder in this way, then they would not have been disciples but hypocrites in allowing the Nephites to commit such murders for them.

Moreover, the Ammonites reached a point at which they actually wanted to take up arms and assist the Nephites in active defense of their liberty and their lives (Alma 53:10–13). Only the concerted efforts of Helaman and his brethren — not the self-reflection of the Ammonites themselves — prevented them from fulfilling this desire (Alma 53:12–15). Although the record assures us that the Ammonites loved their Lamanite brethren (Alma 26:31–32), this did not prevent the Ammonites from wanting to enter war against these brethren when the situation seemed to warrant it.

Third, not only did the Ammonites permit the Nephites to kill Lamanites in their place, and not only did they seek to enter the war that was then being waged, but they also provided material support to the Nephite armies in these very military efforts. We are told that “the people of Ammon did give unto the Nephites a large portion of their substance to support their armies” (Alma 43:13; see also Alma 27:24). It is possible, of course, to reject war as a matter of principle and yet to attend to the human needs of soldiers who are so engaged. For instance, one might provide medical assistance to combatants with the motivation of meeting their needs simply as human beings rather than as a way

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presented above, a more complete discussion of the definition of pacifism can be found on pages 17–20 of this volume.
of supporting them in their combat efforts. In this sense, one can be compassionately “involved” in war and yet still be morally opposed to it. But there is no reason to think that the Ammonites’ support of Nephite armies fell in this category. They welcomed the Nephites’ use of military means to protect them, and they even had to be talked out of taking up arms to join the fight themselves. Providing “a large portion of their substance to support [Nephite] armies” was in no sense a reluctant “pacifist” involvement. They accepted and supported the Nephites’ military action (action that was murderous, according to Nibley’s view of how they saw the matter), and this is a straightforward and obvious violation of pacifist principles.

Each of these features of the record is important because each is sufficient to demonstrate that the Ammonites were not pacifists. In the standard concept of pacifism (and the way in which Nibley, England, and others employ the term), it is in no sense pacifist to let others kill in our behalf (i.e., to allow them to do for us what we consider immoral and won’t do for ourselves), and it is in no sense pacifist either to want to join those protectors in waging war and killing others or to support those protectors in killing in our behalf. All these actions are straightforward contradictions of a complete and principled renunciation of war, and the Ammonites did all three.

It is easy to understand why, on a casual reading, it is common to refer to the Ammonites as pacifists, but it would seem equally easy to understand why this is a fundamental mistake and thus a serious misapplication of the term.

**Resolving Obvious Gaps in the Text**

Coming to understand that the Ammonites were non-pacifist helps explain four elements of the record that otherwise seem extraordinary.

**Helaman’s “Contractual” Appeal to the Ammonites**

Remember that when the Ammonites developed a desire to violate their covenant and take up arms to help the Nephites against Lamanite aggression, Helaman interrupted their plans and implored them not to do so (Alma 53:10–15). He feared that “by so doing they should lose their souls” (Alma 53:15). Now this fear was obviously not grounded in a belief that committing acts of violence *per se* would jeopardize the Ammonites’ souls. Had this been the case, Helaman would have feared on these grounds for his own soul as well. But he had no such worry. He was waging war, and he would continue to wage war. This makes obvious
that his fear for the Ammonites rested not on their entering conflict and committing acts of violence as such but on their violation of a promise. The text states Helaman’s fear simply: the Ammonites “were about to break the oath which they had made” (Alma 53:14).

While the nature of Helaman’s argument to the Ammonites is obvious, however — it appeals to their obligation to honor the covenant they had made — this appeal is counterintuitive on a pacifist reading of the Ammonites. After all, if the Ammonites had genuinely been pacifists, the most obvious and persuasive approach for Helaman to take in convincing them not to enter the war would have been to simply remind them of what they already believed: that killing in war is sinful, and even murderous. Since such a reminder from Helaman would have been sufficient, it is surprising that he did nothing like this. Instead, he appealed to the Ammonites explicitly and solely on the basis of their need to honor the covenant they had made, an appeal that was contractual in nature, not pacifist. If we take the Ammonites to have been devoted pacifists this omission by Helaman is surprising. 13

13 One argument someone might make is that Helaman was actually prepared to use both appeals — the contractual and the pacifist — but that he didn’t need to use the second for one of two reasons: because the first actually assumes the second (that is, the Ammonites entered the contract because it was pacifist in character and thus an appeal to the contract was ipso facto an appeal to their pacifism) or because appealing to the first simply proved to be sufficient. Another possibility is that Helaman actually did make both appeals but that the record simply fails to record this. However, the discussion below (“Why Arguing from Omission Does Not Succeed”) will demonstrate why both possibilities are actually moot. Another argument would be to say that Helaman failed to invoke pacifism because he himself was not a pacifist and thus we should expect him to be loath to adopt the hypocritical stance of appealing to the Ammonites on grounds that he himself rejected. This is not persuasive, however, as Helaman had no reason to be self-conscious about this. Everyone knew that he and all the Nephites were waging war and thus that they were not pacifists. If the Ammonites truly were pacifists, it would have been easy for him to say, “We do not believe that fighting to defend our families and our lives is immoral, but I know you do—so you mustn’t fight even if you want to.” That is in no sense hypocritical and would have been a natural approach for Helaman to take if the Ammonites were pacifists. No matter how we might try to account for Helaman’s approach, if the Ammonites were genuinely pacifists it remains surprising — and conspicuous — that he did not appeal to them on pacifist grounds.
The Ammonites’ Failure to Encourage Pacifism in Helaman

Moreover, it is surprising that the Ammonites did not turn the tables on Helaman at this point. It would seem that if the Ammonites believed all killing in war to be murder, then, when Helaman urged them not to fight, the Ammonites would have explained to Helaman that *he* should not be fighting either. If killing in war was equivalent to murder for them, then it was equivalent to murder for him — so it is surprising that there is no report of the Ammonites explaining this to Helaman and urging him to put down his own weapons.

The Absence of a Pacifist Rationale by the Ammonites

Third, and related to these two points, is the peculiarity that the Ammonites never express a pacifist explanation for their rejection of war. They never state the general proposition that all killing in war is morally wrong and that all war is therefore impermissible. Of course the Ammonite king voiced his worry that “perhaps, if we should stain our swords again they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God” (Alma 24:13), but he never states *why* this should be the case. It is common for readers to supply their own explanation and to suppose that the reason is pacifist in character (i.e., the Ammonites considered all killing, even in war, to be murder), but the Ammonites themselves never say this — an absence from the record that is both conspicuous and surprising. If pacifist moral objection had been the actual reason for their rejection of war, we would expect at least *some* mention of this.

The Ammonites’ Failure to Encourage Pacifism in their Sons

It is also interesting that the text has no record of the Ammonite elders objecting to the younger generation of Ammonite males entering the war at this time (Alma 53:13–22). It would seem that if these fathers had really thought that all killing in war was murder they would have done everything in their power to prevent their sons from enlisting and thereby prevent them from committing such acts of murder. This would have been by far the most natural course for a group of pacifist fathers to pursue if they genuinely considered all killing in war to be murder. Yet the record suggests nothing like this. This fact is startling on a pacifist interpretation of the Ammonites because it seems to suggest that although the Ammonite elders were eager to maintain their own righteousness, they were not at all eager to maintain the righteousness
of their sons. Though implausible in the extreme, this is the logical consequence of the view.

**Why Arguing from Omission Does Not Succeed**

All of these features of the text are surprising if we suppose that the Ammonites were pacifists. In none of these circumstances is there a hint that the Ammonites behaved in the way pacifists would behave. Nor is there a hint that Helaman approached them in the way we would expect him to approach a group of pacifists. What we see in these four instances is exactly what we would expect if the Ammonites were *not* pacifists. These features of the record thus simply illustrate what other features have already demonstrated — the Ammonites’ non-pacifism. Indeed, these elements of the text can be considered additional evidence for this conclusion.

Now it might seem promising to explain these textual features by arguing from omission. We might say that the Ammonites and Helaman *must* have behaved in the ways referred to above (e.g., the Ammonite elders did actually object to their sons’ enlistment in the war, Helaman did actually appeal to the Ammonites on pacifist as well as contractual grounds, and so forth), but that these elements of their behavior are simply not included in the record. Mormon could not incorporate everything, and these gaps in the text are nothing more than illustrations of this editorial reality.

But an argument of this sort is persuasive only if there is no separate validation of the Ammonites’ non-pacifism. In that case we could of course appeal to incompleteness in the text to try to explain the surprising absence of these particular expressions of pacifism (though having to do so four times would still feel like grasping). Unfortunately, there *is* separate validation that the Ammonites were not pacifists. This means there is no reason to speculate that these features of the text are a function of incompleteness. Indeed, at this point it seems obvious that these features are not gaps in the record at all. Once we appreciate (on independent grounds) that the Ammonites were not pacifists, it is apparent why there is no report (for example) of the Ammonites urging Helaman not to fight at the same time he was urging them not to fight: since the Ammonites were not pacifists, such urging never happened — and that’s why there is no report of it. It is similarly apparent why there is no report of: (1) Helaman’s making a pacifist argument to the Ammonites, (2) the Ammonites’ offering a pacifist rationale to explain their conduct, or (3) the Ammonites’ objecting to the military engagement of their
sons. Because the Ammonites were not pacifists, these events simply never occurred. That’s why there is no report of them.

It seems clear, then, that it was not out of editorial necessity that Mormon failed to include the events we would expect in these four cases. He did not include such events for the simple reason that they didn’t happen. Imagining otherwise is based entirely on the mistake of supposing that the Ammonites were pacifists when they weren’t. The analytical byproduct of this is that there is no need to provide explanations for Mormon’s omissions (“Why is this left out?” “Why is there no mention of that?” etc.). There are simply no omissions to explain.

Why Did the Ammonites Refuse to Enter War?

All of this leaves us with an important question. After all, in the pacifist view it is easy to explain why the Ammonites came to eschew war: as a result of their conversion, they came to see all killing, even in war, as murder. Thus, their conversion led to pacifism, and their pacifism meant the renunciation of conflict. This is Nibley’s logic, and on the surface it seems quite natural and persuasive.

The problem, of course, is that — as we have seen — the Ammonites were not in fact pacifists, and that raises the question of why, if they weren’t pacifists, they still eschewed war. Since an attitude of pacifism doesn’t explain this, what does? The answer is found in three important features of the text regarding the Ammonites.14

The Lamanites Waged Numerous Aggressive Wars Against the Nephites

The first important feature of the text is the consistent pattern of Lamanite attack against the Nephites from the very beginning of Lehi civilization to the time of the missionary labors of the sons of Mosiah. Jacob, for instance, tells us that Nephi himself had to fight to defend his people from Lamanite assault (Jacob 1:10; also 2 Nephi 5:14), and aggressive wars are also reported by Jacob (Jacob 7:24), Enos (Enos 1:20), Jarom (Jarom 1:6–7), Abinadom (Omni 1:10), Amaleki (Omni 1:24), Zeniff (Mosiah 9–10), Limhi (Mosiah 19–21), and Mormon (Words of

14 The Book of Mormon tells us some things about the Ammonites as a group as well as about the Lamanites in general. Since the Ammonites were at least a significant portion of the Lamanite population in size and status (evidence for this conclusion is found in Even unto Bloodshed, 281–85), it is plausible to suppose that what the account reveals about the Lamanites in general applies, at least roughly, to the Ammonites themselves.
Mormon 1:13–14) — a record of Lamanite aggression spanning the first four hundred and sixty years or so of Book of Mormon history.

The Lamanites also waged four aggressive wars against the Nephites during the very time the sons of Mosiah were performing their missionary labors among them. Lamanite aggression was therefore not only longstanding but also occurred simultaneously with the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah. That those who later became the Ammonites were integrally involved in these attacks is certain. This is mentioned explicitly in the text (e.g., Alma 25:6), and it is similarly evident in view of the preeminent position that King Lamoni’s father (a later convert — Alma 22) held among the Lamanites during at least part of the time that the Lamanites were launching these wars.

All this is important because the Nephites did not exhibit a similar pattern of aggression toward the Lamanites. Over the course of their history, the instigation of violence was virtually, if not literally, one-sided.

15 A discussion of these wars appears in Even unto Bloodshed, 53–55.
16 This is why, as Nibley notices, every Nephite-Lamanite conflict occurs on Nephite lands. See Hugh Nibley, “Warfare and the Book of Mormon,” in Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints, 294; Since Cumorah, 298; and “Freemen and Kingsmen,” 354. The Nephites fought only when they were being invaded and attacked. There is no instance of their fighting because they were instigating hostilities by invading and attacking others.
17 The account of Zeniff in Mosiah 9 is not a counterinstance to this claim. This is discussed fully in Even unto Bloodshed, pp. 60–61 (Note 2). A possible exception to the Nephite pattern of fighting only in defense occurs late in their history when they desired to “go up unto their enemies to battle, and avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren” (Mormon 3:14). The text never records that they acted on this wish, but even if they did, all that follows is that the Nephites instigated hostilities a single time after a thousand years of absorbing aggression. If that changes the ratio of Lamanite-to-Nephite aggression at all, it does so only minutely. A variation of this argument is to identify elements of offensive tactics that the Nephites used in battling the Lamanites and to think that these constitute, or at least approach, examples of conducting offensive war rather than of merely defending themselves. But this argument misconceives the differences between offensive and defensive action — a matter discussed fully in Even unto Bloodshed (see especially pp. 191–209 and 244–48, but also 7–15 and 22–31). Another possible counterargument is to say that Nephite dissenters fomented many of the Lamanite aggressions (at least from the Book of Alma forward) and that this implicates the Nephites in aggression. But it is difficult to see what moral principle allows us to blame the Nephites for attacks they suffered at the hands of Nephites whom they had expelled from their society, or, for that matter, from those who had rebelled and removed themselves. By the same logic we would have to blame the Father for
The Lamanites’ Aggression was Motivated by Hatred for the Nephites

Accompanying accounts of Lamanite aggression are reports of their longstanding hatred toward the Nephites. Jacob, for example, writes in the earliest days of Lamanite “hatred” for the Nephites and does so while praising them for their superiority to his people (Jacob 3:7). He also reports that the Lamanites “delighted in wars and bloodshed,” that they “had an eternal hatred against us,” and sought “by the power of their arms to destroy us continually” (Jacob 7:24). Over the course of time, Enos, Jarom, Zeniff, Limhi, King Benjamin, and Mormon all speak in identical terms of the Lamanites’ hatred for the Nephites. Mormon’s statement that “the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning” (4 Nephi 1:39) is a perfect summary of what all of these earlier scriptural figures report.

Lamanite hatred of the Nephites was traceable to “the wicked traditions” that they had inherited from their fathers (see Alma 23:3, 24:7). Zeniff’s report to this effect is well known (Mosiah 10:12–17), but he is far from alone. Captain Moroni also explains the Lamanites’ hatred as due to the “tradition of their fathers” (Alma 60:32), and Samuel the Lamanite attributes the Lamanites’ evil in his day to the “iniquity of the tradition of their fathers,” as well (Helaman 15:4). The same theme is seen in Lamoni’s father, the Lamanite king, who not only cited the tradition (Alma 20:10, 13) but also later proclaimed safety for the Nephite missionaries precisely in order that the gospel could be preached and that “his people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers” (Alma 23:3).

The Lamanites’ hatred and their belief in these “wicked traditions” were firmly in place at the time of the sons of Mosiah. The account tells Lucifer’s aggression against him in the aftermath of Lucifer’s rebellion, both in the pre-earth life and here on earth. In considering the matter of Lamanite vs. Nephite aggression, it is also relevant that the text records no examples of agitators gaining power by stirring the Nephites up to anger and prodding them into war against the Lamanites, whereas there are multiple examples of such dissidents doing exactly that with the Lamanites toward the Nephites (see Even unto Bloodshed, pp. 76–77). Finally, it is common to point out the negative stereotypes that Nephites had of the Lamanites and to see ways in which their behavior might have seemed problematic/provocational to them (see Note 19 herein), but that of course does not establish any kind of equivalence between the two peoples. Whatever else it shows, the text is unmistakable in depicting the Lamanites as the military aggressors in every Nephite/Lamanite conflict of which we have record.

18 See, for example: Enos 1:14, 20; Jarom 1:6–7; Mosiah 10:17; and Mosiah 1:14.
us that one of these missionaries’ explicit purposes in laboring among the Lamanites was to “cure them of their hatred towards the Nephites” (Mosiah 28:2). Ammon’s encounter with Lamoni’s father, the king over all the Lamanite land, illustrates the depth of this animosity. Upon seeing his son Lamoni with “this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar,” the king “commanded [Lamoni] that he should slay Ammon with the sword,” and when Lamoni refused, the king attempted to slay Ammon himself (Alma 20:10, 14; cf. verses 10–20). Ammon had neither said a word nor performed a single disagreeable action; his status as “one of the children of a liar” was sufficient to justify his death. So the record not only reports but also shows the contempt in which Lamanites held the Nephites and the ease with which they were willing to kill them.

It is no surprise, then, that Ammon himself tells us that the Lamanites, prior to their conversion, were “racked with hatred against us” and were “in the darkest abyss” and in “the pains of hell” (Alma 26:9, 3, 13). And it is important to note that Ammon tells us this about the Lamanites after he had lived with them for fourteen years and had come to know and to love them in a personal way. This is not an ignorant and prejudiced report made in advance of his mission and without firsthand experience of the Lamanites.

In addition, Mormon includes a description of the Lamanites at this time as

a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them; and their hearts were set upon riches, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering, that they might not labor for them with their own hands (Alma 17:14).

In sum, prior to their conversion, the Lamanites were a people who for centuries had hated the Nephites, had regularly waged aggressive war to destroy them, had sought to murder the Nephites and actually “delighted in” and “loved” murdering them, and had plundered and robbed the Nephites to gain gold and silver without labor. The story of such aggression and hatred is consistent across prophetic reports and across centuries. Indeed, significant Lamanite figures corroborate this picture: the prophet Samuel, for example, as well as Lamoni’s father, who actually reigned as the king of the Lamanites. And as we will see in the next section, another significant Lamanite — Anti-Nephi-Lehi, the Ammonites’ king — also confirms the view of Lamanite conduct as aggressive and murderous in character. Whatever their virtues,
the Lamanites presented over time a consistent pattern of hatred and aggression toward the Nephites — a reality that was acknowledged and reported by the Lamanites themselves.19

The Lamanites’ Aggression was Genuinely Murderous in Character

The Ammonites’ Understanding of “Murder.” The two features of the text we have looked at so far — the frequency of Lamanite aggression against the Nephites and the hatred that motivated it — help us understand what is meant when the Ammonites’ actions are referred to as “murder.” This is an expression Anti-Nephi-Lehi uses three separate times over the course of a mere three verses in speaking of the Ammonites’ past actions (Alma 24:9–11) and that he repeats another two times thereafter in speaking to Ammon (Alma 27: 6, 8). It is important to attend to this because, according to Nibley’s reading of the matter, speaking of murder in this context is just a rhetorical way of claiming that all killing in war is murder. It would be as if Anti-Nephi-Lehi had said to Ammon: “It was wrong for us to fight for our country and to engage you in war. Although we had legitimate reasons for fighting, all killing in war is murder, and because we killed in war, we committed murder. And we are grateful beyond measure for the Lord’s goodness in forgiving us of these murders.” If we want to claim that all killing in war is murder, and that the Ammonites’ attitude proves it, this is how we must take Anti-Nephi-Lehi to be speaking.

19 This is why it is difficult to dismiss Zeniff’s account out of hand, even though some have raised questions about it (see, for example, J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, 14/1 [2005]: 108–17). It is worth noting that John Sorenson attributes prejudice to some Nephite descriptions of the Lamanites on the grounds that the Book of Mormon recorders were not firsthand witnesses of all that they describe; see Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, 1/1 (1992): 26, as well as his An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 90–91. But Sorenson does not mean to extend that explanation to account for reports of Lamanite hatred or of their efforts to destroy the Nephites over the years: these are matters with which the Nephites did, in fact, have firsthand experience and about which multiple Lamanites provided their own confirmation. Dan Belnap has written recently about Nephite stereotypes of the Lamanites and the same point applies in his case. See Dan Belnap, “And it came to pass ….: The Sociopolitical Events in the Book of Mormon Leading to the Eighteenth Year of the Reign of the Judges,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, vol. 23 (2014): 132–36.
But it is evident that Anti-Nephi-Lehi is actually saying nothing like this. To appreciate this, recall that the record tells us more than once that the Lamanites delighted in shedding Nephite blood. Far from being reluctant, the Lamanites’ killings had in fact been wanton and deliberate, in both large-scale aggressive wars and in smaller-scale marauding and banditry. Furthermore, one of the Lamanites’ motives for attacking Nephites was to rob them — to take from them gold and silver so that they would not have to mine it for themselves. And finally, note that in all their conflicts, the Lamanites, not the Nephites, had been the aggressors. So the wars Anti-Nephi-Lehi is speaking of here were not wars involving legitimate disputes that simply escalated out of control, but rather aggressive wars and acts of plunder that were motivated by hatred and that were instigated and pursued in the first instance by the Lamanites themselves.

Such was the moral atmosphere that had existed among the Lamanites, and it is little surprise that Anti-Nephi-Lehi, in hindsight and from the perspective of a changed heart, could see such acts of hate-filled killing as thoroughly murderous in character.

The Nephites’ Understanding of “Murder.” The Nephites understood the Lamanites’ killings to be murderous in exactly the same way. That is how Mormon describes their behavior, for example, telling us that they were “a ferocious people” and “a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites” (Alma 17:14). Moreover, when the Nephites subsequently gave the land of Jershon to the Ammonites for their safety, they did so because of the fear of the Ammonites to take up arms “on account of their many murders and their awful wickedness” (Alma 27:23). It is important to note that the Nephites had themselves been waging battle to defend themselves, and yet they did not consider their own killings to be acts of murder. They used “murder” specifically in regard to the Ammonites, and in exactly the same way that the Ammonites used the term to describe themselves. It refers to acts that are murderous in character, not to ordinary acts committed by combatants during conventional war.

In the end, then, the record seems clear. When the Ammonites repented, they were not repenting of acts of killing that had occurred in war as we normally think of it. They were repenting of aggressive acts that had been motivated by hatred, greed, and a desire for Nephite blood. The acts of killing were, indeed, murderous in nature. Thus, when we read Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s speech in context we see that his use of “murder” is not remotely tantamount to a blanket condemnation of all killing in all war. It is a condemnation of the specific character of the killings
that the Ammonites had committed in conditions that were very much unlike conventional war.20

**Conclusion: Why the Ammonites Refused to Enter War**

The question we began with in this section was why the Ammonites eschewed war if they were not pacifists. The answer is now apparent. The Ammonites were a people who had been motivated by hatred and who had committed murder in both aggressive, large-scale wars and in attempts to plunder gold and silver from the Nephites. Yet despite this history of violence, they had, with difficulty, won forgiveness (Alma 24:10–13). Given the harsh reality of their past and the difficulty of their repentance, it is not surprising that they felt the need to maintain this forgiveness by repudiating not only murder but also anything remotely resembling it. This — not a generalized rejection of war in principle — was their reason for renouncing the shedding of blood. Thus, even in the two instances where the Ammonites allowed themselves to be slaughtered, and in which they appear to resemble pacifist conduct most closely, the resemblance turns out to be superficial because in both cases they were acting from other than pacifist motivations.

**The Ammonites’ Idiosyncratic Covenant:**

**A Covenant of Penance**

Appreciating the nature of the Ammonites’ motivation, we can understand more fully the covenant they entered. It seems clear that the covenant was not motivated by pacifism but by the Ammonites’ desire to distance themselves from their aggressive and hate-filled past. It was an act of penance. This explains why Helaman would appeal to the Ammonites on nothing more than the basis of this covenant: breaking it would be a violation of the penitential discipline they had imposed on themselves as a token of repentance for their past sins. The penitential nature of this covenant also explains why the Ammonites did not generalize their commitment to others — either to Helaman or to their Nephite protectors generally or even to their own sons. The covenant they entered was peculiar to themselves as a people trying to overcome an aggressive and murderous past. Since such a history did not apply either to the Nephites or to the younger generation of Ammonites,

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20. It might be thought that the text’s description of Lamanite attitudes and conduct could apply to the general population of Lamanites but not to the Ammonites in particular. The reasons for rejecting this possibility are covered in *Even unto Bloodshed*, 62–63.
neither did the terms of the covenant. That is why the Ammonites did nothing to persuade anyone else to act as they themselves were acting. Indeed, based on the way they actually behaved, we can surmise that if the Ammonites had considered their covenant generalizable to others at all, they would have thought it applicable only to others who were also repentant murderers and who needed to offer the same kind of penance.

The idiosyncratic, penitential nature of the Ammonites’ covenant is the most natural explanation for why other Book of Mormon leaders did not follow their example. Mormon is the one who included their story in his account of Nephite history in the first place, yet he did not consider the Ammonites’ laying down their arms a prototype to be followed. He behaved nothing like that, nor did he enjoin his people to do so (Mormon 2:23). Nor did the Ammonites’ contemporaries consider their actions an example to emulate. These included such significant figures as Alma, Captain Moroni, Lehi, and Helaman — all of whose wartime actions are well known. And we also know that neither Nephi nor Gidgiddoni nor Lachoneus nor the later Moroni would think of the Ammonites as prototypes to follow. The record depicts all of them as righteous and even prophetic leaders, and yet none of them behaved as did the Ammonites.21 The same is also true of King Benjamin (Words of Mormon 1:13–14).

All of this is significant, and the quick conclusion to draw from it is the one Nibley and some others draw — namely, that the Ammonites were simply better than others were and that they set the highest example.22 But this verdict on the matter could hardly be more mistaken.

21 The wartime acts of Nephi and Moroni are well known, as is their prophetic status (although no scripture specifically designates them this way — on this, one can consult Even unto Bloodshed, p. 90, Note 6). Lachoneus and Gidgiddoni are explicitly designated as prophets (3 Nephi 3:19), and their wartime involvement is seen in 3 Nephi 3–4.

22 It is with the Ammonites in mind that Nibley remarks, regarding Book of Mormon wars, that “the good people never fight the bad people; they never fight anybody.” Hugh Nibley, Since Cumorah, 2nd ed., ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 348. Here Nibley equates what he takes to be Ammonite pacifism with goodness itself, contrasting it with the Nephites and Lamanites generally, whom he routinely designates as “bad.” (For more on this matter specifically, see Even unto Bloodshed, 73–85.) Eugene England also sees the Ammonites as establishing “a higher non-violent ethic,” which the Book of Mormon, he says, “makes clear is a higher standard.” “‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’: An Ethics of Non-Violence,” in Eugene England, Making Peace: Personal Essays (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 159. That the Ammonites’ non-violence is the more divine and moral approach is also the central argument of J. David Pulsipher,
Everything in the record indicates that these spiritual figures could see what the Ammonites themselves appreciated but that some modern readers don’t: the Ammonites’ refusal to take up arms was not a rejection of war per se but a rejection of war for themselves in their circumstances. Their conduct does not generalize to others because the covenant they entered was penitential and thus idiosyncratic — suited to their status as a people who were trying to overcome a past that included murder. Alma and other prophetic leaders could appreciate this and that is why they did not behave in the same way: they were not repentant murderers. So it is not the case that these prophetic leaders were less than the Ammonites. They behaved differently than the Ammonites because, unlike that population, they did not need to offer penance for murder.

The Ammonites’ Departure from Their Own Example

As a final matter, consider the view that the Ammonites’ self-prostration in the face of aggression set, according to Nibley, “the perfect example of what to do when faced with a conflict: refuse to take up arms.” It is thought one reason for this is that pacifist response of this sort brings others’ aggression to an end. This was true the first time the Lamanites attacked the Ammonites, of course (Alma 24:20–27), and this outcome seems to indicate the effectiveness of pacifist conduct. Thus, Eugene England writes that “the sacrifice of these Lamanite pacifists ended violence, while the ‘just’ wars of the Nephites did not.” Such desirable results suggest this practical effect as one reason for emulating the Ammonites’ example.

However, while this interpretation of events might seem appealing on the surface, it faces serious textual problems. Recall, for example,
that after the second attack suffered by the Ammonites (Alma 27:2–3), they never again followed the strategy of self-sacrifice, even though they had opportunity to do so. Indeed, following the second attack, the Lord himself instructed the Ammonites to leave their lands for safety, observing that they would face further assault and “perish” if they remained (Alma 27:11–12). This makes it clear that the Lord himself did not believe the Ammonites would end aggression in this circumstance by prostrating themselves in front of their enemies. Indeed, he instructed them not to do so precisely because he foresaw that such conduct would not end the aggression against them. As a result, the Ammonites did not sacrifice themselves again, instead emigrating to the land of Jershon (Alma 27:4–26).

Nor did the Ammonites pursue a strategy of self-sacrifice at the time the younger Ammonites went to war to assist the Nephites avoid destruction (Alma 53). Since this kind of self-sacrifice had worked before and had brought an end to the violence, it is natural to wonder why the Ammonite elders did not act similarly to end the aggression this time and thus prevent their sons from having to enter conflict. If pacifist response to aggression brings aggression to an end, then this was an opportunity for the Ammonites to behave as they had behaved before and to achieve this result once again. It is a conspicuous feature of the record that the Ammonites did nothing like this.

The same issue arises when we consider the Ammonites’ behavior some years after they had relocated to the land of Jershon and prior to the events of Alma 53. Lamanite assailants sought to invade the land occupied by the Ammonites and yet abandoned their aims because they “were exceedingly afraid of the armies of the Nephites.” The Lamanites turned away, not because of any act of self-sacrifice on the part of the Ammonites themselves but because of the diligent preparation and imposing presence of a well-equipped Nephite army (Alma 43:19, 21–22). Indeed, we have no report that the Ammonites even considered a course of self-sacrifice at this time, and based on everything we have seen, we have no reason to think that they would have considered it.

All of this raises doubts about the actual effectiveness of pacifist response to aggression as well as about the imperative of following

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26 Eugene England asserts unequivocally that pacifist response brings others’ violence to an end. See, for example, his “Healing and Making Peace, in the Church and the World,” 8–9 and “The Prince of Peace,” 229, both of which are found in Eugene England, *Making Peace: Personal Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 1–22 and 223–47, respectively. See also his “‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’: An Ethics
the early example of the Ammonites’ self-sacrifice. The claim that we should follow the Ammonites’ example seems to lose force when we discover that the Ammonites themselves did not follow it. It seems to lose additional force when we discover that the Lord himself instructed the Ammonites not to pursue that path precisely because he foresaw that doing so would not be effective in ending aggression.

Conclusion

Whereas it has long been thought that the Ammonites were pacifists, the record makes clear they were not. Understanding this helps explain various features of the text that are otherwise surprising. Moreover, a close study of the text reveals the actual reason the Ammonites renounced war and entered a covenant to eschew all conflict: doing so was an act of penance — reparation (insofar as such was possible) for a past filled with aggression, violence, and hatred. Appreciating this explains why the Ammonites did not generalize their conduct to others and why multiple prophetic leaders in the Book of Mormon acted differently than the Ammonites: they weren’t trying to repent of murder. Finally, the text also reveals the inaptness of adopting the Ammonites’ self-sacrifice in Alma 24 as the example for all disciples to follow. It seems unpersuasive to encourage others to follow the Ammonites’ example when it is clear even they did not follow it.

None of this subtracts in any way from the unsurpassed righteousness and impressiveness of the Ammonites, of course. We regard their devotion and humility with awe. Indeed, it could not be more obvious that we have many things to learn from the Ammonites. All we have discovered here is that what it means to be a pacifist is not one of them.

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partner of the Arbinger Institute, a worldwide management consulting and educational firm, and is the author or coauthor of five books. He has published academic essays on scriptural topics in BYU Studies, The FARMS Review, Religious Educator, Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture, and the Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture. He is author of the recent book, Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War (Kofford, 2015). Among other callings, he has served as a bishop and a stake president.
"O Ye Fair Ones" — Revisited

Matthew L. Bowen

ABSTRACT: The best explanation for the name “Nephi” is that it derives from the Egyptian word nfr, “good,” “goodly,” “fine,” “fair,” “beautiful.” Nephi’s autobiographical wordplay on his own name in his self-introduction (and elsewhere throughout his writings) revolves around the evident meaning of his name. This has important implications for how the derived gentilic term “Nephites” was understood over time, especially among the Nephites themselves. Nephi’s early ethno-cultural descriptions of his people describe them as “fair” and “beautiful” (vis-à-vis the Lamanites). These early descriptions subsequently become the basis for Nephite ethno-cultural self-perceptions. The Nephites’ supposition that they were the “good” or “fair ones” was all too frequently at odds with reality, especially when Nephite “chosenness” was understood as inherent or innate. In the end the “good” or “fair ones” fell (Mormon 6:17–20), because they came to “delight in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:19). The Book of Mormon thus constitutes a warning against our own contemporary cultural and religious tendency toward exceptionalism. Mormon and Moroni, like Nephi their ancestor through his writings on the small plates, endeavor through their own writing and editorial work to show how the “unbelieving” descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites can again become the “good” and the “fair ones” by choosing to come unto Christ, partaking of his “goodness,” and doing the “good” stipulated by the doctrine of Christ.

Nephi’s “Good” Name

It has now been over two decades since John Gee first proposed that the name Nephi derives from the Egyptian lexeme nfr,¹ the final weak

of which had come to be pronounced as –i by Lehi’s time. Since \textit{nfr} indisputably means “good, fine, goodly” (of quality),\textsuperscript{2} “good, fair” (of character)\textsuperscript{3} and “beautiful, fair” (of appearance)\textsuperscript{4} or “kind” as an adjective, and “beauty,” “good,” “kindness” and “goodness” as a noun,\textsuperscript{5} I posited more than a decade ago\textsuperscript{6} that Nephi created a deliberate wordplay on his own name in his autobiographical introduction:

I, \textit{NEPHI}, having been born of \textit{goodly} parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the \textit{goodness} and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. (1 Nephi 1:1)

Nephi implies here that his name is appropriate because of his “goodly” parentage and because his father Lehi had inculcated him with his own “learning” — an education which must have included a foundational knowledge of “the \textit{goodness} and mysteries of God.” Nephi’s “goodly” upbringing, in large measure, set him on the trajectory that he describes later in 1 Nephi 2:16,\textsuperscript{7} in which he attains to the “great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God” mentioned in 1 Nephi 1:1. Additional evidence for the derivation of Nephi’s name from Egyptian \textit{nfr} and its association with “good” and “goodness” surfaces

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} Raymond O. Faulkner, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian} (Oxford: Griffith Institute/Ashmolean Museum, 2000), 131. Hereafter cited as CDME.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Ibid. See also Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, \textit{Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache} (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971) 2:252–63.
\item \textsuperscript{5} CDME, 132. See also Friedrich Junge (\textit{Late Egyptian Grammar: An Introduction.} 2nd English ed. [tr. David Warburton; Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2005], 338), who cites “nominal derivatives: \textit{nfr} (what is) good, being good, well being, benefactions, goodness, good thing; \textit{nfr.w} (completely spelled) good things, good deeds; \textit{nfr.w} (with semogram stroke or papyrus roll) beauty, goodness.”
\item \textsuperscript{7} 1 Nephi 2:16: “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore I did cry unto the Lord and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.”
\end{itemize}
in 2 Nephi 5:29–31; 33:4, 10, 14; Mosiah 9:1; and Helaman 5:6–7; 8:7, among other passages (see below).

Since the meaning of Nephi’s name as nfr — especially in the senses of “good, fair” (of character) and “beautiful, fair” (of appearance) — has implications for the derived gentilic term “Nephites,” I further suggested in a previous study that Mormon’s lament in Mormon 6 with its plaintive refrain “O ye fair ones” constitutes a wordplay on (or a play on the meaning of) the name Nephi and its gentilic derivative “Nephites”:

O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!

Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss.

O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen! (Mormon 6:17–19)

In support of this thesis, I cited 3 Nephi 2:16; 9:2; and 4 Nephi 1:10 as texts corroborating synonymy between Nephites and “fair ones.”

As I will endeavor to show in the study that follows, the Book of Mormon contains considerable additional evidence that the Nephites’ self-understanding from an earlier period was that they were — morally, ethically, culturally, religiously — the “good” or “fair ones”

9 Matthew L. Bowen, “He Is a Good Man: The Fulfillment of Helaman 5:6–7 in Helaman 8:7 and 11:18–19,” Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture 17 (2016): 165–70. Helaman uses wordplay on “Nephi” in the explanation of the giving of the names of Nephi and Lehi to his sons: “Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good. Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them” (Helaman 5:6–7). See also Bowen, “Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi’s Name,” 2.
10 CDME, 131.
vis-à-vis the Lamanites and others. Moreover, this evidence has important implications for the overall message of the books of Nephi and Nephi’s small plates as well as for Mormon and Moroni’s editorial intent. Book of Mormon writers uniformly problematize the Nephites’ view of their own chosenness as an exclusive status.

The Nephites’ self-perception that they were the “good” or “fair ones” was often at odds with reality. During times in which Nephite pride waxed strong and righteousness waned, the Nephites perceived their chosenness as intrinsic rather than extrinsic. I will further endeavor to show that wordplay (or play on meaning) involving the name Nephi and Nephites in terms of “good,” “better,” and “fair ones” constituted a key part of the prophetic rhetoric of Jacob, Jarom, Amaleki, Zeniff, Nephi the son of Helaman, Samuel the Lamanite, Mormon, Moroni, and the Lord himself. It emerges that this prophetic rhetoric had its origin in Nephi’s descriptions of his own people, who themselves helped define Nephite self-perceptions.

In the end, the Nephites — the “good” or “fair ones” — “delight[ed] in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:19). Mormon and Moroni aimed to show their latter-day audience — which would largely consist of descendants of the Lamanites and Nephites — why it was that the “good” or “fair ones” fell. Like their ancestor Nephi, Mormon and Moroni both explain how the “unbelieving” descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites can again become the “good” and the “fair” by choosing to come unto Christ, partaking of his “goodness” and doing the “good” stipulated by the doctrine of Christ. In so doing, they will “return to the Lord from whence they have fallen” (D&C 113:10) and thus be “restor[ed] from their lost and fallen state” (2 Nephi 25:17).

**Nephi as the “Good[ly]” or “Fair One”**

The term *nfr* is not only a compound in numerous Egyptian names, it also constitutes a common name on its own. As Gee explains, “It is


13 Gee, “A Note on the Name Nephi,” 190. He notes that *nfr* “is attested as a man’s name from Dynasty 1 through the late period … and as a woman’s name in
the proper form of a proper name of the proper gender from the proper place and proper time.”14 He further observes that “most European and Latin American Latter-day Saints are already pronouncing the name more or less correctly as /nɛfi/ or /nefi/, since originally it was most likely pronounced ‘nĕfē’ or ‘nāfē’ (rhyming with ‘heh-fee/hay-fee’) rather than the current ‘nefi’”15 — that is, neh-fee, nay-fee.

All of this helps us better appreciate the Lord’s commandment to Nephi, as recorded by Nephi himself, when the Lord commissioned Nephi to make the small plates:

And I, Nephi, had kept the records upon my plates, which I had made, of my people thus far. And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people. Wherefore, I, Nephi, to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things. (2 Nephi 5:29‒31)

The Lord’s commandment to Nephi “thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight” constitutes a transparent play on Nephi’s name and its meaning.16 Moreover, the Lord was suggesting to Nephi the overarching theme and content of the plates: “good” things “for the profit” of Nephi’s people. In other words, the “many things upon them which are good” were to help the people of Nephi live up to the “good” implied in the name Nephi. The observation that the Lord wanted the Nephites to be truly “good” requires no imagination, for he clearly wants all of his children to be good. However, the Nephites were to embody and exemplify “goodness” and to be ambassadors of the “goodness of God” in a special way. The Lord was preparing the Nephites, by virtue of his covenant, to “show forth good examples” to reclaim17 the Lamanites from their covenant delinquency. The small plates of Nephi were a way to instruct the Nephites how to do and become the “good” he wished them to do and become, and to bring others to “partake of his goodness”:

\[\text{the Old Kingdom through the New Kingdom, and Greek period” (note 11).}\]

14 Ibid.
17 Jacob 7:24; Enos 1:14, 20; see also 2 Nephi 25:23.
He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit [that is, good]18 of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. (2 Nephi 26:24)

Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden. (2 Nephi 26:28)

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 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)

Nephi recognized that everything the Lord does is for the “benefit” or “good” of the human family. His invitation is ever to come and “partake of his salvation” or to “partake of his goodness.” The Lord, in “do[ing] that which is good among the children of men” and “invit[ing] all to come unto him,” establishes the model for the human family. Nephi recognized its implications for himself and for the Nephites — the “good” ones — in particular, as pertaining to their brethren, the Lamanites. These statements may have had additional implications for their role among the “others” (Gentiles) in the land of promise.19

Thus, the Lord’s commandment to Nephi and these statements plausibly explain the content of Nephi’s introduction and conclusion to his own record, which I have described elsewhere as a prominent example of Nephi’s use of inclusio:

18 English benefit < Old French bienfet < Latin benefactum bene facere, “to do good.”

<table>
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<th>1 Nephi 1:1 (opening bracket)</th>
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<td><em>I, NEPHI</em></td>
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<td>having been born of <em>goodly parents</em>,</td>
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<td>therefore <em>I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father,</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days,</td>
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<td>nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days;</td>
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<td><em>yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God,</em></td>
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<td>therefore <em>I make a record of my proceedings in my days.</em></td>
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<tr>
<th>2 Nephi 33:4, 10, 14 (closing bracket)</th>
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<td>And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them;</td>
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<td>for it <em>persuadeth them to do good,</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>it <em>maketh known unto them of their fathers,</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to endure to the end, which is life eternal. (2 Nephi 33:4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and <em>they teach all men that they should do good.</em> (2 Nephi 33:10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And you that will not partake of the goodness of God, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day. (2 Nephi 33:14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in 2 Nephi 5, Nephi’s use of “good” terminology in 2 Nephi 33:4, 10, 14 plays on the meaning of his own name and completes the circuit that he began in 1 Nephi 1:1, closing the *inclusio*. Additionally, the mention of “mak[ing] known unto them of their fathers” and “teach[ing] to [do] good” evokes Nephi’s description of the “goodly parents” who “taught” him and instilled in him a knowledge of the “goodness of God.” Of course, the final mention of the “goodness of God” in 2 Nephi 33:14 answers his mention of “the goodness and mysteries of God” in 1 Nephi 1:1.

However, Nephi’s *inclusio* on “good” and “goodness” constitutes far more than an ornamental literary statement on the aptness of the name Nephi for its bearer — the “good[ly]” or “fair” one. Nephi’s *inclusio* frames the narrative history of the separation of the Nephites from the Lamanites and Nephi’s adumbration of the doctrine of Christ. Since Nephi’s small plates were, at least in part, a national political
document, doing and learning the “good” that Nephi describes and partaking of the “goodness” of God — that is, adhering to the doctrine of Christ — necessarily distinguished “those who … did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi” (2 Nephi 5:9) from “the people who were now called Lamanites” (2 Nephi 5:14). In other words, Nephi’s writings defined what it meant — or at least what it should have meant — to be “Nephite.” While Nephi’s writings demarcated ethno-cultural and religious boundaries for his people, Nephi did not intend these boundaries to be exclusivist, although many Nephites of later generations seemed to so regard them. Nephi’s descriptions of “Nephite”-ness vis-à-vis “Lamanite”-ness gave rise to longstanding Nephite cultural self-perceptions and rhetoric that, during times of Nephite wickedness and apostasy, reinforced false notions of innate or intrinsic chosenness and righteousness.

The “Nephites” as the “Good” or “Fair Ones”

Nephi gives ethno-cultural descriptions of the emergent Nephites in at least two prominent places within his writings. Nephi’s language helped create and define Nephite self-perceptions for many subsequent generations. Nephi records the “grand vision” of the future of his own people and their eventual fall in what now comprises 1 Nephi 11–14. In this vision Nephi sees the latter-day Gentiles whom he characterizes as “exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain” (1 Nephi 13:15).

Similarly, when Nephi later mentions the schism of the Lehite party into the Nephites and Lamanites, he describes the former as the “exceedingly fair and delightsome” (2 Nephi 5:21) in contradistinction to the latter (2 Nephi 5:21‒25). As I have noted elsewhere, Nephi’s cultural descriptions here and in 1 Nephi 12:22-23 become enormously important to his brother Jacob and later Nephite writers who detail Lamanite “unbelief” (a term that perhaps constitutes an appropriation of


21 2 Nephi 25:23 “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren [i.e., the Lamanites], to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God”; Jacob 4:3: “we labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren [i.e., the Lamanites] and our children will receive them with thankful hearts, and look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents.”

22 See, for example, Alma 26:23-25.
the expression ʿl –ʾmn in Deuteronomy 32:20 as a pun on “Laman[ites]”) but also strongly criticize Nephite exceptionalism.  

Nephi “seals” his personal writings by testifying that his words persuade and teach all to do good and by exhorting all—especially the Jews and his and his brothers’ descendants — to believe in Christ and to “partake of the goodness of God.” Jacob then takes up Nephi’s good / goodness theme in the early part of his own writings: “Wherefore we labored diligently among our people [that is, the people of Nephi], that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God” (Jacob 1:7). Jacob, like his brother Nephi, understood that the Nephites could remain truly “Nephite” only to the degree that they gave heed to the “good” doctrine of Christ.  

Jacob, in a sermon delivered at the temple in the land of Nephi, chided the wealth-seeking Nephites for pride and immorality. Like Nephi, he emphasized the importance of doing “good” in connection with having “hope” in Christ: “And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted” (Jacob 2:19). The “good” that Jacob instructs the Nephites to do here is the “good” that that their pride has prevented them from doing — taking care of their society’s most vulnerable members.  

Jacob, however, declares that had it not been for “a grosser crime,” he would have “rejoiced exceedingly” because of the Nephites: they sought “to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David and Solomon his son” (Jacob 2:22‒23). In other words, the Nephites — like David and  


24 King Benjamin quotes Jacob 2:19 in his sermon at the temple in Zarahemla: “And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you — that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God — I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26).  

25 See, e.g., 2 Samuel 12; 1 Kings 11.
Solomon were not doing “good” in their families and in their family relationships.

In contrast to some Nephites during his time and in later years, Jacob understood that Nephite “chosenness” was not intrinsic or inherent. It was extrinsic and was predicated on covenant obedience. Jacob chided the Nephites — the self-perceived “good” or “fair ones” — for their covenant failure, their “wickedness”:

For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands. And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts. (Jacob 2:31‒32)

Here Jacob invokes Nephi’s description of the Nephites as “fair” or “fair ones,” but he notably limits his application of “fair” to the “daughters” — that is, the Nephite women. The Nephite husbands — “the men of my people” — had become, to a great degree neither “good” nor “fair” in terms of their sexual mores and the discharge of their family obligations (“the wickedness and abominations of their husbands”). The conduct of many of the “good” or “fair ones” was in fact “bad”:

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26 See, e.g., 2 Samuel 6 LXX and 4QSama 2 Samuel 13:21 (LXX: “But he did not grieve the spirit of his son, Amnon [kai ouk elupēsen to pneuma Amnon tou huiou autou; i.e., he did not displease, upset or antagonize Amnon] because he loved him, for he was his firstborn [LXX: hoti ēgapa auton, hoti prōtotokos ēn; 4QSama: kyʾhbw ky bkwʾw ]"); 1 Kings 1:6 (“And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?”); 1 Kings 11:1‒8.

27 Regarding David’s “taking” of Bathsheba as his wife in 2 Samuel 11:27, the KJV describes the sin thus: “But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.” The text literally says: “But the thing that David had done was evil [wayyēra ] in the Lord’s eyes.” This evil act becomes the basis for the Lord’s “rais[ing] up evil against” David out of his own house — i.e., out of his own family.

28 On the roots of Nephite “chosenness” see 1 Nephi 1:20; 3:29. Samuel the Lamanite alludes to the Nephites “chosenness” in Helaman 15:3: “Yea, wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent, when they shall see all these signs and wonders which shall be showed unto them; for behold, they have been a chosen people of the Lord; yea, the people of Nephi hath he loved, and also hath he chastened them; yea, in the days of their iniquities hath he chastened them because he loveth them.”
Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds. (Jacob 2:35)

Here Jacob initiates an unfavorable comparison of the Nephites with the Lamanites. Of all the sins of which the Lamanites had been guilty, they, unlike the Nephites, had been generally free from the sin of breaking the hearts of their wives and losing the confidence of their children through sexual immorality. By implication, their “bad examples” extended not only to their families, but to the Lamanites themselves. Jacob’s “concrete diction”29 and “sensitive style”30 emotively hammer the point home.

A major point, if not the whole point, of the Lord bearing with Nephite covenant disobedience was the prospect of Lamanite reclamation and restoration (see, for example, Enos 1; Jarom 1:2–3). As the “good[ly] ones” or “fair ones,” the Nephite men were not “show[ing] forth good examples unto them in me [the Lord]” as Ammon and his brothers (the royal sons of Mosiah) would do years later (Alma 17:11).

On the contrary, the Lamanites were showing forth good examples in their discharge of marriage and family responsibilities. The Lamanites had already become the “better” ones: “Behold, their husbands love their

29  John S. Tanner, “Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants,” in The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy, eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 25–69; idem, “Jacob and His Descendants as Authors,” in Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before, eds. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 52–66. See especially p. 59: “When Jacob does speak … he spoke vividly and even eloquently. Notice the concrete words [diction] in the phrase ‘instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God [they] have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds’; or consider ‘the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God. … Many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds’” (Jacob 2:9, 35; emphasis in the original). He continues, “Here are strong words welded to strong feelings.”

30  Ibid. Tanner also notes: “Like many sensitive people, Jacob did not preach harsh messages easily. Many times he openly shared his anxiety with his audience, as in the preface to the temple discourse discussed above. The structure of that sermon may also reflect his reluctance to speak harshly. He first addressed the relatively easy issue (pride) and then, reluctantly, moved to the ‘grosser crime,’ whoredoms (Jacob 2:22–23).”
wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their
wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards
you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much
better [literally, good/fair, that is, nfr] are you than they, in the sight of
your great Creator?” (Jacob 3:7). Given that both Egyptian and Hebrew
form comparatives with an adjective + preposition,31 we can discern
Jacob playing on the meaning of “Nephi” to trade on the Nephites’ self-
perception that they were the “good” or “fair ones,” especially when
contrasted with the Lamanites.

At the outset of his brief record, Jacob’s grandson and Enos’s son
Jarom states that the things/words on “small” plates “are written for the
intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites” (Jarom 1:2) — that is,
written for the good (the Latin root bon-/ben- in “benefit” means “good”) or even the making good of the Lamanites.32

Amaleki too, the final author on Nephi’s small plates, concludes his
record by recalling and invoking the “good” of which Nephi spoke when
he concluded his own writings:

And it came to pass that I began to be old; and, having no seed,
and knowing king Benjamin to be a just man before the Lord,
wherefore, I shall deliver up these plates unto him, exhorting
all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe
in prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of
angels, and in the gift of speaking with tongues, and in the gift
of interpreting languages, and in all things which are good; for
there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord; and
that which is evil cometh from the devil. (Omni 1:25)

Contemporary with Amaleki, the last writer on Nephi’s small
plates, we have Zeniff’s personal writings which Mormon preserved in
Mosiah 9–10. Zeniff’s autobiographical introduction to his writings, also
modeled on Nephi’s autobiographical introduction, again demonstrates
that the concept of “Nephites” as “good”/“fair ones” continued to define
self-perception during this period of Lamanite and Nephite history:

31 Hebrew and Egyptian both create a two-member comparative construction
using a regular adjective with a preposition (m- or min in Hebrew, r in Egyptian).
Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 2:522–23; Alan Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar, 3rd
ed. rev. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 47.

32 Perhaps these ideas are present in the terminology that underlies the
translation term benefit.
Zeniff’s self-introduction is remarkable not only for the way he adapts Nephi’s autobiography with its onomastic play on “Nephi” and “good,” but also for the way in which Zeniff describes his preconceptions of what defined what was essentially “Nephite” vis-à-vis what was essentially Lamanite. Zeniff had been sent as a spy among the Lamanites because of his knowledge of the land of Nephi — presumably he had lived there before the Nephite exodus described in Omni 1:12–19 and because he could blend in among them. The Nephites who were attempting to recolonize the land of Nephi had planned a preemptive strike against the Lamanites. Zeniff himself, however, had a change of heart when he “saw that which was good among” the Lamanites. In other words, Zeniff came to recognize that the Nephites did not have a monopoly on “goodness,” as Jacob had emphasized many years previously (Jacob 3; see above). Zeniff’s later contention with the leader of the Nephite re-colonists, which led to the slaughter of most of them, and his self-described “overzealous” attempts to re-inherit the land of Nephi on peaceful terms, would have later (then unseen) repercussions for Nephite attempts to reclaim

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34 Note the wordplay on “peace” and Shilom in Mosiah 9:5–6: “And it came to pass that I went again with four of my men into the city, in unto the king, that I might know of the disposition of the king, and that I might know if I might go in with my people and possess the land in peace [Heb šālôm = “peace”]. And I went in unto the king, and he covenanted with me that I might possess the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the land of Shilom.”
and restore the Lamanites from covenant delinquency. For example, “the language of Nephi began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites” by the wicked priests of King Noah (Mosiah 24:4). This development proved to be a necessary precursor to Ammon and his companions’ attempts to teach the Lamanites the gospel a generation later (see Alma 17–27).

Nephite self-perception comes into play again in a prominent way in the same narrative cycle. Mormon later chronicles the struggles and suffering of the Zeniffite-Nephites in the wake of Zeniff’s son Noah’s disastrous rule. When King Noah, his corrupt priests, and some of the Zeniffite men abandoned their wives and families in the face of the Lamanite threat (cf. Jacob’s criticism of the Nephites in Jacob 2–3), some stayed behind and forsook those responsibilities. Mormon’s comment is probably best understood as reflecting Nephite self-perceptions:

And it came to pass that those who tarried with their wives and their children caused that their fair daughters should stand forth and plead with the Lamanites that they would not slay them. And it came to pass that the Lamanites had compassion on them, for they were charmed with the beauty of their women. (Mosiah 19:13–14)

Just as Zeniff had compassion on the Lamanites because, contrary to all presuppositions, he saw “that which was good among them” (Mosiah 9:1), a generation or so later the Lamanites had compassion on Zeniff’s people because — according to Mormon’s record — the Lamanites recognized (were “charmed with”) what was “fair,” “beautiful,” or “good” (that is, nfr) among them.

Another lucid manifestation of the Nephite “good”/“fair” self-perception emerges during the account of Ammon, Aaron, Omner, Himni, and their associates’ mission among the Lamanites. Aaron, the onetime Nephite crown prince who refused to inherit his father’s kingdom, is confronted by an Amlicite/Amalekite while attempting to preach in one of their synagogues:

Therefore, as Aaron entered into one of their synagogues to preach unto the people, and as he was speaking unto them, behold there arose an Amalekite and began to contend with him, saying: What is that thou hast testified? Hast thou seen an angel? Why do not angels appear unto us? Behold are not this people as good as thy people? (Alma 21:5)
Here it is important to bear in mind that the “Amalekites” in the present text of Alma 21–24, 27, 43 are the “Amlicites” of Alma 2–3, and thus Nephite dissenters. The thrust of the Amlicite/Amalekite’s language here, including Alma’s wordplay on Nephi/Nephite and “good,” is this: “we and our religion (after the order of Nehors) are every bit as Nephite — and legitimate — as you and your religion.” In other words, the Amlicite/Amalekite invokes his “Nephite”-ness as a way to neutralize Aaron’s testimony.

The association of the names Nephi and Nephite with the semantic range evident in nfr persists well into later Lamanite and Nephite history. Mormon offers a distinctly negative evaluation of the Nephites living during the time of Nephi the son of Helaman. Again, he does so in terms of the meaning of Nephi’s name, a play on its meaning being evident in his assessment of Nephite public morality: “For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted” (Helaman 5:2).

Mormon’s words pointedly allude to Mosiah II’s declaration in Mosiah 29:26–27. The “time [had] come that the voice of the people chose iniquity.” However, Mormon’s paraphrastic citation uses the evil/good dichotomy, rather than Mosiah’s iniquity/right, which invokes the meaning of Nephi and Nephites as “good[ly] ones.” This is later confirmed by Mormon’s inclusion of Helaman’s explanation of his giving his sons the names Nephi and Lehi, with the clear wordplay on “Nephi”


36 See especially Alma 21:4: “And it came to pass that Aaron came to the city of Jerusalem, and first began to preach to the Amalekites. And he began to preach to them in their synagogues, for they had built synagogues after the order of the Nehors; for many of the Amalekites and the Amulonites were after the order of the Nehors.”

37 Mosiah 29:26–27: “Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law — to do your business by the voice of the people. And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.”
(see Helaman 5:6–7). The Nephites of this era, by and large, were not choosing or doing the “good” that 2 Nephi 33:4, 10, 14 prescribed, Nephi and Lehi being important exceptions (see the public recognition that Nephi was “a good man” in Helaman 8:4).

Nephi himself chided the Nephites of Zarahemla who, in his words, had become “lifted ... up beyond that which is good because of [their] exceeding riches” (Helaman 7:26). The rhetorical echoes of Nephi’s name and echoes of the admonitions to do “good” that conclude the latter’s personal writings can be further heard in Samuel the Lamanite’s sermon to the wicked Nephites at Zarahemla. This criticism must also be understood in view of the Nephites’ self-perception that they are the “good”/“fair ones”: “ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you” (Helaman 14:31). The well-read Lamanite prophet also uses a wordplay similar to Jacob’s in Jacob 3. Samuel warns “it shall be better [lit. good] for them than for you except ye repent” (Helaman 15:14).

Mormon further states that following Samuel the Lamanite’s sermon atop the walls of Zarahemla and his delivery of several important prophecies regarding Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection, Satan used rumors and contentions among the Nephites “that he might harden the hearts of the people against that which was good and against that which should come” (Helaman 16:22). Satan was taking aim at the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 31‒33) and the prophecies regarding his coming, the belief that had traditionally defined the Nephites vis-à-vis the Lamanites, Nephite dissenters, and others.

Like the Amalekite in the synagogue in which Aaron taught, Giddianhi, “governor” of the Gadianton robbers, uses a rhetorical appeal to the Nephites’ self-perception as “good” or “fair ones” in his letter to Lachoneus, in which he demands the surrender or submission of the Nephites to the Gadianton robbers: “And behold, I am Giddianhi; and I am the governor of this the secret society of Gadianton; which society and the works thereof I know to be good; and they are of ancient date and they have been handed down unto us” (3 Nephi 3:9). The Gadianton organization, of course, was “Nephite” in origin — founded amid a

38 Bowen, “Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of the Name Nephi,” 2; idem, “He Is a Good Man,” 165–70.
39 Ibid.
Nephite political crisis by the Nephite Kishkumen⁴⁰ [Kishkumen]⁴¹ and his wicked Nephite associates before their being taken over by the Nephite Gadianton.

The Lamanites, for their part, had become more “Nephite” in many ways than the Nephites themselves at this period of history.⁴² Mormon alludes to traditional Nephite cultural and religious self-understanding, again using wordplay on the name “Nephites” in terms of the concept of nfr:

And their young men and their daughters became exceedingly fair, and they were numbered among the Nephites, and were called Nephites. (3 Nephi 2:16)

The play on the meaning of Nephi in terms of “fair” occurs in epistrophe or antistrophe — that is, the “repetition of a closing word or words at the end of several (usually successive) clauses.”⁴³ The repetition of “Nephites”/“fair” emphasizes the dramatic change in how the converted Lamanites were perceived by those Nephites who remained faithful.

At the time of the destruction that attended the death of Jesus Christ, Mormon reports the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies, including the Nephites’ lamentations (see especially Helaman 13:33, 36 and the reported fulfillment in 3 Nephi 8:24‒25; cf. Mormon 1:18).⁴⁴ At

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⁴⁰ Helaman 1:9‒12; 2:3‒14; 6:12.
⁴² See especially Helaman 5:34‒41; 15:3‒18; 3 Nephi 6:14; but cf. 3 Nephi 1:28‒30.
⁴⁴ Helaman 13:33: “O that I had repented, and had not killed the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out. Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us”; Helaman 13:36: “O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them.” Mormon reports the fulfillment of the lamentation portion (“O that I/we had repented…”) in 3 Nephi 8:24‒25: “And in one place they were heard to cry, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla. And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were
least one of those laments included the “fair” language connected with Nephite self-perception: “And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared” (3 Nephi 8:25).

Mormon records that the Lord himself used the same language in describing why so many of the Nephites had fallen — or perished — in the cataclysm: “Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!” (3 Nephi 9:2). We can appreciate the poignancy of the lament in 3 Nephi 8:25 and the Lord’s explanation of the Nephites’ fall: the Lord’s people (“my people”) the “fair ones” had fallen “because of their iniquity and abomination,” sins which included the murdering of the Lord’s prophets (8:25).

Following the Savior’s ministry among “the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared,”45 Mormon continues to describe these Nephites and Lamanites in terms that play on the meaning of the name Nephi and evoke the traditional Nephite self-description: “And now, behold, it came to pass that the people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightsome people.” (4 Nephi 1:10). Here, as in 3 Nephi 2, the Lamanites who had fully embraced the Nephite gospel are described as “fair ones.” Mormon’s use of the verb “became” suggests that to be “good,” “fair,” or “Nephite” was (or should have been) more than an exclusive status conferred on one at birth. In other words, one can become or un-become “chosen” to the degree that one “chooses” or does not choose to embrace Christ’s covenant and the “good” stipulated in the doctrine of Christ.46

the howlings of the people great and terrible.” Mormon reports the fulfillment of the “slippery” riches prophecy in Mormon 1:18: “And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again” (Mormon 1:18).

45 3 Nephi 10:18.

By the end, however (just a few short generations later), the Nephites fell and ceased to be “Nephites” — “good” or “fair ones” — in any meaningful sense. This final, thoroughgoing fall occasioned Mormon’s famous “O ye fair ones” lament (Mormon 6:17–20; see in detail below). As Mormon explained it to his son Moroni, the Nephites of that time “delight[ed] in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:19; see below). This in large measure explains Moroni’s exhortation as he wrote the conclusion to his father’s personal writings: “O then ye unbelieving [that is, descendants of the Lamanites and Nephite dissenters] turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day” (Mormon 9:6).

**Fair Ones Fallen I: “The Slain of the Fair Sons and Daughters of My People”**

After Mormon found the small plates of Nephi among the other plates of Nephi — that is, among the larger body of records that “had been delivered into [his] hands,” the former became an important source, resource, and reference for Mormon. Mormon describes the contents of the small plates as “pleasing me.”

The literary dependence of Mormon’s autobiography on Nephi’s biography is evident at several points. For example, Mormon “began to be learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of [his] people” (Mormon 1:2), just as Nephi “was taught somewhat in all the learning of [his] father” (1 Nephi 1:1). Similarly, when Mormon states, “And notwithstanding I being young, was large in stature; therefore the people of Nephi appointed me that I should be their leader” (Mormon 2:1), he reminds us of Nephi’s autobiography: “And it came to pass that I Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature and also having desires to know the mysteries of God, wherefore I did cry unto the Lord and he did visit me” (1 Nephi 2:16). Mormon further has the latter statement in mind when he writes: “And I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind, therefore I was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” (Mormon 1:15). Mormon clearly has Nephi in mind, playing on the meaning of Nephi’s name in Nephi’s statements: “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents … yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God”

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47 Words of Mormon 1:4.
(1 Nephi 1:1) as well as Nephi’s concluding remark about the importance of “partak[ing] of the goodness of God” (2 Nephi 33:14). Mormon humbly infers that he had become his ancestor’s spiritual heir and that he was a worthy heir.

As Nephi’s spiritual heir, Mormon endeavors to show the fulfillment of Nephi’s words inasmuch as he sees their fulfillment before and during his own time. In describing the fulfillment of prophecy, Mormon uses language that evokes the language of Nephi’s original vision and its resultant prophecies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Nephi 12:4–5; 2 Nephi 26:6–7</th>
<th>3 Nephi 8–9, especially 3 Nephi 9:2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord. (1 Nephi 12:4–5)</td>
<td>“great and terrible thunder”; “exceedingly sharp lightnings” (3 Nephi 8:6–7); cities “take fire”/“sink,” etc. (vv. 8–10, 14–16); “the whole earth became deformed, because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and lightnings, and the quaking of the earth” (v. 17); “And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest did cease … and then behold there was darkness upon the face of the land. And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land …” (v. 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And they shall be visited with thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and all manner of destructions, for the fire of the anger of the Lord shall be kindled against them, and they shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall consume them, saith the Lord of Hosts. O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just. (2 Nephi 26:6–7)</td>
<td>Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen! (3 Nephi 9:2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wo, wo, wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen! (3 Nephi 9:2)</td>
<td>Second catalogue of cities “burned with fire,” “sunk,” etc. (3 Nephi 9:3–12)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Mormon recognized multiple fulfillments of Nephi’s prophecy in 2 Nephi 26, which is based on Nephi’s vision of “the things which

48 Mormon 1:5: “And I, Mormon, being a descendant of Nephi, (and my father’s name was Mormon) I remembered the things which Ammaron commanded me.” Cf. 3 Nephi 5:20: “I am Mormon, and a pure descendant of Lehi.”
[his] father saw” in 1 Nephi 11–14. The first fulfillment came with the “fall” (cf. Hebrew npl = “fall”) of many of the Nephites, perhaps also a pun that exploits homonymy between Hebrew npl (the Hebrew “p” is aspirated) and Egyptian nfr. Moreover, we are reminded here of Isaiah’s language “How art thou fallen [nāpaltā] from heaven …” (Isaiah 14:12; 2 Nephi 24:12) and “Babylon is fallen, is fallen! [nāpēlā nāpēlā]” (Isaiah 21:9), language of which Nephi and his spiritual successors were surely cognizant and sought to evoke.

Nephi saw that one actualization of the “fall” of “the great and spacious building” (1 Nephi 11:35–36) would be the “fall” of the prideful Nephite nation — his “seed”: “And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all, because of the destruction of my people, for I had beheld their fall” (1 Nephi 15:5).

The language of the woe oracle recorded in 3 Nephi 9:2 incorporates or reflects the language of 2 Nephi 26:7 (“O … the slain of my people! For I, Nephi [nfr = good, fair], have seen it,” along with 1 Nephi 11:36 (“the fall thereof was exceedingly great”); 15:5 (“I beheld their fall”) and 1 Nephi 13:15 (“exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain”); and 2 Nephi 5:21 (“exceedingly fair and delightful”).

The “fall” of the “fair sons and daughters of my people [this is the Lord speaking]” was even more anguishing to the Lord than it was to the Nephites’ anguished patriarch, Nephi himself.

49 There is no separate letter for the unaspirated consonant “p” and the aspirated consonant “f” in Hebrew.
51 The quotation of Isaiah 14 from the brass plates onto the small plates in 2 Nephi 24 and Lehi’s allusion to the Isaiah 14:12 in 2 Nephi 2:17–18 confirm Nephi and his successors’ familiarity with Isaiah 14 in its entirety. It is also wholly reasonable that Isaiah 21 was on the brass plates and that Nephi et al. were familiar with it.
52 Lehi appears to formulate the description “the great and spacious building,” at least as record by Nephi, in 1 Nephi 8:26, 31. Nephi uses the slight variant “large and spacious building” (which may or may not reflect an actual difference in the underlying text) in 1 Nephi 11:35 and 12:18. The adjectival phrase “large and spacious” is also applied by Lehi to the field seen in his dream in 1 Nephi 8:9, 20.
Fair Ones Fallen II: Nephi’s and Mormon’s Anguished Souls

Mormon wants his audience to understand that he shared the Lord’s and Nephi’s anguish regarding the “fall” of the “fair ones.” Accordingly, Mormon’s account of a second fulfillment of 2 Nephi 26:6-7, especially v. 7, comes in Mormon 6 with the final “fall” or destruction of the Nephite nation. Mormon sorrowed — and stated that those “who realize whence their blessings come” would sorrow that the Nephites “might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus” (Mormon 5:11); that is, the Nephites might have “tasted and kn[own] of the goodness of Jesus” as Mormon had done. They had, however, become too hardened. Instead of “sorrowing … unto repentance, because of the goodness of God” (another play on “Nephi”), they succumbed to “the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” (Mormon 2:15). Mormon wishes to show us that here Nephi’s prophecy came to complete fulfillment, to an even greater degree than in 3 Nephi 8–9.

Like the woe oracle/lament 3 Nephi 9:2, Mormon’s moving lament in Mormon 6:17–19 incorporates the language of Nephi’s lament in 2 Nephi 26:7, as well as 1 Nephi 11:36 (“the fall thereof was exceedingly great”); 13:15 (“exceedingly fair and beautiful”); 15:5 (see below); and 2 Nephi 5:21 (“exceedingly fair and delightsome”):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Nephi 15:5; 2 Nephi 26:7; 3 Nephi 9:2</th>
<th>Mormon 6:17–19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all, because of the destruction of my people, for I had beheld their fall. (1 Nephi 15:5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people!

For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just. (2 Nephi 26:6–7)

Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen! (3 Nephi 9:2)

And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people, and I cried:

O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!

Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss.

O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen!

By mentioning his “soul rent with anguish, because of the slain of [his] people,” Mormon connects his anguish to the “anguish of [Nephi’s] soul for the loss of the slain of [his] people.” Their anguish in their sphere is akin to the Lord’s “anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people” which caused “blood” to extrude “from every pore” (Mosiah 3:7; cf. D&C 19:18), anguish that seemingly evoked the Lord’s woe oracle/lament in 3 Nephi 9:2. In other words, Mormon wishes us to understand his own suffering within the context of Nephi’s and the Lord’s suffering.

Additionally, Mormon’s repetition of the refrain “[O] ye fair ones” and the phrase “O ye fair sons and daughters” emotively connects the vast scene of the slaughter of a people that should have embodied the “goodliness” and “goodness” of their ancestor, to the visions and revelations that so anguished him. The repetitious wordplay reverberates the name Nephi against the backdrop of what has come to pass in all of his irony: the “fair ones” have become the “fallen ones.”53 It was needless

53 Cf. the Nephilim (nēpilîm, sometimes interpreted “fallen ones,” though this interpretation is disputed and far from certain) described in Genesis 6:4, those with whom the Lord’s Spirit ceased to “strive” (Genesis 6:3). Mormon so described the Nephites: “the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers; and they are without Christ and God in the world; and they are driven about as chaff before the wind” (Mormon 5:18). He made the following statement to Moroni twice in two separate letters: “I fear lest the Spirit hath ceased striving with them” (Moroni 8:28; 9:4).
“loss,” and yet “loss” from which Mormon and Moroni hoped future “good” could come. The scattered descendants of such a “lost and fallen” people, however, would need to know just how far their ancestors had fallen: “They delight[ed] in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:19). Hence, they need to understand the remedy: Christ, the source of all “good.”

“They Delight in Everything Save That Which Is Good”

Mormon’s other major lament over the Nephites is a private one, included in a letter written by Mormon to his son Moroni and preserved for us by the latter. This letter, comprising the contents of Moroni chapter 9, is easily one of the most haunting scenes in all of scripture. Mormon exclaims:

O the depravity of my people! They are without order and without mercy. Behold, I am but a man, and I have but the strength of a man, and I cannot any longer enforce my commands. And they have become strong in their perversion; and they are alike brutal, sparing none, neither old nor young; and they delight in everything save that which is good; and the suffering of our women and our children upon all the face of this land doth exceed everything; yea, tongue cannot tell, neither can it be written. (Moroni 9:18‒19)

When Jacob reprimanded the Nephite men near the beginning of Nephite history, it was for the suffering of the Nephite women and children (Jacob 2:31‒35). Mormon also particularly cites the suffering of the Nephite women and children, but here that suffering “exceed[s] everything.” It has become unspeakable and beyond Mormon’s ability — and perhaps any writer’s ability — to record. Among the doomed Nephites, the women and children suffered most from the wickedness of the adult men, as so often happens in human history.

The Nephites had been collectively and individually wicked in times past, but the Nephites had become the individual and collective antithesis

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54 Mormon also makes almost the very same point in his own personal record: “And it is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites; and every heart was hardened, so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually. And there never had been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi, nor even among all the house of Israel, according to the words of the Lord, as was among this people” (Mormon 4:11‒12).
of everything implied in the name *Nephi* and its gentilic derivative *Nephites*. Far from delighting in and embodying what is “fair” or “good,” they delighted “in everything save that which is good” (Mormon 9:19).

Mormon refuses to recapitulate the harrowing details of what he is witnessing to his son Moroni, who had been witnessing similarly awful scenes of wickedness: “And now, my son, I dwell no longer upon this horrible scene. Behold, thou knowest the wickedness of this people; thou knowest that they are without principle, and past feeling; and their wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites” (Moroni 9:20). Mormon’s description of Nephite wickedness helps us understand the extreme degree to which they “delight[ed] in everything save that which is good.” The erstwhile “good[ly] ones” or “fair ones” were now “without principle” and “past feeling.” Moreover, Mormon’s assessment that the Nephites’ “wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites” should be understood in terms of his possibly contemporary comment about the Lamanites becoming in the future — and perhaps already becoming — “a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites, and this because of their unbelief and idolatry” (Mormon 5:15). Simply put, Mormon’s own people, the “good[ly] ones” or “fair ones,” had collectively become the worst, least “fair” people imaginable.

**Fair Ones Good Again: “Lay Hold upon Every Good Gift” and “Put on Thy Beautiful Garments”**

With his own people — the “fair ones” — destroyed, just like the onetime “fair” Jaredites,55 and on the run from the Lamanites, Moroni preserves a sermon delivered by Mormon to an audience of faithful Nephites during the waning days of their society. This sermon, drawing on earlier writings by Nephi and Amaleki, uses *good* as a *Leitwort* (lead-word or keyword), and this use should be understood in terms of the observations on the Nephites and the “good” or “fair ones” rendered heretofore.

These statements of Mormon would have been particularly poignant during this period when the Nephites’ church, society, and belief in Christ were failing:

55  Ether 7:4; 13:17; cf. Ether 8:9–10, 17. Moroni’s use of this term in his abridgement/translation of the Book of Ether in connection with the Jaredites, who fell from the Lord’s favor and were destroyed, is meant to evoke the use of “fair” elsewhere in connection with the Nephites.
… if their works be good, then they are good also. (Moroni 7:5; see especially Helaman 5:6-7)

… a man being evil cannot do that which is good. (Moroni 7:6)

… a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift. (Moroni 7:10)

… a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water. (Moroni 7:11)

… all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil. (Moroni 7:12)

… that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. (Moroni 7:13)

… Take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil. (Moroni 7:14)

… For, behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain. (Moroni 7:15)

… he [the devil] persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him. (Moroni 7:17; cf. 3 Nephi 9:2)

… I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ. (Moroni 7:19)

… And now, my brethren, how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon every good thing? (Moroni 7:20; 2 Nephi 31; Helaman 3:29)

… there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them. (Moroni 7:24; cf. 3 Nephi 9:2; Mormon 6:17)

… And thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing; and thus it was until the coming of Christ. (Moroni 7:25)
... Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you. (Moroni 7:26)

... They who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing. (Moroni 7:28)

Mormon — drawing on Nephi’s writings in 2 Nephi 26, Nephi’s adumbration of the doctrine of Christ in 2 Nephi 31-32, Nephi’s good inclusio, and Amaleki’s writings at the conclusion of Nephi’s small plates (Omni 1:25) — implores his people to “lay hold” upon and cleave to “every good thing” as if to the “rod of iron” or “word of God” (1 Nephi 1:11; 15:23-25)\(^{56}\) and “word of Christ,” \(^{57}\) since every good thing has its source in God the Father and Jesus Christ.

When that entreaty failed to persuade and preserve the Nephites from going to their ruin, Moroni included his father’s sermon wholesale in the concluding portion of his own personal writings, implicitly redirecting it to the descendants of the fallen Nephites (especially the posterity of Nephite dissenters/deserters) and the Lamanites. Moroni hoped that his father’s sermon would eventually persuade these descendants to do “good,” follow the doctrine of Christ, and, through the atonement of Christ, again become the “fair” ones (Mormon 9:6).

This best explains Moroni’s recapitulation of substantial portions of his father’s sermon in his final exhortation in Moroni 10, where he writes “as seemeth [him] good … unto the Lamanites,”\(^ {58}\) including the descendants of the Nephites who were preserved among them. Again, his strong emphasis is on embracing, doing, laying hold upon, and becoming “good”:

And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is.” (Moroni 10:6)

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\(^{56}\) On the Egyptian wordplay evident in Nephi’s equation of the “rod” with the “word” (both Egyptian \(\text{mdw}\)), see Matthew L. Bowen, “What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?” Insights 25/2 (2005): 2–3. Cf. also 1 Nephi 17:26, 29; Helaman 3:29.


\(^{58}\) Cf. especially 2 Nephi 5:30.
And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be *none that doeth good* among you, no not one. For if there be *one among you that doeth good*, he shall work by the power and gifts of God. (Moroni 10:25)

And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and *lay hold upon every good gift* and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing.” (Moroni 10:30)

Moroni’s declaration here that “nothing that is good denieth the Christ” must be understood in the context of the Lamanites “put[ting] to death every Nephite that [would] not deny the Christ” (Moroni 1:2), which Moroni tells us the Lamanites were doing at the outset of his record. Many Nephites denied the Christ and so ceased to be Nephites.59 Moroni, for his part, “w[ould] not deny the Christ,” as he tells us. Although many ethnic “Nephites” who survived the great war of extinction by deserting to the Lamanites continued to live as cultural Lamanites, Moroni was the only true “Nephite” left because he “[would] not deny the Christ.” Many of the Nephites had not only denied the Christ, but (in Mormon’s words) had been “denying the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 8:28).

All of this, of course, had (and has) implications for the descendants of the dissenting/deserting Nephites. The writings of Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni are written not only to the Lamanites, but to the descendants of Nephi and his other brothers whose posterity mixed with them. By “do[ing] good” and “laying hold upon every good gift,” all of these Nephite/Lamanite descendants could, through the atonement of Christ, become “good” again, and thus “be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day” (Mormon 9:6).

It is in this earlier consideration of Moroni in Mormon 9:6 where we see Moroni articulate even more beautifully in one of his final pleas, wherein he employs the language of Isaiah:

> And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and *put on thy beautiful garments* [litši bigdê tip’arētēk], O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled. (Moroni 10:31, quoting Isaiah 54)

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Moroni’s final exhortation to the scattered descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites is almost a plea: “put on the authority of the priesthood”60 and become what the Lord intended you collectively and individually to become: good, fair, and “purified even as he is pure” (Moroni 7:48).

Conclusion: “Written For the Intent of the Benefit of Our Brethren the Lamanites”

Nephi’s small plates and all that they contained were, in Jarom’s words, “written for the intent of the benefit [making/doing good] of our brethren the Lamanites” (Jarom 1:2). Just as we see a consistent pattern throughout the Book of Mormon of the Nephites being associated with the descriptions “good,” “fair,” and “beautiful” — all within the range of meaning of Egyptian nfr — we see an almost equally consistent pattern of prophetic criticism levied against the Nephites for failing to live up to the standard implied in that name.

The “good” or “fair ones” eventually “fell” because they abandoned the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 31–32). That doctrine which teaches men and women how to come unto Christ and to partake of his “goodness” (2 Nephi 26:28, 33; 33:14; Jacob 1:7), to do “good” (2 Nephi 33:4, 10), also teaches them how to “lay hold on every good thing” (Mormon 7:19–21, 25) and “every good gift” (Moroni 10:30).

The warning of the Book of Mormon is clear: it includes any “highly favored people of the Lord”61 who become so depraved as to “delight in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:19). Without the doctrine of Christ, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and his atonement, we will all alike “perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever” (2 Nephi 2:5). Rather than “revile against that which is good” (2 Nephi 28:16), all of us need to recognize that “all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them” (Moroni 7:24). In so doing, we can all become the un-fallen “fair” ones spoken of by Moroni in Mormon 9:6. “Evil” can finally “be done away,” we can be “persuaded to do good continually,” and we can “come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved” — the express purposes for which Moroni and his forebearers were commanded to write (Ether 8:26; cf. especially Ether 4:11–12).

60  D&C 113:8.
61  See especially Mosiah 1:13; Alma 9:20; Alma 27:30; 48:20. This phrase derives from Nephi’s “highly favored” status; see 1 Nephi 1:1; 3:6; 2 Nephi 1:19; Mosiah 10:13.
The author would like to thank Allen Wyatt and Parker Jackson.

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Abstract: *All of the volumes in the Joseph Smith Papers series are beautifully presented, with important photographic and excellent typographic versions of the texts. This volume continues by providing this treatment for the Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon.*

An important addition to the Joseph Smith Papers series is the facsimile edition of the Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon. Produced in two parts, 1 Nephi–Alma 35 and Alma 36–Moroni 10, the facsimile of the Printer’s Manuscript provides a color photograph of a page on the left with the transcription on the right. With the commitment to color in the photographs, the editors have also been able to use color to indicate different hands in the writing and editing visible in the manuscript.

The transcription work relies heavily on Royal Skousen’s meticulous work on the Printer’s Manuscript, also published in two volumes by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (2001). Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen are the volume editors, so it is no surprise that Skousen’s work would form a foundation for these volumes.

There was certainly no reason to completely rework what Skousen had already done, but these volumes clearly supersede the earlier volumes. The 2001 typescript was in a non-proportionally spaced font, and printed landscape in a book bound portrait. That made the volume a little awkward to use and the font less reader friendly than that used in
the facsimiles. The major changes are listed in the facsimiles, and for the majority of students and researchers, these volumes clearly replace the early transcripts.

However, there are some details that Skousen listed in his earlier transcriptions that are not in the facsimile. For instance, on the title page, Skousen’s earlier transcript shows that an *i* was written over *e* in the word “interpretations.”¹ That particular change is not marked in the facsimile edition.² As specifically noted in the explanation of the editorial method employed in the facsimile edition:

> The transcript presented in this volume is modified from the transcript published by volume editor Royal Skousen as part of his Book of Mormon Critical Text Project. His transcript has undergone adjustments to ensure that the transcription better corresponds with the style guide of the Joseph Smith Papers Project. The transcript is simplified from the transcription in Skousen’s earlier publication, but it still represents the nuances of the initial production of the manuscript as well as its subsequent editing.

> Generally, Skousen’s transcription is more detailed and literal regarding retracing letters, mending particular letters, representing partially obscured letters, and representing ambiguous characters.³

Using the facsimile edition is much easier, and the ability to see the photograph clearly adds information. Still, there are data in the earlier volumes that can be useful and should be consulted for serious work on the manuscript.

In addition to the facsimile and transcription, the volume contains informative introductory material. There is a one-page timeline of Joseph Smith’s life, a map of his residences, and an essay introducing the Book of Mormon’s discovery and translation. While the introductory material provides nothing particularly new for historians, for many readers the open discussion of Joseph Smith’s relationship with treasure hunting and the use of seer stones in the translation represent a new openness in the discussion of these topics. Perhaps most importantly, the text has the first officially published photographs of the particular

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³ Ibid., xxix
seer stone that was apparently used during the translation of much of the Book of Mormon.

At the end of the second volume are reference materials. The first provides a chronology of historical events related to the Book of Mormon. This is not, however, a speculative reconstruction of the timeline for the translation. That topic is not represented. Finally, there are short biographical sketches of scribes and printers.

These volumes are an essential resource, and are both more elegant and ultimately more usable than Skousen's previous transcriptions, which were until now the most important resource for scholars interested in the text of the Printer's Manuscript.

**Brant A. Gardner** (MA, State University of New York Albany) is the author of Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon and The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon, both published through Greg Kofford Books. He has contributed articles to Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl and Symbol and Meaning Beyond the Closed Community. He has presented papers at the FairMormon conference as well as at Sunstone.